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CHINESE STUDENT MOBILITY TO FINLAND AND THE STUDENTS’ TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL REALITY

Case study on Chinese degree students and their future plans at the University of Tampere and the University of Jyväskylä
The Master’s thesis concerns Chinese student mobility to Finland and the transnational social reality of the Chinese students in the University of Tampere and University of Jyväskylä. I have studied future plans, social life as well as reasons to stay, return or move elsewhere by conducting 13 thematic face-to-face interviews. A majority of the informants were students of information technology and computer sciences.

In order to examine the current Chinese student mobility to Finland, I also shortly review the migration history of the Chinese since the end of the 19th century and present the development of governmental policies of the PRC, the EU and Finland toward the student mobility of higher education. The future plans and social and transnational reality of the Chinese degree students is compared with other international degree students in Finland.

The theoretical framework is based on migration theories, studies on so-called highly skilled migrants and studies on transnationalism. The study is linked to the research on new Chinese migration that refers to the Chinese migrants who have left China after the opening of the PRC at the beginning of the 1980s. A number of governmental reports are applied as background data on the studied questions.

The Chinese degree students interviewed were generally satisfied with the Finnish university studies and Finland as a study environment. However, a great majority of the interviewed students were planning to return to China following their graduation, either after gaining some working experience abroad or directly after finishing their studies. My findings suggest that female students
are returning home more often due to familial reasons whereas male students stressed the opportunities to advance their careers in the developing labour markets of China. The students find that China can offer more opportunities than Finnish labour markets, which provide few chances for the Chinese to gain high social position and progress in the work career. The Finnish labour markets are still regarded indirectly discriminatory for foreigners.

However, many male students are willing to stay abroad due to more relaxed working environment, a relatively high salary, and various opportunities to develop professional skills. Some of the informants also stressed the significance of more societal and political freedoms in the Western countries.

The Chinese student mobility to Finland is evidently a phenomenon related to the opening of the PRC and increasing opportunities for the urban Chinese youth to travel abroad and obtain education in the Western universities. The Chinese university students in Finland are a spill over of the increasing Chinese student mobility to Europe after 9-11. Many of the students have been attracted by the high quality of the Finnish technology industry and the university education in the technical fields; information technology and computer sciences in particular.

Keywords: student mobility, Chinese migration, transnational social reality
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

In the course of social and economic development, university studies abroad have become popular in China. Chinese student mobility has strongly contributed to the already extensive number of Chinese beyond the borders of the People’s Republic of China (PRC)\(^1\). In the recent years, Chinese students have become the most numerous national group of international students in the world. However, Chinese overseas students may not be infiltrated into Chinese ethnic communities and diasporas. Increasing ratios of the students are planning to return to the fast developing cities of China.

Since the harmonization of the European higher education system, Finnish universities have established a growing number of international degree study programs. By 2005 Chinese students had become the most numerous national group of foreign degree students in Finland (Statistics Finland 2007). They have enrolled mainly in the international study programs of technical fields and are primarily obtaining the MA and PhD level degrees (Alanen 2006; JYU and UTA student statistics).

Meanwhile, the Commission of the EU promotes its member countries to enhance the economic competitiveness of the EU region and prepare for the coming challenges caused by the ageing population. Finland will face these challenges even earlier than most EU countries (See e.g. Wallenius, Hjelt 2005, pp. 16-25). Many EU countries strive to balance the demographic development by attracting a highly educated labour force from all over the world in order to advance their economic competence. Hence, many EU countries have introduced a great deal of benefits for the global economy’s experts who either work short-term or settle down in respective countries. (Mahroum 2001, p. 34; International Migration Outlook 2006, p. 76). However, the competitiveness of Finland for the global economy’s experts has been questionable. Finland has remained a country with an extraordinary outflow of university graduates; far beyond its western neighbours. (Thematic review on tertiary education in Finland 2007, p. 41.)

1.2. Overview on previous studies

In recent years, a number of studies have been published on the Chinese immigration to Europe and

\(^1\) Both *China* and the abbreviation *the PRC* are used when referring to the geographical, political and administrative entity of the People’s Republic of China.
the formation of transnational social space of Chinese immigrants (e.g. Ong 1999; Pieke 2004; Pieke et al. 2004). However, international studies on Chinese students abroad have remained scarce. Netherlands Education Support Office (NESO) has prepared a study for the Academic Cooperation Association on the topic. The study focuses on the attraction of the EU region among Chinese students’ parents and university personnel (NESO report 2005).

The research on Chinese overseas migration has a long tradition especially in South East Asia and to some extent in Australia and the United States. These three regions have historically been the main destinations of Chinese migration. (Skeldon 1996; Ong 1999; Wang 2003; Wang 2007, p. 173.) The research on Chinese overseas migrants in Europe has focused on the so-called new Chinese migration that has evolved since the opening of China from the early 1980s onwards. The studies have focused for instance on country specific studies on ethnic Chinese immigrants or sojourners (Thunø 1997, Nyiri 1999, International Migration 2003), their ethnic-based organizations, and the relations of these organizations to the PRC as well as the transnational nature of living the Chinese have in Europe (Nyíri 1999, Pieke et al. 2004). Regarding the situation of Chinese immigrants in Finland, Saija Katila has conducted an ethnographic study on the Chinese catering sector which unfortunately describes little about the nature and conditions of the so-called new Chinese migrants, and even less on Chinese degree students in Finland (Katila 2005).

The recent publications on Chinese migration, in the aftermath of the 5th conference of International Society for the Study of Chinese Overseas (ISSCO), stated that it is of high relevance to link the contemporary Chinese migration to the global migration patterns and the reconfiguration of global economic system (Thunø 2007b, p. 2). Already in the 1990s many scholars approached transnationalism from the Marxist perspective and linked global migration patterns to changes in global capitalism and their impact to the labour needs in global centers and peripheries (Basch et al, 1994; Sassen 1998). It is widely acknowledged that the labour markets have an essential impact to migration, although direct causal relations between the labour need and higher salaries in the country of immigration do not sufficiently explain migration flows. (See e.g. Faist 2000, pp. 63-65; Sassen 1998)

Another major tendency in migration studies has stressed the move from the brain drain theory to the focus on networks and transnational human and social capital. Network perspectives stress the movement and influences back and forth between a country of origin and a country of destination, instead of the definitive loss of human and economic capital through emigration stressed by the
brain drain perspective. (Meyer 2001, pp. 92-93; Faist 2000; Vertovec 2002, p. 3.) In recent years, the network perspective is stressed by both scholars of Chinese migration as well as the Chinese Authorities responsible for international student mobility (See e.g. Pieke et. al. 2004; NESO report 2005, p. 3).

The open-ended, life-long nature of movements is constantly stressed by the previous studies on transnational mobility and migration (Pieke et al. 2004, p. 9; Faist 2000, p. 301). This approach appears to be particularly relevant in the case of Chinese overseas students. They can be categorized neither as ‘migrants’ who are about to settle down to a country of destination, nor as ‘nomads of the global economy’ who are deliberately mobile when searching optimal challenges and benefits from the global labour markets (Wang 2007, p. 173; Raunio 2003, p. 16). Chinese degree students in Finland are rather on a space between a mere visit, migration, re-migration, or returning home. In one of the rare theorizations on international students, Wang Gungwu applies the concept of migranthood to describe the state of international students who are potential migrants but still highly bound to their country of origin and simultaneously open to new options for re-mobility (Wang 2007). As far as other related groups are concerned, the situation of Chinese overseas students with strong career orientation resembles the one of overseas Chinese professionals (OCPs) (Xiang 2005, p. 6), or more generally, highly skilled labour (Vertovec 2002, p. 2), and global economy’s experts, the concept which refers to the university educated professionals on the strategic fields of the global economy (Raunio 2003, pp. 15-17).

The experts of global economy have drawn attention of the major international institutes focusing on the conditions of economic development. Both the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Asian Development Bank have published widely on this topic (See e.g. Xiang 2005; International Migration Outlook 2006). The journal, published by International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Migration has also provided much space to the studies on the highly educated migrants and their impact to national economies. The reports of the Ministry of Education in Finland (Thematic Review on Tertiary Education in Finland 2007) and the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Wallenius, Hjelt 2005) have also focused on the attraction of highly educated labour to Finland while acknowledging the crucial role of international degree students as a potential source of labour resource.

The studies of Taina Kinnunen (2003) by order of Centre for International Mobility in Finland, CIMO and Kulsoom Ally (2002) by order of the Student Union of the University of Helsinki
focused on the foreign degree students and their living conditions and future plans and prospects in Finland. Kinnunen had conducted a survey study and thematic interviews of international degree students in all the Finnish institutions of higher education except the University of Helsinki. Hence, Kinnunen continued from the basis of Ally’s study which focused only on the international degree students of University of Helsinki. The fundamental objectives of Ally and Kinnunen strongly correspond to my objectives; however their studies focus on all international degree students instead of one selected nationality (Kinnunen 2003, pp. 9-10). Nevertheless, the studies of Kinnunen and Ally provided me an excellent point of reference on the situation and tendencies of the international student mobility to Finland by 2003. I refer mainly to the findings of Kinnunen for two reasons: the living conditions in the capital area differ distinctively from the average conditions of Finnish university towns and almost one fifth of the informants of Kinnunen were of Chinese origin (2003, p. 21). In certain parts of her study Kinnunen provides excellent data concerning only Asian informants who were primarily made up of Chinese people.

Due to essentially differing research methods applied in the studies of Ally (2002) and Kinnunen (2003) on the one hand, and my own study on the other, the findings are not fully comparable. Therefore, all the quantitative comparisons presented remain as mere approximates. As such, they may amplify the validity of the findings of Kinnunen and Ally, but more importantly, the comparisons may reveal the unique, or in most cases rather regular nature of Chinese degree students’ lives in Finland.

In 2005 the five student unions of the universities of Helsinki, Turku, Tampere, Jyväskylä, and Helsinki University of Technology conducted a study on the living and study conditions of their international degree students. Of all the informants 20 percent were Chinese, and 70 percent of them were students of Helsinki University of Technology, HUT (Kärki 2005, p. 15). Since the study was strongly quantitative in nature, and the analysis of the received survey data was relatively limited, I mainly refer to the studies of Ally and Kinnunen when comparing my findings to previous studies on international degree students in Finland.

Although student mobility, immigration, and labour mobility to Finland have been widely studied, the largest group of international degree students, the Chinese, have not been a focal point in those previous studies. The previous studies on the global labour migration of the highly educated suggest that immigration is often based on preceding study experiences in the country of immigration (Raunio 2003, Xiang 2005). The role of China for the Finnish ICT industry both as a market area
and as a location of the Finnish production lines has strongly increased in recent years. Although the information technology (IT) and computer sciences are by far the most popular fields of international degree students in Finland, the experiences and perceptions of Chinese IT students on the Finnish education and working opportunities have not gained much attention so far. Therefore, more elaborated study on the characteristics of the Chinese student mobility to Finland is needed. The cultural and social framework determined by the Chinese urban background and its implications toward the student mobility to Finland have not been studied so far.

1.3. Study objectives

My aim is to undertake a qualitative study on the transnational mobility of the Chinese university degree students at the University of Tampere and University of Jyväskylä as well as their living experiences and future plans in Finland. I have applied thematic interviews and ethnographic perspective by utilizing my own observations in China, blogs on the Internet, as well as a number of reports and articles in order to describe and analyze the phenomenological reality of Chinese degree students in Finland.

By reflecting on previous international degree student studies as well as the Chinese migration history, I intend to examine:

1. How the life of Chinese degree students differ from that of other ethnic international students in Finland? What are the common patterns of mobility experiences and transnational reality of the Chinese degree students?

I will characterize the profile of a common Chinese degree student in Finland. In order to describe the economic and cultural background of international mobility for the Chinese students, I will shortly preview the migration history in China (Chapter 2.1.) and the context of the Chinese university studies (Chapters 2.3.1. - 2.3.3.).

By taking into consideration relevant migration theories and the research reports of Finnish ministries, I will study the following:

2. Do Chinese degree students constitute a real potential to contribute to the pool of highly educated labour resources in Finland? What is, if any, the general mobility pattern of
Chinese degree students prior to and after the study program in Finland? Furthermore, do the Chinese university students in Finland fit to the theories on global migration flows initiated by labour needs? What is the significance of the student mobility to the societies both in China and Finland?

I will shortly introduce the discussion about the global competition on highly educated labour resources and the increasing labour need in Finland, and consequently, the expectations set to the international university degree students in Finland (Chapter 2.1.). The understanding of the social and political context of the Chinese university students will also help to estimate their motivations to stay in Finland, elsewhere in Europe, or return to China (Chapters 2.2. and 2.3.).

By reflecting on the theories and previous studies of Chinese migration and 'New Chinese migration' in particular, I will examine the following:

3. What is the relation between the Chinese student mobility and the Chinese migration to Europe, or the new Chinese migration in particular? What is common among the student mobility of the Chinese to Finland? Does the Chinese student mobility add to the validity of the previous studies on Chinese migration to Europe?

My short overview on the international mobility of Chinese students (Chapter 2.3.) and the previous studies and theories on Chinese migration (Chapter 2.4.), lay the groundwork for my empirical study on the previous and future mobility of Chinese students in Finland as well as their incentives to leave China; whether it be temporary or permanent.

My hypothesis is the following: Most university educated Chinese students leave Finland after finalizing their degree studies, either by re-migrating elsewhere in Europe or further to the United States, Australia, or by returning back to China. The greatest pushing factors lie in the inability to enter the Finnish labour market due to lack of knowledge in both the function of the markets and insufficient language skills in Finnish and/or Swedish.

1.4. Structure of the study

In the second chapter I present the general context of Chinese migration, the development of Chinese transnational student mobility, and the disciplinary framework of my study. First, I start by
briefly presenting the historical background of Chinese migration in the PRC and its influence to the transnational student mobility. Secondly, the cultural and societal context is introduced in order to frame the socio-cultural background and its implications to the student mobility. Thirdly, I present the political framework and the general trends of Chinese migration and student mobility in the last decades. Finally, I show the main concepts and theories on Chinese migration, student mobility, as well as the general patterns of global labour migration and the transnational flow of ideas and symbols which are presented and analyzed in chapter 2.4. I start by introducing the theoretical framework of transnational migration and transnational communities. I further examine overseas students as a target group of migration studies and how they can be categorized in the current framework of migration studies and transnational relations. I end the second chapter by examining the role of social and symbolic capital in the transnational relations and their role in international student mobility. In the third chapter I justify my methodological assumptions and present the focused thematic interview as my major method. I also briefly present my data collection practices and the primary research data.

In the fourth chapter I introduce the profile of my informants and the background of entering university studies in Finland. The fifth chapter includes the main findings on the transnational reality of the Chinese degree students of the University of Tampere and the University of Jyväskylä. In the sixth chapter, I present and analyse the reasons for the future mobility plans of my focus group. The seventh chapter concludes my findings and presents some suggestions for further research.
2. CONTEXTS OF CHINESE TRANSNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

2.1. Historical context of Chinese migration

2.1.1. Chinese migration from the late Qing Dynasty until the rise of the Communist regime

The international mobility of the Chinese has always been linked to internal migration in China. It was the first time in the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) when migration to the coastal cities in the eastern China and to Manchuria increased significantly. Diana Lary argues that the migrational flows of that time strongly correspond to the present migration. She stresses the increase of temporary contract labour as the main reason for migration, while Pál Nyíri mentions the lack of nutrition in the western parts of China (Lary 1999, p. 30; Nyíri 1999, p. 14). The aims of migration were also reminiscent of the current migrations; to earn as much money as possible and send the remittances back to families at home. Also in the late 1900s, the recruitment was mainly organized through personal relations which explains the features of chain migration. (Lary 1999, p. 30.)

The increase of international migration took place somewhat simultaneously with the growth of internal migration. Although Chinese people have moved overseas for centuries, the waves of overseas migration were truly launched by the discoveries of gold in the United States, Australia, and Canada from the late 1840s onwards (Skeldon 1996, pp. 435-436). The migration wave was strongly dominated by young male migrants who left voluntarily for making money fast abroad and intended to return. However, many of them were later followed by other family members. (Skeldon 1996, p. 436; Wang 2007, p. 168.)

In the 1850s the majority of the Chinese overseas mobility was directed to North America and Australia, but since entry regulations were set in these regions from the 1870s onwards, Singapore and the Malay states received the majority of Chinese immigrants1 (Skeldon 1996, p. 436; Richardson 1975, p. 565). However, already at that time, the United States had left doors open to a limited number of Chinese students who were sent to the United States by an inter-governmental

1 The change was mainly influenced by the exclusion policies of Australia, New Zealand, British Columbia on the West Coast of Canada as well as in California in the United States. So-called Great White Walls were set up in order to ban the entry of all non-Europeans and to prevent mainly the Asians from entering to these Anglo-Saxon settlements (Richardson 1975, p. 565). In the Malay Peninsula colonial governments and the British in particular were also searching for labour to territories in order to accelerate their economies (Skeldon 1996, p. 437).
education mission (Wang 2007, pp. 169-170). By the 1930s and in the aftermath of the recession in the capitalist world, the South East Asian destinations became restricted to continuing Chinese immigration. Following the Sino-Japanese War, the civil war between the Communist and Kuomintang armies, and finally the victory of the Communist party in 1949, two to three million people had fled to Hong Kong and Taiwan. (Skeldon 1996, p. 437.) Also, through the first half of the 20th century, overseas studies remained as a rare option for the selected Chinese students to enter in the United States (Wang 2007, p. 170).

The number of people leaving China from the 1850s onwards included millions of people; by the onset of the Second World War, approximately 9 million Chinese had become a part of relatively stable overseas Chinese communities. The diasporas were set in a number of locations around the world of which the largest ones were in South East Asia, although the network extended to the Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, South Africa, North America, and Australasia. (Skeldon 1996, p. 436.) Skeldon stresses the role of these historical migration experiences when analysing the current Chinese transnational mobility. The migration since the mid-1960s onwards has been largely based on the global diaspora networks established by the migration flows of the last 150 years. (Skeldon 1996, p. 437.)

**2.1.2. Migration in the Mao era (1949-1976)**

Lary has categorized the Mao era migration according to the social agenda and political aims of migrations. Furthermore, Chinese people were moving spontaneously or they were driven to move by the famine. Most forms of government-led migration generally indicated personal disasters, or at least humiliation to migrants and their families (Lary 1999, p. 31). The relocation programs of high school students and university graduates during the chaotic times of the Cultural Revolution in 1966-1976 brought up a so-called lost generation who missed the chance for education while participating in ideological work in the countryside (See e.g. Pieke 1999, p. 4)\(^1\).

At the turn of the 1960s, millions of Chinese were relocated for strengthening borders in backward areas\(^2\). Apparently, the relocations had a vast impact to the life of the borderland minorities who

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\(^1\) The life in the middle of hyper-politicized Chinese society and the reality of continuous relocation programs are best described in a number of novels and memoirs published in the 1990s and 2000s. Among the most well-known works can be mentioned *Wild Swans* (1992) by Jung Chang and *One Man’s Bible* (1998) by Gao Xingjian.

\(^2\) The largest migration flows were directed to Heilongjiang in the furthest corner in the North-east of China where 5,1 Million people moved in 1949-1961, 89 percent of them from Shandong
were well aware of the assimilation agenda glued to the resettlement of Han Chinese in their living areas. Not surprisingly, immigrants did not find themselves welcome in the borderlands and many of them returned as soon as possible\(^1\). (Lary 1999, pp. 35-37.)

Furthermore, massive modernization projects such as dam constructions led to the relocation of millions of Chinese. Since 1949, 2,500 large or middle-sized dams have been built in order to suffice the increasing needs for electricity and irrigation while at least five million people have been relocated due to dam constructions.\(^2\) (Lary 1999, p. 38.) Since the state unified job assignment system, *fenpei*, enabled relocation according to the judgement of teachers and other official authorities, the relocation was applied as an extended punishment system. As a result, *fenpei* functioned as a powerful threat for the student authorities and led students vigilantly to avoid any misdeeds. (Lary 1999, p. 39; Pieke 1999, p. 4.)

Millions of workers were also sent to new, artificially built industrial centres inland (Lary 1999, p. 39)\(^3\). After the break-up with the Soviet Union in the mid-1960s, Mao’s government started creating a so-called *third front*; including millions of people which would provide a strategic reserve against the Sino-Soviet war (Lary 1999, p. 40)\(^4\). Additionally, the unofficial form of relocation policy included millions of people who were sent to be reformed through labour in the distant border regions. Also, different kinds of political reasons were a source for relocation schemes; from 1965 to 1979 approximately 17 million young people were moved “up to the mountains and down to the countryside” in order to spread socialism to distant areas. In the later stage of the Cultural Revolution, millions of older cadres and intellectuals were sent to the countryside in order to become re-educated in “*May 7th cadre schools*” which, alternatively, could have been described as prison camps. (Lary 1999, pp. 41-42; Pieke 1999, p. 4.)

Finally, the great famine in the first years of the 1960s forced millions of people to flee with little

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\(^1\) For instance the rate of Shandong return migrants from Heilongjiang exceeded 50 percent on a yearly basis.

\(^2\) For instance Sanmen Dam on the Yellow river, one of the most famous dams lead to the relocation of 600,000 people even though the dam fast proved to be inoperative.

\(^3\) Zhengzhou in the central eastern parts of China and Lanzhou in the Western Gansu province received the highest numbers of relocated workers.

\(^4\) Since this campaign proved to be waste of time and a source of embarrassment for the leading authorities, clear numbers of population relocation are not reported in governmental statistics.
knowledge of their destinations or hopes for better nutrition. Many who left were replaced by other people coming from other famine-stricken regions. For instance, the eastern province of Shandong lost a population of 2.5 million people of whom 2 million migrated elsewhere. (Lary 1999, p. 43.)

Migration during Mao’s rule was characterized by the internal mobility of involuntarily moving masses. These migration experiences usually carried general negative connotations which must have been passed to the next generations. Not surprisingly, the propaganda against international migration rebounded to the government during the domestic relocation operations. The masses had begun to believe in the traditional view that no one ever voluntarily left home. (Lary 1999, pp. 30-31.) This was demonstrated by the general unwillingness to adapt to new living environments and high ratios of spontaneously returning migrants (Lary 1999, pp. 31, 37).

2.1.3. International mobility in the Mao era

In the beginning of the Mao era (from 1949 onwards), China’s international migration flows for the last hundred years were considered to be a humiliation; leaving the homeland was propagated to be treachery (Lary 1999, p. 31). International mobility was highly restricted and allowed only under the surveillance of the government. Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of people fled the PRC during Mao’s rule. Emigration was mainly directed to Hong Kong and it was dominated by well educated nationalist officials and professionals (Wang 2007, p. 174). A high number of Chinese people migrated to Australia, Canada, the United States, and Europe from the 1960s onwards; though they all were either from Hong Kong, Taiwan, or from independent South East Asian countries. This migration flow was initiated mainly by the changes in immigration policies in Canada, the United States (in the mid-1960s), and Australia (in the 1970s) but also in Europe (Skeldon 1996, p. 438). Following that time period, Hong Kong Chinese and Cantonese have dominated the Chinese communities in many European countries (Pieke et al. 2004, p. 71).

Since the Communist revolution in 1949, a great number of the fleeing nationalists’ offspring in Taiwan and Hong Kong were sent to study in the United States and were eager to bring up an anti-communist elite for Taiwan and Hong Kong regimes. However, many of those students were not willing to return because they had never been rooted to their temporary haven, and thus, they

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1 Skeldon presumes that 40,000 people per year from the PRC entered Hong Kong during the 1950 although Lary states that Hong Kong received 700,000 Mainland refugees only in the first six months of 1950 (Skeldon 1996, p. 339; Lary 1999, p. 45). Lary argues that the flow continued during the Mao era and Hong Kong only closed its borders during the Cultural Revolution, but also then only to avoid political instability from spreading to its area (Lary 1999, p. 45).
constituted the first wave of Chinese university students who settled down in the United States. (Wang 2007, p. 174.) From the communist-ruled mainland the only legal international mobility was restricted to other socialist countries. For instance, in the early 1970s over 13,000 engineers, technicians, and support staff were sent to Tanzania in order to assist with railway construction (Skeldon 1996, p. 438). The number of international students from the PRC was also highly restricted (See e.g. Xiang 2005, p. 11). Before the severance with the Soviet Union in the 1950s, China sent 11,000 students to study in the Soviet Union. The rule of Deng Xiaoping from 1978 onwards slowly started a new era of international student mobility. In 1978 alone, more than 3,000 students were sent overseas. (Skeldon 1996, p. 438.)

Despite the strict regulations in internal and international migration of the Chinese, it is evident that Chinese people have been involved in massive migration flows during the Mao regime. The turbulent past of migration has taught the Chinese to move before it is too late (Lary 1999, p. 45); conditions have changed rapidly and opportunities to migrate, either to other regions or to Hong Kong, might be closed as soon as new political campaigns were launched. The experiences in the recent history have also led to various methods to secure the future opportunities before new political and social changes might occur.

2.2. Societal context of Chinese student mobility

2.2.1. Hukou system and spontaneous migration in the PRC

From the early 1960s until today, internal migration in the PRC has been controlled by the so-called hukou system. The hukou system says that everyone wanting to move inside the PRC has to apply for approval from the public security authorities. The change of residence can only become official when one’s hukou is transferred to a new municipality. Hukou proves the legal residency and enables eligibility for urban welfare benefits. Thus, hukou can be seen as de facto internal passport mechanism in China. (Chan 1999, p. 51.) The control created by the hukou system has been mainly directed against those who have wanted to move from the rural areas to cities or from the remote cities to developed metropolises. From 1949 to the mid-1980s approximately seven million people moved spontaneously, despite the fact that when moving to cities migrants were dependent on

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1 Since the end of 1990s, prosperous businessmen from Hong Kong have sent their children and wives to the West Coast of the U.S. and Canada in case of changes in the political climate in Hong Kong after the reunification to the PRC in 1996. These parachute kids secure the residence rights and ability to move permanently if political changes occur. (See e.g. Skeldon 1996, p. 344; Ong 1999b, p. 23.)
relatives and their ratio-coupons, as well as the friendly neighbourhood not willing to inform the authorities about them. (Lary 1999, pp. 43-44.)

Although social, political and economic reforms begun soon since Deng Xiaoping gained a stronghold in the Communist party, the year 1978 cannot be regarded as a starting year for the era of new Chinese migration (Pieke 1999, p. 6). The essential political changes for easier migration only took place in the mid-1980s. In 1985 the government began to issue identity cards to all residents, which essentially eased moving around the country. By then, people already applied for permission from their work unit and other local authorities which, could therefore, control employment opportunities of the people under their surveillance. In the same year, the Emigration and Immigration Law was adopted which guaranteed the rights to travel abroad and to leave the country for private reasons. (Skeldon 1996, p. 439.) China’s market reforms, since the beginning of the Deng rule in the late 1970s, have significantly weakened governmental control over internal migration (Liang 2004, pp. 467, 473). While the private sector has developed and partly replaced the public sector as the most lucrative source of income, migrating people do not necessarily need to obtain official residence permits and the legitimacy for state benefits in order to secure their and their families’ standard of living.

The hukou migration has remained stable 20 million per year since the early 1980s, however, spontaneous migration (so-called zifā, or floating population) has increased from the estimated 20 million in the early 1980s to approximately 100 million in 1995, and further up to 144 million according to census of the year 2000 (Chan 1999, p. 55; Liang 2004, p. 475). Although peasants can move freely to many places, it is still mainly unreachable for them to obtain permission to register in medium-sized or large cities (Chan 1999, p. 52). However, many of the non-hukou migrants are legalized by issuing a temporary city registration for certain periods of employment (Pieke 1999, p. 4).

The governmental statistics from the early 1990s onwards clearly demonstrate socio-economic polarization of the two categories of internal migrants. According to Chan, in the late 1980s half of the hukou migration was for family reasons and 30 percent was for study or training (Chan 1999, p. 57); while the year 2000 census indicates that non-hukou migrants are in large extent in their prime age and moving mainly for manual labour (Liang 2004, p. 480). Hence, hukou has remained as a

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1 More than 80 percent of the floating population is 15-44 years old and about 80 percent of them
migration channel to people in higher socio-economic niches compared to those moving spontaneously to search for employment.

Despite the oppressed role of the non-hukou residents, they have played a crucial role in the economic miracle of the PRC since the early 1990s onwards. The income growth in the rural China through remittances and economically active return migrants co-exist with the large-scale structural discrimination of non-hukou migrants in the cities. (Liang 2004, p. 468.) Since they cannot obtain residence permits and become eligible to urban social security, they face difficulties in schooling their children, having access to health care, as well as disadvantages in housing and employment opportunities available to the residents with hukou. (Liang 2004, p. 484.)

The most popular destinations of the floating population have been the biggest and more developed provinces of Beijing, Shanghai as well as the Guandong in the south. The floating migration increasingly includes urban-urban migration of those who leave a state sector work in order to swift to private labour markets. Also the migration to the United States, Canada, and Eastern Europe in the last decade can be regarded as a spill over of this migration. (Pieke 1999, p. 5.) In the 1990s international immigration increasingly originated from rural regions instead of municipal and urban areas. According to governmental statistics, rural international migrants from Fujian, Zhejiang and Yunnan made up of more than 50 percent of the migrants while registered migration from Beijing and Shanghai made up only 14 percent of the total emigration.

2.2.2. Cultural framework for international student mobility

In 1999 Frank Pieke argued that Chinese overseas migration has sustained its specific endogenous features stemming from the massive scale and volume of immigrants and the still continuing governmental and social control on internal and international migration originating from the Mao era. (Pieke 1999, pp. 1-2; see also Thunø 2007, pp. 2-3.) Patrilineal family networks, the tradition of ancestor worship, as well as the stress on descent and common origin continue to form an important framework for the attachment to the home country, family, and kin networks. The Chinese society has traditionally put significant weight on family obligations in which the children’s duties to the parents are framed by the core Confucian value of filial piety. This has continued the emphasis to

reported "manual labour and business" as their occupation (Liang 2004, p. 480).

1 Guandong, including its capital Guangzhou (Kanton) has received more than one fourth of the all floating population, even though the relative increase of the total population has been greater in Shanghai and Beijing, 27 % and 25 % during the 1990s, respectively (Liang 2004, p. 868).
family obligations and the obedience of the offspring that has been found to be stronger in Chinese societies when compared to other societies. (Fuligni, Zhang 2004, p. 180.)

The Chinese cultural framework strongly stresses the role of sons as a guarantor of the family prestige and taking care of the parents. Thus, the parents traditionally live with the eldest son. (Pieke 1999, pp. 1-2; Zhang, Goza 2005, p. 154.) Since the beginning of the birth control in 1979, the favour of the patrilineal chain has led to discrimination of female children and the ratio of sexes has turned increasingly unbalanced\(^1\). According to Pieke, this development may function as an additional stimulus to migration of men in their prime. Besides, young women are traditionally expected to assist in maintenance of the household until they marry and move from the family which has also made them relatively free to migrate (Pieke 1999, p. 2). However, in some parts of the rural China married couples have begun to reside with the wives’ parents in order to decrease the unbalanced sex ratio and promote new ideas about traditional gender preferences (Zhang, Goza 2005, p. 162). That is the case for instance in Inner Mongolia where the family of one of my informants comes from. In the study of Chinese adolescents’ filial piety changes, Fuligni & Zhang estimate that adolescent girls express a greater sense of obligation to support their families than boys do; however, the situation may reverse when male offspring become adults. (2004, pp. 182, 189.)

\[2.2.3. \textit{One-child policy and its implications to the family structure}\]

Since the beginning of the one child policy in 1979, the government has introduced legal bindings in order to encourage Confucian filial piety; in 1979 it introduced the law which officially sets obligations to the offspring to take care of the elders. Furthermore, the family law adopted in 1982 made reciprocal caring legally binding by obliging parents to take care of the children and the adult children to provide care for their elderly parents (Zhang, Goza 2005, p. 154). In any case, the caring for the only child has become even more deliberate than in the earlier days. The parents want to do anything to provide their only child with the best possibilities to succeed in the increasingly competitive Chinese society. The highly educated urban parents interviewed by Zhang & Goza want firstly to invest in the child, then their parents, and finally prepare for their own retirement. (Zhang, Goza 2005, p. 159.)

As a result of the decreased number of the adults in the caring-age, a so-called \textit{sandwich}

\(^1\) In 1995 there were 100 women to 104 but according to the year 2000 census the ratio has worsened to 100 women to 117 men (Nyíri 1999, p. 16; The Economist print edition 2002).
generation, an increased number of elders live alone. For instance in Tianjin, the third biggest city of China near Beijing, 62.5 percent of senior citizens lived alone in 2002, and the number is estimated to reach 90 percent by 2012 (Xinhua News Agency, 7 Oct 2003). Also the patterns of taking care of the parents are changing since the 4-2-1 family structure, referring to four grandparents, two breadwinners, and one child, is becoming increasingly dominant. Due to low fertility in urban areas, even more urban residents will reach their final years without any surviving children, while the retirement payment has still remained beyond reach for a part of the retired people. (Zhang, Goza 2005, p. 154.) Furthermore, according to the study of Fuligni & Zhang, the urban male adolescents have a weaker sense of family obligation than female ones that may reflect the fact that the urban life demands more assistance which is usually expected by the female offspring (2004, p. 189). Therefore, urban parents who are already experiencing the reality of the 4-2-1 family structure, have begun to search for alternative strategies to arrange their financial security in the old days. (Zhang, Goza 2005, pp. 155-162.) Private institutions offer different types of insurances for the only child and there is a great deal of nursing home arrangements, especially in the urban areas where many young people have migrated elsewhere (Zhang, Goza 2005, pp. 155, 159). Additionally, neighbourhood committees continue to provide services for the ageing population, such as social activities and hobbies, while the role of protestant churches is increasing in the care of the elderly. (Zhang, Goza 2005, p. 158.)

2.3. Political context of Chinese student mobility and expert migration to Finland

2.3.1. Regulations and incentives for Chinese overseas students since the Reform in 1978

Xiang categorizes three groups of Chinese overseas students since the Reform in 1978. The first group consists of those students who were sponsored by the government, and mainly took postgraduate or short-term training courses abroad. The second group has emerged since the 1990s and is mainly supported by overseas scholarships or by own financial resources. They were mainly postgraduate students although younger than the ones in the first category. The third group of Chinese students has moved abroad since the late 1990s and is characterized by a high number of young students taking language courses and undergraduate programs. Many of them have been studying in

\[1\] The discrepancies in the sense of family obligations may also depend on the new opportunities which modern urban life offers mainly for men (Fuligni, Zhang 2004, p. 189). However, the urban environment requires many kinds of caring activities (shopping, seeing off the parents to the doctor etc.) which are traditionally expected to be done by daughters.
polytechnic institutes rather than universities. Also, an increasing number are going abroad for high school education. (Xiang 2005, p. 13.)

In 1979, the Chinese state institutions responsible for the international student mobility jointly issued a document stating how Chinese overseas students should be regulated. The procedure was set to be strict; for instance, those who did not return on time would be punished. In 1981, the State Council approved the "Temporary Regulations on Self-financed Overseas Education" which for the first time recognized self-financed overseas studies as a legitimate channel to leave China. Already at that time employers were allowed to send staff overseas for academic exchange or degree education. (Xiang 2005, p. 11.)

The Tiananmen Square incident in June 1989 had a remarkable impact on China’s student mobility (see e.g. Nyiri 1999, p. 29). The United States, followed by other major Western destinations for overseas studies, granted Chinese students permanent residency in 1990. As a result, 70,000 Chinese students in the United States (including 20,000 family members), 10,000 in Canada, and 28,500 in Australia obtained permanent residence permits which stabilized the pool of highly educated Chinese overseas professionals in those countries. (Xiang 2005, p. 12; Skeldon 1996, p. 344.) In 1992 China announced that all the returning overseas students would be welcome regardless of their participation level in the political activities during the Tiananmen incident (Xiang 2005, p. 12). Already by the early 1990s, China had become the most numerous source of international students in the United States, which is the most popular destination of international students. The flow of Chinese students from the mainland was influenced by a high number of students arriving from Taiwan and Hong Kong during the previous decades. The same pattern took place in the Chinese student migration to Canada and Australia in the early 1990s. (Xiang 2005, p. 10.)

Until 2004, the Chinese had become the largest nationality of international students with 115,000 annual students going abroad, while in 2003 the total number of international students was estimated at 2 Million (Atlas of Student Mobility; International Migration Outlook 2006, p. 37; NESO report 2005, p. 11). In 2004, the most popular countries for Chinese overseas students included the United States with 88,000 students, Japan (76,000), UK (48,000), Australia (28,000), and Germany (25 000) (Atlas of Student Mobility). Netherlands Education Support Office estimated that EU countries already receive more Chinese degree students than the United States alone. (NESO report 2005, p. 4.)
Whereas initially all the Chinese overseas students were fully supported by the government, today 93 percent of them are self-financed. According to the governmental statistics, only one fourth of the 814,887 Chinese students who left the country since 1978 have returned to China by 2004. (NESO report 2005, p. 3, 10; Xiang 2005, pp. 15-16). Xiang refers to the report of the Chinese National Conference on Science and Technology from the year 2002 which indicates that among the estimated 30 million “old” overseas Chinese there are about “600,000 overseas Chinese technology personnel in Western developed countries. There are 450,000 in the USA alone, including 30,000 of world-class professionals, making up about one quarter of the 130,000 first-rank scientists and technology personnel in the USA”. Thus, it seems that China has been affected by remarkable brain drain in the recent decades. Furthermore, Xiang states that as many as 60 percent of the legal Chinese immigrants since the 1978 were students and their families. (Xiang 2005, p. 10.) The high ratio of the students and their families also demonstrates the continuing restrictions faced by the Chinese youth who are willing to leave China for the Western countries. For instance, legal labour immigration to the EU is highly restricted by the immigration policies of the EU countries and even tourist trips require extensive bureaucratic procedures in order to obtain a Schengen visa. Hence, overseas studies have remained as the easiest and the most secure option to international mobility for the Chinese youth; although a great number of the Chinese are estimated to enter the EU through illegal channels every year (Country strategy paper: China 2002-2006 s.a., p. 18).

Nevertheless, since 2002 an increased ratio of students has returned in China, especially in the most developed provinces of Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong. (Xiang 2005, p. 16.) In this regard China seems to follow the experiences of other developing East Asian countries, such as Taiwan and South Korea (Skeldon 1996, p. 11). However, the return mobility varies according to the region of overseas studies; whereas 14 percent of overseas Chinese students return from the U.S. in 1978-2001, the return rates from Europe and Japan are much higher, 42 and 37 percent, respectively. Many Chinese students from Europe and Japan also moved to the United States after graduation. (Xiang 2005, p. 17.)

### 2.3.2. The recent changes in the Chinese labour markets and the dynamics of overseas studies

The Chinese education system is featured by the scale and volume unseen elsewhere in the world. There were almost 110 million students in the primary and secondary education and more than 6,5
million students graduating from the senior secondary school in 2005 (China facts and figures 2006). Almost one fifth of the youth of 18–24 years has access to higher education which includes both higher vocational and university education. The enrolment of new students in higher education has increased from approximately 2 million in 2000 to 5,05 million in 2005. Unless the statistics demonstrate impressive increase in the number of students, they still reflect under-capacity. (NESO report 2005, p. 3.) In 2005, eight million high school graduates competed for approximately four million positions in higher vocational and undergraduate university education, while 1,2 million Bachelor graduates applied for the 316,000 places available for Master students. (NESO report 2005, p. 8.) The fiercest competition takes place during the National College Entry Examination, gaokao, which determines the access to the Chinese universities. On the day of gaokao the Chinese society as a whole is focused on the exams. Parents, grandparents and the social infrastructure in general do their utmost in order to provide the best possible conditions for the examiners: urban traffic is limited, construction sites are silenced, and the parents take days off for seeing off their children to the examination cities.

Alternatives to those who do not obtain a study place in one of the wanted universities are either private Chinese institutions, foreign university programs in China, or study abroad. In 2005 there were 214 private universities in China, of which only few are allowed to grant Bachelor degrees while the rest may only provide diplomas from a number of study fields. (NESO report 2005, p. 8.) Three of my informants had studied computer sciences in a private college in English before starting preparatory studies in Finland and finally entering an MA program at the University of Tampere.

The foreign degree providers are only allowed to offer their programs in cooperation with recognized Chinese institutions. So far the number of Sino-foreign joint programs has remained limited due to very complex and time-consuming process with various regulations and bureaucratic procedures. However, the joint programs bring to China valuable academic knowledge, new teaching methods and curricula that remarkably contribute to the development of the Chinese higher education. Although the Chinese government increasingly allows free market mechanisms on the education sector, it also keeps tight reins on private and foreign actors in order to ensure a certain

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1 In 2003 there were 712 officially approved joint educational programs in China, with approximately 150 of them entitled to confer foreign academic degrees. In reality, the number may have already then been much higher because most of the popular preparatory programs were not yet acknowledged by official procedures. (NESO 2005, p. 9.)
standard of the degrees and the absence of illegitimate education business actors. (NESO 2005, pp. 3, 9.)

The same strategy is reflected in the governmental policies towards overseas studies. The Chinese government encourages international mobility of students while it builds a legal framework which regulates the institutions providing services for potential overseas students (NESO report 2005, p. 11). The Ministry of Education has forbidden the direct involvement of foreign education providers in recruitment and the operations of Chinese recruitment agencies are highly regulated (NESO 2005, p. 12). The Chinese education agencies are providing services in order to find the best possible institution as well as practical arrangements related to the overseas studies. The agencies usually charge notable sums for their services; one of my informants estimated the agency service costs up to 20 000 ¥ or 2 000 €, and according to an article by the governmental Xinhua news agency, the intermediation price may rise as high as 30 000 ¥ (Xinhua net 25 July 2005). Many of the agencies are operating on the verge of legal business; the service fees may rise surprisingly high even though the aim itself, a study place in a Western university, is never realized (Hui 2005, p. 72). By the end of 2005, more than 300 agencies had a licence to provide study abroad services. The number of agencies has strongly decreased in the previous years due to the slightly smaller number of students going abroad and the maturation of the market. (NESO report 2005, p. 12.)

In addition to the self-financed students, the government provides different kinds of scholarships through Chinese Scholarship Council (CSC) for studies abroad, although they are primarily targeted to PhD students. Of the 3000 annual scholarships provided by CSC, 600 are offered under bilateral and multilateral exchanges, as was the case with one of my informants. Additionally, CSC administrates 4000 scholarships provided by other authorities and individual universities. (NESO report 2005, p. 19.) What is noteworthy in the case of Chinese students in Finland, is that CSC increasingly grants scholarships for the studies in Europe because the return rate of the students is expected to be higher than among the students in the United States, Australia, or Japan (NESO report 2005, p. 20).

Many of the popular countries of destination, including the biggest EU countries Australia and the United States, have set up offices in the most important cities of China in order to provide information on possibilities to study abroad as well as to promote their national cultures. The United States has strongly enhanced its promotion activities since 2005 in order to re-gain a high volume of Chinese students after the decline of Chinese applicants in the aftermath of 9-11. (NESO
report 2005, p. 13.) Apparently, they have succeeded because the enrolment of foreign students in the US universities increased for the first time in the academic year of 2006/2007 since 2000/2001, including the increase of Chinese students by 8 percent from the 2005/2006 to 62,400 students (Open Doors 2007).

The Ministry of Education in China has set up a website in order to provide relevant information about overseas studies. The website provides for instance a list of all licensed recruitment agencies, information on approximately 10,000 foreign institutions whose degrees it recognizes as well as the blacklists of schools and agencies which are not fulfilling the official criteria. The students returning to China enjoy specific tax reductions and the MoE and other governmental institutions have set up entire science parks for returning students to start up business under favourable conditions. (NESO report 2005, pp. 10, 17.)

Despite of the new domestic alternatives, overseas studies are still a highly potential strategy to obtain a proper job in the highly competitive Chinese labour market, as well as the easiest way to go abroad for those who want to experience different cultures and international atmosphere, whether for a short period or permanently. The overseas studies have boomed since the beginning of the 21st Century because the needed financial resources are more widely available, although the study abroad option is still beyond the budget of many families. However, although the number of students going abroad peaked in 2002 with 125,000 students it was slightly decreased in the two following years down to approximately 115,000 students (NESO report 2005, p. 11).

This small change in the number of Chinese overseas students may reflect the increased competition of young university educated students in the Chinese labour market. The employers have become increasingly aware of the inconsistent quality of overseas studies. According to a study from Netherlands Education Support Office, local companies in China do not generally prefer jobseekers with an international degree, although some foreign companies still do. Furthermore, a foreign degree does not reflect to higher starting salaries as it used to do some years earlier. Chinese employers may even prefer domestic university degrees since Chinese universities are more competitive than many foreign institutions. (NESO report 2005, p. 18.) The families and students themselves are also aware of the changes. Compared to the tuition fees of 5000 to 10,000 ¥ (500 to 1000 €) per year in Chinese state universities, studies abroad may cause a heavy financial burden which may not be covered by the rise of future earnings. According to Xinhua net, in 2005 the average annual income of a Chinese family in a medium-sized city is around 80,000 ¥
(approximately 8 000 €), while the expenses of a child in the UK start from 200,000 ¥ (20 000 €), and may cost as much as 300,000 ¥ in the United States per year. (Xinhua net, 3 June 2005) When returning to China, Chinese graduates may expect a starting salary from 2,500 to 4,000 ¥, or 250 to 400 €. (NESO report 2005, p. 26.)

2.3.3. **Role of the Chinese governmental institutions in linking Chinese overseas students to their homeland**

As previously stated, the attitudes towards overseas Chinese have fundamentally changed since 1978 and the start of the social reforms (so-called *gaige kaifang*). In the 1990s, the PRC replaced Marxist rhetoric with nationalist discourse towards overseas Chinese which has also helped to legitimate state-supported Chinese overseas organizations among the overseas Chinese.¹ (Nyiri 1999, p. 111; see also Pieke 2004, p. 181.) From the government’s point of view, Chinese transnational migrants are regarded as important contributors to the development and nationalist project of the PRC. This is also reflected by the data of IOM stating that over 60 percent of overseas investments to China are made by the overseas Chinese (World Migration Report 2005, p. 126). Getting rich abroad does not only bring respect to the family but it is also considered patriotic by the state. (Nyiri 2001, pp. 636-639; see also Pieke 2004, p. 181.) The study of Pieke et al. on the overseas Chinese from the Fujian Province reveals how affluent overseas Chinese gain respect by contributing to the social and educational infrastructure in their home villages. Also, Chinese state agencies encourage establishing migrant organizations in Chinese cities and counties. These organizations link overseas Chinese to their home region and can give honorary titles for successful overseas Chinese. (Pieke et al. 2004, p. 183.) According to Pieke et al. the overseas Chinese media is mainly in line with the information of policy of the Chinese Communist Party. They reproduce the Chinese identity and maintain the dichotomy between Chinese and foreigners. (Pieke et al. 2004, p. 190.)

Although international mobility may lead to permanent migration and weaken the state control over its citizens, especially in terms of the flow of information, transnational links may also increase the scope of Chinese state authority. Pieke et al. argue that migration supports and is supported by transnational connections that strengthen both nationalism and state-building. (Pieke et al. 2004, p.

¹ Already in 1987, Zhao Ziyang, then the general secretary of Chinese Communist Party (CCP), argued that the brain drain should be regarded as a case of “storing brainpower overseas” that would be used in the future (Xiang 2005, p. 2).
Migrants, and even people back home, become more involved, have more contacts, and influence to state agencies through overseas organizations (Nyíri 2001, p. 648). On the one hand, for many immigrants overseas Chinese organizations may be instruments of economic gains; on the other hand, for the state the immigrants provide a channel to extend its influence beyond the geographical borders of the PRC (see also Nyíri 2001, p. 650).

Overseas Chinese organizations constitute an important link in the transnational social relations of overseas Chinese. However, Biao Xiang’s survey study on overseas Chinese professionals (OCPs) states that newly graduated Chinese degree students do not have extensive academic or professional transnational connections back to the PRC. When OCPs have completed their studies and entered into the working life, they often develop a strong interest in contacting China. However, given their relatively limited work experience and other resources, only few achieve tangible collaboration relationships. (Xiang 2005, p. 27.)

The older the OCPs are, and the longer they have resided abroad, the more they have transnational connections to institutes and business actors in China (Xiang 2005, p. 22). Xiang concludes “that OCPs in general have fairly diverse and strong ties with China, and the connections are clearly shaped by the trajectory of their career development overseas” (Xiang 2005, p. 21). Evidently, Xiang’s study suggests that neither the Chinese MA, nor PhD degree students in Finland have strong institutional relations to China.

2.3.4. Finland – a pariah country in the global circulation of highly educated labour force

Student mobility to Finland truly begun in the end of the 1980s and it radically increased during the 1990s. The international student mobility in Finland was characterized by the Sokrates and Erasmus exchange programs of the EU, which with developing education in English and international student services, constituted a framework for the fast increasing number of foreign students in Finland as well as a channel for Finnish students to study abroad, mainly in Europe. The number of foreign exchange students in Finland has risen from a few hundred to 8,200, and Finnish exchange students from almost none to 8,600 by 2006. (Kinnunen 2003, p. 7; CIMO Press release 2007.)¹

The exchange students slightly outnumber international degree students in Finland. In 2003 there were 7,400 foreign degree students, which constituted 2.5 percent of all university students. The

¹ In 2006 there were 94 Chinese exchange students in Finnish academic universities (and 193 Chinese in the universities of applied sciences) (CIMO 2007, p. 20).
majority of them come from neighbouring countries, Russia, Sweden, and Estonia as well as from China. (Kinnunen 2003, p. 7; Alanen 2006.) Compared to almost any other OECD country, the numbers of foreign university students are modest. However, Finland receives a relatively high number of students majoring in technological fields – almost one third of all international degree students – which is much more than anywhere else (Alanen 2006).

The Finnish society as a whole gains relatively little labour force with university education; 0.9 percent of the university educated labour force in Finland come from other OECD countries whereas in Sweden and the United States the ratio reaches seven percent, while Switzerland has 20 percent (Thematic review on tertiary education in Finland 2007, pp. 40-41). Furthermore, almost seven percent of the students with a Finnish university degree leave Finland for other OECD countries. In other words, Finland experiences a loss of almost six percent of its university graduates. Evidently, Finland is an extraordinary brain drain country among the highly developed OECD countries. (Thematic review on tertiary education in Finland 2007, p. 41.)

Finland also benefits from the brain gain from the non-OECD countries significantly less than the OECD countries in average.¹ The brain gain from non-OECD countries to Sweden reaches seven percent and in the United States nine percent whereas Finland receives 1.3 percent of its highly educated labour force from non-OECD countries². (Thematic review on tertiary education in Finland 2007, p. 41.) It is justified to conclude that Finland is one of the few losers among the OECD countries in the competition on highly educated labour force.

2.3.5. Demographic change and sectoral prognoses on the labour need in Finland

The Finnish labour markets will remarkably change in the coming decades. According to the Ministry of Education in Finland (MoE), the need for university graduates (including the graduates of the universities of applied sciences) on the fields of technology, transportation, and social and health services will highly increase whereas the need for the graduates of social sciences, pedagogy

¹ The discussion on the so-called brain drain from developing countries is definitely an essential topic of the global development policy. The mobility of the highly educated people from the developing world to the OECD countries is obviously a part of this development discussion but unfortunately I cannot elaborate the topic of the brain drain and its impacts in this paper.

² The term highly educated refers to people with a university degree; in the case of Finland this also includes the degrees from the universities of applied sciences (Thematic review on tertiary education in Finland 2007, p. 9).
and the humanities will decrease by one fourth, and the need for the graduates of commerce and administration will be halved. (Thematic review on tertiary education in Finland, p. 41.) In general, the population in the age between 15-64 is predicted to reduce from 2010 onwards. The ratio of those in the working age (15-64 years) to those beyond that age cohort will change from 1:0.5 to 1:0.7 by 2030. (Wallenius, Hjelt 2005, p. 10; Torvi 2007, p. 1.) The greatest need of additional labour force will be faced on the social and health sector. The ageing will not only face Finland, but the whole of Europe; although the ageing of the Finnish population will take place earlier than in other EU countries. (Wallenius, Hjelt 2005, p. 10, 18.) However, nearly all the EU countries will be restructuring their social systems and competing on the mobile labour force from other regions. The change of the ageing population in China follows the same schedule as in Finland, that is to say, the change will come sooner than in most developed countries. (Wallenius, Hjelt 2005, p. 18.)

The point of departure for attracting more international university students and highly educated foreign professionals to stay in Finland is twofold: On the one hand, foreign post-graduate students and researchers are not very satisfied with the immigration procedure and the social and health services in Finland. (Thematic review on tertiary education in Finland 2007, p. 43.) On the other hand, the MoE finds many assets for the post-graduate students and researchers in Finland; for instance good gender equality, progress on the strategic fields of research such as natural sciences, technology, and health sciences as well as the progress in administrational services and policy sectors under the governance of the Ministry of Education (Thematic review on tertiary education in Finland 2007, p. 43). The findings of the MoE correspond to the results of the studies on international degree and exchange students and their views on the Finnish society and education environment (Kinnunen 2003, p. 36; Garam 2001, pp. 13-15).

Following the findings of other studies on the labour mobility of the highly educated, the rapport of the MoE regards the institutions of higher education as one of the most important channels to attract highly educated labour to Finland. Hence, the MoE recommends the Finnish universities to recruit an increasing number of international students and personnel in order to develop co-operation with foreign institutions and to bring new innovations to Finland. Furthermore, the foreign students may become a source of additional financial resources in case some of the Finnish universities introduce tuition fees for the students coming from outside of EEA area. (Thematic review on tertiary education in Finland 2007, p. 44.) The MA students of computer sciences can therefore be regarded as an important resource for the highly educated labour force. Finland is regarded as a relaxed and professional working environment although foreign degree students have faced many difficulties in
entering Finnish labour market, partly due to insufficient language skills and partly because of indirect, or even direct, discrimination in recruitment situations and when applying for promotion. (Raunio 2003, pp. 18, 20; Kinnunen 2003, pp. 51, 67-70; Ally 2002, p. 99.) In the studies on international degree students and global economy’s experts in Finland, the Finnish nature and safe living environment were highly valued while the rather modest salary level was regarded as a problem (Raunio 2003, pp. 38, 43; Kinnunen 2003, p. 87).

In 2005, there were 511 Chinese students conducting university degrees and 185 students conducting their post-graduate studies (696 in total) in Finnish universities and 748 students in the universities of applied sciences (Tilastokeskus 2007). By September 2007 there were 521 applications for residence permits by Chinese students in 2007 (Finnish Immigration Service). In the University of Tampere there were 52 Chinese students and 39 in the University of Jyväskylä. The majority of Chinese students studied at the Helsinki University of Technology (HUT), 101 students altogether. (International office of UTA; Int. office of JYU; Int. office of HUT.)

2.4. Theoretical tools and concepts

2.4.1. New Chinese Migration

Mette Thunø stresses the experiences of Chinese transnational migrants which increasingly correspond to those of other migrants coming from any other country and whose migration is shaped by global capitalism, globalization, and the booming economy of China (Thunø 2007, p. 2). This has been the main feature characterizing the experiences of so-called new Chinese migrants, the label which can be attached to all Chinese who left the PRC since the early 1980s, regardless of their status and destination(s) (Thunø 2006, p. 3; Nyíri 1999, p. 122; see also Pieke 2004, pp. 72-73). Pál Nyíri´s description crystallizes the major differences between the traditional and new Chinese migration:

"The difference between new and traditional migration is in characteristics of population movement (shorter times spent in destination country, more frequent return and remigration, demographic profiles) more even distribution (by place of origin, higher special and social mobility, higher educational level), and motives (more individual, conscious decision-making)” (1999, p. 122).

Compared to the traditional Chinese migration, the new migrants come from more diversified social and geographical backgrounds and they are not as male-dominated as the former young male ‘coolie’ pioneer migrants from non-urban areas of south-eastern China. If women used to migrate
mainly due to the need to follow their husbands, today they might migrate as students, highly skilled professionals, workers for the entertainment industry as well as spouses. (Thunø 2007, p. 4.) Nyiri states that the new wave of Chinese immigrants can be seen as a product of increasing overpopulation within the context of the emerging Chinese consumer society which produces both economic opportunities and expectations (Nyiri 1999, p. 122). In the case of Chinese university students, the overpopulation is reflected in the furious competition on desired posts on the labour markets of the developed Chinese cities, and later, as extremely long working hours.

The development of new Chinese migration and the growing role of the Chinese entrepreneurship in the world economy have initiated more elaborated theorization on Chinese transnational relations1. When analysing the changing volume and intensity of Chinese transnationalism, Pieke proposes an open-ended term of Chinese globalization. He conceptualizes it as “multiple, transnational social spaces straddling and embedded in, on the one hand, diversifying smaller regional or national systems, and, other the hand, as a part of a unifying global system”. The term emphasizes the process-like nature of globalization which is never complete and, as Pieke puts it, “that (1) creates and takes place in multiple centers and peripheries, (2) produces new forms of inequality and competition, and (3) encompasses a multiplicity of developments that are distinct yet at the same time interconnected” (Pieke 2004, p. 8). He stresses that globalization consists of contested and fragmented processes which may not lead to a more homogenous, or even more interdependent post-modern world that has left behind the era of independent nation-states (Pieke 2004, p. 8). International mobility in the era of globalization does not necessarily weaken for instance nationalist feelings but may also cement the aspirations absorbed during the earlier years in the homeland.

2.4.2. Overseas studies as a springboard to the world of global economy’s experts?

International degree students have gained a relatively limited attention in the framework of migration and transnational theories. International university students have been mostly studied as a potential highly skilled labour resource or as exchange students who are expected to return to their home country. Evidently, international students possess a high potentiality of becoming migrants although they may also return directly after finalizing their studies abroad. As I earlier referred to Xiang, even 60 percent of all the legal Chinese transnational migrants since 1978 have originally

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1 See e.g. Pieke et al. 2004; Nyiri 1999 and Thunø’s (Ed.) Beyond Chinatown 2006.
left China as international students or their family members (Xiang 2005, p. 10).

Scientific interest in the professional migrants increased in the 1990s which was largely due to a paradigm shift from the brain drain perspective to a world systems perspective that emphasized the interconnections among countries and the benefits of circular migration (See e.g. Faist 2000, p. 13; Meyer 2001). In the case of China, the country has lost a great deal of its human resources in science and technology (HRST); but, there are also significant benefits due to a large number of highly skilled professionals abroad who have strongly contributed to the investments of the Chinese economy. Although such benefits only take place in the course of time, Zhang & Li regard that in the long run the advantages are greater than the disadvantages. The highly educated professionals in science and technology bring their added value when establishing new companies in China as well as their working experiences which would have not been possible to obtain in China. In the course of time returning professionals facilitate a fruitful environment for new innovations and new methods for personnel management, which further attracts the overseas professionals and students to return in China. (Zhang, Li 2002, pp. 195-196.) Hence, the term brain circulation fits to describe also the mobility of the Chinese overseas students to an increasing extent. However, the paradigm shift from the brain drain perspective has not greatly increased research on the international students. (Alberts & Hazen 2005, p. 133; see also Wang 2007, p. 177.)

2.4.3. Migranthood as a subjective construction of being elsewhere

Wang Gungwu has approached modern Chinese student mobility through the origin of the Chinese concepts of liuxue (留学), a word for ‘study abroad’, and yimin (移民), indicating migration in Chinese. While liuxue has had a connotation to long-term stay of scholars in a foreign residence, yimin has rather referred to movements of people, either by economic or strategic reasons. Since the modern student mobility does not fully connote with neither of those original definitions, Wang refers to the contemporary state of overseas students with a concept of migranthood. For Wang,

[I]t is not necessarily decision to settle permanently, but to position themselves in the space between that of a student and that of a settled migrant. Within that area, they can identify with many other conditions. For example, they could choose to feel that they are in a state of exile or that of a refugee; or they could also resort to the ancient art of long-term sojourning, or acquire the skills of a modern transnational. (Wang 2007, 167-168.)

The migranthood can include the elements of different traditional conceptualizations on mobile life; it is a subjectively constructed state which is usually featured by the indetermination of the future
state of residence. It might be uncomfortable but still lasts for long periods of time. (Wang 2007, p. 168.)

2.4.4. Conceptualizations of the global, mobile and educated labour

Also in the case of the so-called highly skilled mobile labour, Steven Vertovec has noted that migration may not be the most suitable term to describe the biographical nature of mobile labour force. Vertovec defines the highly skilled labour as

...those in possession of a tertiary degree or extensive specialized work experience – include architects, accountants and financial experts, engineers, technicians, researchers, scientists, chefs, teachers, health professionals, and – increasingly – specialists in information technology (IT, including computing professionals, computing engineers, managers, sales reps, etc.) (2002, p. 2).

His definition is obviously close to one of Mika Raunio on global economy’s experts, and Biao Xiang’s definition on overseas Chinese professionals which is still restricted to ethnic Chinese residing outside China on a long-term basis (2005, p. 6). Raunio’s definition to the profile of global economy’ experts still has a stronger focus on ICT and biotechnology experts, apparently due to the focus of his study to the Finnish labour market. Raunio stresses the capability of global experts to search for career opportunities on a global scale through Internet and global professional networks. (Raunio 2003, p. 16.)

Raunio has categorized global economy’s experts to three groups according to their motives, namely those of Global economy’s nomads, Quality of life –migrants and Social relations –migrants.

1.) Global economy’s nomads are inclined to work in highly multicultural working environments and to further their universally applicable skills in the global labour markets where ever the best circumstances are provided. (Raunio 2003, p. 16.)

2.) Quality of life –migrants are mobilized by the search for the optimal environment for the high quality of living. They are looking for a permanent place where to settle down permanently and integrate to local culture.

3.) Social relations –migrants move depending on their social relations, i.e. a partner or
Raunio’s categorization constitutes a fruitful framework to classify the intentions of my student informants. I will return to my elaborated classification in chapter 7.

2.4.5. Transnational ties as a theoretical framework

Saskia Sassen has stressed that migration is rarely caused by a single factor, such as poverty or unstable political situation in the country of emigration, but rather by the socially produced opportunity structure in which the social, economic, and political situation of the receiving country is integrally involved (Sassen 1998, p. 55). The link between strong export production and wide-scale emigration is a distinctive feature in the countries sending the relatively highest number of emigrants (Sassen 1998, p. 118). Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) and export-dominated industries have mobilized masses of rural population into migration to industrializing centres which has again led to locational concentration and further to international migration from the industrialized and more developed regions (Sassen 1998, p. 112). According to Mette Thunø also the changes in China’s migration-intensive regions in the 1980s and 1990s reflect the link between economic development and the international migration. If the main emigration flows were previously located to Canton, Shanghai and Beijing, now they are in the fast developing provinces of Yunnan, Zhejiang, and Fujian. Evidently, the Chinese migration is rather initiated by the integration in the global economy than as a consequence of the backwardness and the lack of economic development (Thunø 2007, p. 6). This link is also reflected in the socio-economic profiles of Chinese overseas students: they mainly come from urban areas which are strongly linked to global economic and cultural processes.

Although there are features of chain migration in China, it is questionable how it finally ignites the mobility of the Chinese degree students in the Finnish universities. The strongest flows of migrants as well as international degree students are facilitated through so-called migration systems which are usually preconditioned by strong political, cultural, and economic ties\(^1\) (Faist 2000, p. 69). It is evident that the conditions of the three strong ties mentioned by Faist are not met in the relations between the PRC and Finland. China and Finland do not have particularly strong cultural or

\(^1\) For Faist the core conditions for migration systems are featured by 1) strong interaction between the nation-states; 2) high density of interactions on at least one of the areas of economic, political, security or cultural relationships, and 3) transnationally active civil societies. These conditions have been fulfilled for instance between the Western European states and their former colonies. (Faist 2000, pp. 67-68.)
political relations, although the countries have strengthened their bilateral trade\textsuperscript{1}.

However, the Western influence and the impact of foreign companies in the export-oriented manufacturing locations generally facilitate access to information and help to get familiar with potential destinations of immigration and overseas studies (see Sassen 1998, p. 120). Finnish FDIs to China and the presence of Finnish companies in the Chinese manufacturing industry seem to have indirect, but substantial, impacts on the mobility of Chinese degree students. Finland is globally well-known for its strong performance in information and communication technology (ICT) as well as education facilities which have attracted an increasing number of Chinese degree students from technical fields to Finland. (See Alanen 2006.)

Faist notes that the focus on the strong ties of migration systems, such as political or economic relations between two countries, hardly ever facilitates new information on the dynamics of migration. Analyses on migration systems and linkages are needed when explaining the directions of migration but they hardly can explain who is leaving and how migration networks and their scale and volume are formed. (Faist 2000, pp. 53-54.) In the case of Chinese student mobility, the perspective of strong ties explains the flow of Chinese students to the western EU countries at best, but it hardly provides new information on the selection of a specific country, such as Finland. Hence, so-called weak ties, such as personal contacts, the ties between associations, social networks, and business actors play a crucial role in the final decision-making of the transnationally mobile Chinese.

2.4.6. Transnational social space and meso-level analysis

The perspective of transnational social space stresses the agency of both the mobile people on the one hand, and those who stay put and facilitate connections to the institutions and the social reality of the countries of origin and destination on the other. Thus, the perspective of transnational social space enables to expand the scope of migration studies and to include the circulation of ideas, symbols and material culture, not only the movement of people. (Faist 2000, pp. 13, 200.) As such, Faist’s conceptualization provides a fruitful framework for my analysis on Chinese degree students’ transnational connections.

Faist stresses the role of the meso-level connections in the transnational mobility. The meso-level

\textsuperscript{1} However, Finland was the first Western state to normalize the relations with the PRC after the Tiananmen incident in June 1989 that was an important diplomatic recognition to the PRC.
consists of the set of social and symbolic ties and the resources involved there. It explicitly redirects the focus of analysis from the economic and political framework (macro-level) and the individual decision-making processes (micro-level) to the level between the state and the individual. It stresses both the content of social ties as well as the analysis of the structure, strength, and density of those ties. In practice, this approach leads to study relations between relevant collective actors, such as kin groups, households, and ethnic communities as well as nations as the governing subjects of mobile individuals. (Faist 2000, p. 32.)

In the case of Chinese degree students in Finland, Faist’s approach examines the relations of the mobile students between their families and kin groups, previous Chinese immigrants, or overseas students as a peer group in Finland as well as with brokers, i.e. the persons who have provided information about Finland and study opportunities in the Finnish academic institutions. Faist’s theory leads to ask how they have found information about the study opportunities in Finland; how are they bound to their family; who provides the required financial resources for the studies, and, to what extent transnational movements are voluntary, and to what extent forced?

2.4.7. Social ties in the construction of transnational networks

In the recent theories on migration the role of transnational social ties is emphasized as an indicator of the directions and volumes of mobility. As Steven Vertovec puts it,

Social ties in pre-migration networks are related to factors affecting which people migrate, the means of migration, the destination (including locality, accommodation and often specific job) and future prospects for physical and occupational mobility. (2002, p. 3.)

Connections with earlier migrants provide potential migrants a number of resources which help them to predict the benefits and risks of their mobility. Potential migrants may receive information about technical and legal procedures, financial support, and job opportunities as well as social support and emotional solidarity during the moving process and in the site of destination. (Meyer 2001, p. 93.) International degree students’ need for the information related to student mobility is as relevant as it is in the case of labour migration. The lack of information on study opportunities and social environments of specific countries is regarded as one of the main obstacles to the Chinese

1 Symbolic ties consist of rather stable common meanings, memories, future expectations and symbols whereas social ties are described "as the number and frequency of connections as well as the speed of transactions". The social ties "are constituted in a various forms of interactions, such as meetings of associations, unofficial discussion etc." (Faist 2000, p. 15, 101.)
student mobility to EU countries (NESO report 2005, pp. 26-28). Therefore, the social ties perspective is highly relevant in the case of Chinese overseas students in Finland as well.

The increase in transnational social ties has been dependent on new communication technologies but also the constantly increasing volumes and density of transportation channels and the increasingly universal nature of labour markets on the certain core fields of the global economy. In addition to decreased transportation costs, the new communication channels, such as free telephone calls via Internet and inexpensive real-time video communication facilities, have made international mobility easier both in terms of financial resources as well as emotional sacrifices. (See e.g. Vertovec 2002, p. 4.)

According to Vertovec, “migration networks, among both skilled and unskilled workers, are significantly gendered”. The gender largely defines “who one’s contacts are, and how networks are accessed, managed and taken advantage of”. (Vertovec 2002, p. 4.) Vertovec also stresses the movement of students as an integral part of emerging transnational migration systems (Vertovec 2002, p. 13). Studies on Indian IT students suggest that student mobility has laid a cornerstone for the future circulation of the highly skilled labour (World Migration Report 2005, p. 231). However, the volume of circulation patterns seem to be related to social and cultural factors, and thus, studies on Indian IT students can be only partly applied to the Chinese overseas students.

2.4.8. Symbolic ties and imagination as foci of analysis

While Faist regards symbolic ties as rather stable and permanent, Arjun Appadurai stresses the increased role of imagination in the absorption of different kinds of ideas, tastes, and cultural products which enable people to imagine realities different from their own traditions and life-spheres. (Faist 2000, p. 15; Appadurai 1998, pp. 7-9.) This change has posed a fundamental difference compared to previous eras. Appadurai argues that in the last decades the imagination has become a collective social fact and a powerful source of social life:

*Here the images, scripts, models, and narratives that come through mass mediation (in its realistic and fictional modes) make the difference between migration today and in the past. Those who wish to move, those who have moved, those who wish to return, and those who choose to stay rarely formulate their plans outside the sphere of radio and television, cassettes and videos, newsprint and telephone. For migrants, both the politics of adaptation to new environments and the stimulus to move or return are deeply affected by a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space.* (Appadurai 1998, p. 6.)
Since the content of Chinese mass media has dramatically globalized in the last two decades; the expansion of imagined sphere has also taken place in China. Furthermore, the availability of polyphonic and pluralistic mass media in the West bring Chinese overseas students expanding opportunities to receive pluralistic information on topics related to foreign societies as well as their home country.¹

Appadurai’s perspective essentially differs from Faist’s which does not stress the change in the deterritorialization of symbolic ties but regards both social and symbolic ties as factors which connect migrants to their background community and culture. (Faist 2000, p. 15.) When living abroad the question is how to combine symbolic ties and the new influences caused by the expanded landscape of imagination.

¹ Compared to the Western countries, Chinese mass media and public space is still strongly controlled by state agencies. This is demonstrated by systematic control of domestic news transmission and restrictions in broadcasting foreign news channels by blocking a number of internet websites (e.g. foreign news agencies such as BBC and a number of human rights NGOs) and popular web portals (e.g. Youtube and Blogspot) as well as by persecuting a number of political activists who have been campaigning for the more pluralistic and democratic Chinese society. (See e.g. Reporters Without Borders 2007)
3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

3.1. My positioning towards study methods and practices

I locate my approach in the methodological paradigm of critical theory. By taking this approach, I primarily apply qualitative methods in my study and I acknowledge that my knowledge production is essentially value-mediated as is its end product. Hence, its validity and reliability are hardly possible to be judged by repeatability. Therefore, I aim at depicting the research procedure and settings as carefully as it is needed to understand the level of validity of my research.

Due to the fact that my informants have a distinctly different cultural background as I do, it is of high relevance to position myself vis-à-vis my informants. As Anna Rastas suggests, it is more important to reflect how my positioning effects to my research process, the results of my research and the relation with my informants, rather than to describe my socio-cultural position. Rastas further notes that it is of high importance to examine the limits of one’s own knowledge on the culture which is subject to the research. She stresses the need for reflexivity during the research process; the researcher has to be aware of the differences between her/him and informants as well as the relevance of the differences to the relation between the researcher and the informants, and the research in general. (Rastas 2005, pp. 94-95.)

How have I pursued to apply a reflexive position during my research process? Already in the first contact with my informants through email (Annex 1), I have clearly indicated my position as a Finnish male student of social sciences who already has a basic knowledge on Chinese culture and language. When introducing my interview procedure and practices prior to the interview itself, I have let my informants know that I have similar kind of experiences as an international student in China and Germany. I found that such congruent experiences with my informants helped to create mutual understanding on the experiences, challenges, and personal changes faced when studying abroad. Furthermore, in the discussions concerning Finland’s immigration policy, I have not concealed my disagreement with the relatively strict entry policy of immigration in Finland. In general, I have tried to do my best to take a neutral and passive position when discussions have turned to political questions, such as the Finnish welfare system or governmental policies of China.
3.2. Methodological Approach

Ontological and epistemological framework of my study may be positioned in the critical theory approach which is dialectic per se; reality as well as knowledge are constructed and reconstructed through social and historical processes. Following the critical theory approach, knowledge may only accumulate in a relative sense. Only enlarged insights may be obtained, not true knowledge as such. (Guba & Lincoln 1994, p. 212.) The critical theory approach stresses the recognition of dialectic production of knowledge, and therefore, the interview as a method of knowledge production is highly applied.

I have conducted thematic and partly biographical interviews (see e.g. Hirsjärvi 2000, p. 47). The study abroad and transnational mobility are holistic, temporally extensive phenomena which may originate from the early incentives, or even partial enforcement related to family or work histories. The selected methodological approach is fruitful in the study of historical and social formations of life-spheres, as is the case in my study. The question on the decision-making to conduct studies abroad and the potentiality to stay abroad would be difficult to elaborate with more restrictive methodological approaches and the methods which provide less possibilities to adjustments during the research process.

My methodological approach supported my decision to conduct semi-structured focused and unstructured interviews. In the focused interviews the same topics are touched in every interview but the order and formation of the questions may vary. Unstructured interviews remind more of daily discussions. New topics may have been included into the interviews and they may have been elaborated by reflecting to the needs and interests of the interviewee and the informant(s). (Tiittula & Ruusuvuori 2005, pp. 10-11.) The loosely structured method allowed me to include new topics and information which enlightened new perspectives to my study questions.

3.3. The method of informant selection

I collected my research data in ten face-to-face interviews during September and October 2007. I also received answers to two email interviews; additionally one informant first answered by email to the most central questions and later we had a short face-to-face interview on the topics I wanted to acquire more elaborated data.

The first six interviews were conducted with the students of the University of Tampere. In the
beginning I had an interview with three informants after which I reviewed the results and examined to what extent my original hypotheses may have been be proved. The first interviews already revealed, contrary to the previous studies from the field, that the Chinese students do not find notable difficulties with the Finnish immigration regulation during the process of entering to the Finnish labour market. Hence, I re-focused my questions on other topics, however, I did not leave any topic out after the sample interviews but rather left out the detailed questions on the migration regulation issue and stressed more other themes. All the six informants at the University of Tampere were found through Chinese friends and acquaintances; I first had two interviews with the persons I already knew and through their recommendations I asked their friends for interviews. All the six interviews were conducted during separate two-day visits in Tampere in September 2007.

I began the search for informants at University of Jyväskylä with the same method, although the process did not prove to be as successful as in Tampere. After only one successful search through friends and acquaintances I received the register data of the Chinese degree students at University of Jyväskylä. Only one of approximately 10 inquiries replied. Through her Chinese social circles in Jyväskylä, I reached two other informants. Additionally, two informants who had already moved out from Jyväskylä replied through email; another one wrote me an email directly after sending him an inquiry and described his history and objectives concerning my research topic. Later I reached him for a short face-to-face interview.

In total, I conducted ten thematic face-to-face interviews, two email interviews, and one open answer concerning my field of study. Four of ten informants in face-to-face interviews were female; altogether five of thirteen informants were female. Nine of thirteen informants were master degree students of mathematical information technology department of JYU or the department of computer sciences of UTA; two were master degree students of other departments and two informants were doctor degree students of which another one at the mathematical information technology department of JYU. They had conducted previous studies in the capital city of Beijing or in the Chinese cities which are either province capitals or cities with more than two million inhabitants. Most of them originally come from big cities, although there were two exceptions in this term.

My interviews were primarily thematic interviews conducted face-to-face with my informants. I had approached them through email and friends. (The email inquiry attached as ANNEX 1.) The form of interview questions was open and thus the content of the interviews may have varied from one interview to another. (Interview questions form attached as ANNEX 2.) All the interviews were
held either in public cafés or in semi-open study spaces at the university facilities. All the interviews lasted from one to two and half hours. During some of the interviews technical problems prolonged the meeting; nevertheless, all the recordings lasted from one to two hours.

In addition to the interviews I apply my own ethnographic observation on the Chinese society and study environment in Beijing. I have also met the family, the parents and the sister with her boyfriend, of one of my informants in Beijing. The informal meeting provided me a unique insight into the expectations and the life-style of the family members of one of my informants.

3.4. Reliability and study ethics

The interview recordings were transcribed during the next five days after each interview. I have focused on the content rather than the form and the discourse of the interviews. Hence, if discussions were distanced too much on the actual topic during an interview, I may have left them out from the transcription. I may have also corrected grammatical mistakes of both the informants and me myself as the interviewee, although the corrections are limited to explicit mistakes in temporal forms or references to personal pronouns. In some cases I have edited the speaking style of my informants in order to protect their anonymity. If the form of direct citations is changed, I have kept in mind that no changes were made in the actual content of the message. After the interviews I let all the informants to review the transcription, and comment and amend the text. From the very first contact onwards I stressed to my informants that the interviews remain fully confidential.

In order to protect the anonymity of my informants, I have changed all their names and replaced them randomly with common Chinese surnames. In some direct citations I have left out specific data and replaced it by asterisks, ***. Such specific data would have revealed the exact field of study, the name of the company she/he has been working, or other explicitly revealing data. Since the data received by some informants is more sensitive than others, I have asked some of my informants to proofread the citations which I have selected from the interviews.
4. CHINESE DEGREE STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ AND THE UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE: THE WAY FROM A VAGUE NORTHERN OPTION TO DEGREE STUDIES

4.1. Profiles of the informants

The most typical Chinese overseas student at University of Tampere or University of Jyväskylä is a 26-year-old woman from the department of computer sciences. She comes from a big developed city from the eastern coast of China; she has conducted her Bachelor level studies in China and has continued her MA degree studies almost directly after obtaining her BA degree. Her main reason to study abroad is based more on the urge to see other countries and cultures and to learn English than to conduct high-quality studies for a well-paid job in the future. However, most of her friends in Finland are other international students or her compatriots; though she has made some Finnish friends through her studies and hobbies. She wants to return to China but she might like to have working experience of some years in an international company in Finland or elsewhere in Europe before heading back home near her parents and old friends.

Apparently the motivations and the social profile of a Chinese student do not greatly differ from the ones of a Finnish student conducting her/his degree studies abroad. The student mobility from China is increasingly reminiscent of the patterns of European student mobility of tertiary education. Today, very few of the Chinese overseas students receives a scholarship in China, contrary to the Chinese student mobility of the early 1980s; however, their studies are financed by their families and in some rare cases, financial assistance is received from other relatives.

However, the typical case described above is far from the whole truth. When considering all the Chinese degree students in the Finnish universities, the majority of them are male and they study in the faculties of the technical field. The male students I interviewed also had distinctively different future plans from their female fellow students. Although their social and educational backgrounds were similar to those of female students, their future plans were more oriented to permanent migration to Europe than those of the female students. However, the willingness to stay seemed to be related to the kind of employment prospects they could expect in China after they return; both of the two informants conducting their PhD studies were already certain of returning back to China, and they both believed to find easily a satisfactory job after the return. Additionally, one MA student had already returned to Beijing although he had not submitted his thesis so far.
In general, my 13 informants had rather homogenous social and educational backgrounds in China. All but one of the informants had previous studies in a big Chinese city, i.e. the capital city area of Beijing, or in a provincial capital. The student with no study background in China had conducted also his previous tertiary level studies in Finland and another one had participated in another MA program elsewhere in Europe. Except these two informants all the others had stayed in Finland from two to four years. The majority of them also come from big cities (the cities over ten million inhabitants); as exceptions, two informants come from prefecture level capitals (the third administrative level in the PRC), although their home cities’ metropolitan areas are populated with more inhabitants than the whole Finland. As a conclusion, my informants come from and have study histories in the urban, developed and relatively prosperous environments in China.

The parents of my informants may have rather low educational backgrounds compared to the Finnish parents of the university students. This is fully understandable when regarding the historical context of the PRC. Their parents have professional backgrounds from a taxi driver and common worker to businessmen and university teachers. The parents of only three informants had travelled abroad, and none of my informants had left China before their overseas studies. Hence, the previous migration background of my informants or their parents does not explain their willingness to study abroad. Compared with the findings of Kinnunen, the Chinese degree students had less previous experiences on Finland than the international students had in general, which is also partly explained by the geographical distance of the countries (2003, p. 29).

Regardless of the socio-economic background, the parents have a strong role in the financial support of their children’s overseas education. According to the study of five student unions, for 24 percent of the international degree students the support from the family is the most important source of income. However, all of my informants mentioned the family as the most important source of financial support. (Kärki 2005, p. 42.)

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1 Numbers of inhabitants of the Chinese cities are found in Wikipedia, on 23 November 2007.
2 The reform of the Chinese social structure from agricultural to industrial and further to service-oriented society has begun later than the one of Finland and is still, and will be, under process for many decades. I have presented the consequences of the Chinese political history of the 1960s and 70s to the education-level in the chapter 2.1.2. Migration in the Mao Era (1949-1976).
3 A certain kind of class stratification is under the process in the Chinese society, and the discussion on the Chinese middle-class is heated. However, applying traditional class stratifications to the background of my informants is difficult, partly due to the lack of data, partly due to the unclarified definitional and applicability of the concepts in the Chinese context.
4.2. Gender and decision to conduct overseas studies

In general, my informants do consider that gender does not reflect the challenges that the students are facing in the course of overseas studies. They find that in the Chinese cities female and male students are regarded very equal: one of my female informants noted that China is regarded as the most gender equal country in East Asia, and there are not any visible discriminatory features in the society. Although the situation is considered very equal in the cities, the gender equality may not be very high in the countryside. Also, the differences between the upbringing of female and male offspring are less visible since all the families have only one child. In the following, Ms. Wu describes her rather ambiguous vision on gender equality in the urban China:

*I mean, it’s not so difficult in cities. In my family, in a middle-class family it’s not so difficult. But at the same time my parents have mentioned that if they had a son, at the same time, two children, they would not have let me go. Fortunately they haven’t* [laughing].

Although both male and female students did not find evident discrepancies, the female students were more critical and aware of the problems that may be reflecting the gender. For instance, as Ms. Wu addressed, also in the big Chinese cities young female employees may face discrimination due to potential pregnancy and maternity leave. Also the traditional way of thinking on the value of female and male children may have been revealed in their families. For instance, Ms. Sun found differences when comparing parents’ attitudes to her and her male cousins: “Sometimes there are things they start to do much younger than me. Parents might worry more about girls, because boys are stronger than girls.” Nevertheless, the preferable position of male babies may have changed in the modern Chinese metropolises. The Confucian tradition lays more responsibilities to the families of the son that may cause additional costs to the family, as the excerpt by Ms. Xu demonstrates:

*I think more and more city people like to have girls. For example in the marriage, the guy will come to your family, and you’ll have a son-in-law. But in sons family, it’s more like you lose your son. And if your son gets married you have to provide lots of things for the marriage.*

4.3. Social Relations and media as a thrust to study abroad

For most of my informants the idea of studies abroad was initiated by their family members, close relatives, or good friends. Some of their parents, friends, or family friends had already travelled or worked abroad which had convinced them of the benefits of overseas studies. For one informant the
most influential person was the father who had worked as a translator abroad; for another, the big brother who himself did not have a chance to study abroad after graduating his BA degree. In the following Mr. Zhu describes his situation:

*My aunt always persuaded me to study abroad. She has been to Holland for a working visit, and she told me how fantastic the country is. And I should really go abroad for having high-quality education and to know different people, to see different cultures. In case I could improve myself to be international and then I was studying English harder in order to study abroad.*

Many of my informants also mentioned the general awareness of the study and working opportunities abroad in the Chinese cities and how people discuss the topic:

*Quite interesting for me also, we can also get lot of influence from other people who are just living near us, who’ve been to some other countries before. [...] Sort of people I know, friends’ friends or relatives, but not my family members, you know the single child law in China. (Ms. Ma)*

Therefore, not only parents and relatives, but also the college environment and study mates had a strong influence on many of my informants. Three of them had studied in a same college where lectures were conducted in English. After the college most of their classmates had moved to study abroad. During the college, classmates with similar intentions had influenced them. Ms. Wu put her experiences as follows:

*I think it’s from my lecturers in the college. They had described and told us how is it going universities abroad. And actually the general description for us, all the girls, like we have lived in dormitory all six girls, and that time we discussed together and we thought what we could do after the college and then, we got the idea, maybe we can go abroad, and started searching information.*

Many of my informants had started preparing for overseas studies during the high school years although the study environment may not have been internationally oriented at that time. In many parts of China, even in big cities, it is not common to have contacts with foreign people or to have opportunities to study under the instruction of native English speakers. Compared to Finland, for instance, the rarity of international experiences is obvious. Compared to the Finnish youth of the Euro era, Chinese students have far less first-hand contacts to the international environment, as the citation from Mr. Zhao demonstrates: "I didn’t talk any foreigner when I was in China, I just listened to English TV and studied English with a Chinese English teacher." Not surprisingly,
gaining sufficient proficiency in English plays an important role in the orientation process. Many of the informants also mentioned the passing of the English proficiency test TOEFL as a crucial point in the preparation for overseas studies:

*When I studied for my Bachelor degree I also began to [get prepared for] studies abroad, for example, I got prepared for the TOEFL test. Well, and fortunately I got a satisfactory scores and I’m also very lucky that I got accepted. [...] This was a quite long process. Initially I just wanted to take a trip to Western countries. But well, getting to the university was a better way.* (Mr. Huang)

For many the TOEFL test was an important part of their high school studies, not least because it was the only way to obtain an opportunity to study abroad.

Not only personal relations and school environment but also the media as a broader context of global reality promotes experiences on foreign countries. After a long period of restrictions in transnational mobility from China, a great number of people want to have a trip, if not to stay for longer periods abroad. As Ms. Sun put it: "You know, the media [in China] always shows something from other countries and their culture and new sides. At that time I just got curious...so, why not.” Various opportunities to study abroad are also broadly promoted and advertised in big Chinese cities. During my stay in Beijing, I could often notice advertisements of overseas education agencies near the university campuses and even in the lifts of my neighbourhood which was mainly populated by well-off families with a small child. Mr. Zhu described the attraction of international studies in China as follows:

*Nowadays there’re many Chinese students who want to study abroad, no matter old, traditional countries to study abroad, like the US, Canada and Australia, or some new, like Korea, Singapore. They just want to study abroad to see new things.*

4.4. High labour market demands for university graduates in China

During my stay in the campus concentration of the Haidian District in the northern Beijing, I at last stopped complaining about dim future prospects of Finnish graduate students of social sciences and humanities. The Chinese students seemed to study so much harder than the Finnish students do in Finland, and still many of my Chinese friends were quite uncertain of their future prospects. Since the early 2000s, the newly graduated Chinese university students have been entering to the extremely meritocratic working environment of big Chinese cities. Many students find it difficult to get a proper job after finalising their bachelor degree studies. In the article of a popular blogger
network Globalvoices.org, Meng Zhang describes his feelings after an annual job fair in the southern city of Guangzhou:

... To be honest, since November 24 when I attended the job fair held in Bei Ting of Guangzhou Higher Education Mega Center, one of my feelings is no matter what sort of job fair, there will be a swarm of graduates; no matter what kind of position, there will be a great pile of resumes. Facing such situation, I can do nothing. China lacks everything but people; before 1999 China used to be short of graduates, too. Postgraduates at that time were really precious, but in recent years even masters and doctors have been surplus. (Meng 2007)

Entering into MA studies abroad provides a lucrative alternative to the highly demanding and uncertain process of job hunting or a poorly paid job which does not correspond to the expectations set during the BA studies. This is how Mr. Hu put the situation after working a half a year after finalizing his Bachelor studies:

Then [after a friend went studying abroad] I started thinking of that. Maybe you know, it started from 2002, it’s very difficult to young graduates to get a job in China. In 2001-2002. You know, even though you can get a job it’s worthless, so, I started to think about studying abroad, you should go out and see something. China is also a very homogenous society, especially in the central and eastern parts, there are less minorities. Now you can see what was always in the imagination but what lacks.

Ms. Xu told that her parents were pushing her for graduating fast in Finland during the first years of her studies but after they came to realisation of the labour situation in the Chinese cities in 2003-2004, they recommended her to obtain international working experience before returning to China:

It’s like when I came here [in Finland in 2002], there were lots of [Chinese] students who [returned] to China from America, Britain and some other countries, and it was very easy to get a job in China, in a foreign company or to get a higher position in a commercial field. ... But in these years, maybe not too many but really a lot of people come back from abroad back to China to look for opportunities, maybe to work, or build their own companies. So, it’s very heavy competition there. ... It has changed very fast. It hasn’t been like that for long time, maybe five years ago more Chinese started to go abroad. This year, the older students already came [went] back. ... People didn’t want to come [go] back to China before because they had a permanent residence or the ID, or they changed the nationality already. But these years they just come [go] back to get better lives [in China].

The phenomenon of return migration to the most developed cities and the unwillingness to immigrate overseas from Beijing and Shanghai has been already discernible in the Chinese population statistics (Xiang 2005, p. 16). The most developed Chinese metropolises have also
become attractive for immigrants from the Third World around the globe (Eunjung 2007). I will return to the views of my informants on working life in the chapter 6.

4.5. Previous contacts in Finland

Four of my informants had previous personal connections to Finland which seemed to play a crucial role in their mobility decisions. Firstly, Mr. Guo was granted with the acceptance for his MA studies in Finland through a bilateral program between his university in China and University of Jyväskylä in Finland. Secondly, two informants had friends who had studied before in Finland. Mr. Hu had seen how his friend found a good job directly after finalizing his MA program in Finland; for Ms. Sun, her two fellow students from the college had arrived to Finland earlier in order to conduct their preparative studies for an MA program in the same university. Thirdly, Mr. Huang had a family friend who had participated in training in Finland while working for Nokia in China. She had praised the Finnish education environment which had convinced Mr. Huang and his parents:

...so she had got some experiences on living in Finland, she suggested me that Finland is a good place to study: education is free and people are friendly. In general, she said Finland is a good, quiet place to study. She strongly suggested this to my parents [laughing].

Such views correspond to the findings of NESO report collected from Chinese education experts and parents. They regard the strongest assets of the higher education in the EU as high quality education and the high status of the diplomas. Also, the possibilities to further mobility within the EU, relatively low tuition fees in most EU countries, as well as pleasant and comfortable living and study environment may promote the decision to overseas studies in the EU area. (NESO report 2005, pp. 3-4.)

According to many scholars of transnational migration, social networks play an essential role in the decision-making processes about migration. The decision to overseas mobility often precedes connections to the country of destination and people who are familiar with the living conditions and future prospects in the country. (See e.g. Faist 2000, pp. 50-53; Sassen 1998, p. 13.) Evidently, some of my informants already knew other Chinese students or labour migrants who have either studied in Finland and moved further (or returned), or settled down to Finland. However, since the Chinese have a relatively short and thin migration history to Finland, some of the Chinese degree students have also taken a role as potential broker migrants, i.e. as the persons who later facilitate the transnational mobility of other Chinese to study or work in Finland. According to the study of
Östen Wahlbeck on Turkish migrants in Finland, there are no genuine chain migration patterns developed in the Finnish framework which would be initiated by concurrent flows of mobile individuals between a country of origin and Finland as a country of destination. Although such chains have not been formed yet, there may be first strings woven for the increasing mobility in the future. (Lecture notes, 2 Oct 2006.)

4.6.  “Nokia country” found from Internet

Most of my informants studying computer sciences or information technology in Finland mentioned the role of Nokia when selecting Finland for the location of their MA studies. The reputation of the Nokia country directly competed with the reputation of the Ericson country, Sweden:

*I didn’t go to Norway because the living costs are so high. [...] And Sweden, it’s equally bad with the language, so I decided to come to Finland, but there’s also the reason of Nokia. So, Finland should have some advantages on the IT field. (Ms. Ma)*

Compared to the findings of Kinnunen on degree students from all academic fields, the reputation of Finland as a country of high technology and good quality of IT studies was given more significance by my informants. (2003, p. 49.) More often than not, the country of destination was primarily selected after finding the best study program for one’s individual preferences. Five of my informants had searched for a suitable MA program individually from Internet. Only two of the informants had resorted to the services of study-abroad intermediary agencies. Two others had indirectly consulted an agency; the two students who came to Finland together called to an agency just to catch some basic information. In another case, Ms. Ma had a friend in an agency who helped her find a suitable university and a MA program corresponding to her preferences. Furthermore, many of my informants mentioned that they knew about the services of the study-abroad intermediary agencies, but most of them found the services unnecessary. In general, they found that the application procedure could be finalized without external services. If one knows what she/he wants, the information found in Internet may suffice.

According to the previous studies on international degree students in Finland, free tuition in the Finnish universities influences the decisions of Chinese overseas students (Kinnunen 2003, p. 48; Kärki 2005, p. 23). My findings support the previous studies in this regard; seven of my informants mentioned that the free tuition had an impact to their selection of the country.
You know, in China studying abroad is very popular, I could check from Internet. For example, in 2004 I knew that Germany and Nordic countries are free to study. But if you go to America, first, the visa is difficult. You need to apply for a scholarship. If you cannot get that it’s difficult. UK is maybe a bit cheaper. If you’re a rich guy you go maybe to the UK or New Zealand. (Mr. Zhou)

Also the language requirements in Finland are an asset compared to for instance the francophone countries, such as Belgium (Brussels and Wallonia) or France. My informants had found it difficult to find English MA programs in Germany. In Finland a vast majority of young people can speak English, at least in university campuses. In the study of Netherlands Education Support Office, the abundance of foreign languages was regarded as the main weakness in the EU, although some of their respondents found the multitude of languages as an asset in European countries (NESO report 2005, p. 19).

In general, the reasons to come to Finland are often formed from a multitude of social, academic, and economic factors (See also Kinnunen 2003, p. 50). In my study the relevant study program stood out as the most important reason. This is also in line with the findings of Kinnunen; 71 percent of her informants had chosen the university according to the possibility to study a specific field in a Finnish university (2003, p. 33).

4.7. Studies in Finland

All the informants regarded their Finnish universities as pleasant study environments. The universities of Tampere and Jyväskylä provide good facilities for the MA studies, and even a possibility to learn technological skills which cannot be studied in China. No one of the informants complained the quality of the education. The citation from Ms. Xu represents the general opinion of many of my informants:

In my major, *** is the research area, maybe it’s not that common in China... So, I think it’s quite necessary to get this experience, for me it’s quite beneficial to get my future job in China. Because it’s very small area of information but not common in China.

Additionally, three informants praised the research-oriented structure of their programs; the thesis seminar of more than a year and contributory writing courses were beneficial to the orientation process for the thesis writing. In China, Mr. Guo noted, the students are working (even) more individually in the last periods of the MA studies than in Finland. Three of my informants also mentioned the relaxed and informal atmosphere among the students and teachers as an asset. As Mr.
Guo put it: "It’s quite different here, it’s more relaxed for students. Students have ability to choose what they want to study, and the curriculum is very fit for the process of research."

Not only the program structure but also the substance of the studies took more research-oriented path than my two informants had accustomed to in their previous studies in China. For some of them as MA degree students of computer sciences, the strong emphasis on research was welcome because they hoped to become employed on the fast developing research & development sector in China.

_It’s quite good, because in China I studied mostly very technical, like programming. It’s kind of basic knowledge but here it’s more focusing on research part. [...] So, it’s more studying by yourselves. We don’t have that many assignments but you mostly have to study and understand by yourself. I think it’s quite a benefit._ (Ms. Xu)

For many of them the relation between students and teachers had remained rather distant during their previous studies in China. The lectures in Chinese institutions are often held for more than hundred students and personal contacts with professors were rare. This difference surely reflects the ratio of professors to students in Chinese institutions, and the limited interest of professors towards BA level studies which is also common in Finland. However, the hierarchies in the Chinese education institutions were regarded as more distinctive than in the very informal Finnish universities:

_[...] The atmosphere is quite open and equal. You can just knock the door and like that. It’s a bit different in China. Also, because of the population, there are smaller groups in lectures, in China there are very big lectures._ (Mr. Zhou)

The low hierarchy was also regarded as a positive aspect in the studies of Kinnunen and Ally among international degree students in Finland (Kinnunen 2003, p. 42; Ally 2002, p. 84).

The limited selection of the courses conducted in English had caused frustration, especially to three MA degree students of JYU, although the problem was mentioned by the students of UTA as well. The students of JYU found to be left out from teaching only because they were the only foreigners in the taken courses. The following citation by Mr. Hu casts a doubt whether all the international MA programs at University of Jyväskylä are seriously planned for the needs of international students:
I liked the program but maybe it’s not quite international. Because I’m the only international student whose major is ***. And most of my major courses are in suomi. Not only this but if the half of my courses is in suomi, I think it’s quite unfair for me. If it’s all book exams, why do I have to be here? I can study in China, you know, and send papers by email, that’s ok. It’s no meaning for me to be here, they get teaching from the professor and I just get the books.

The same problem was regarded as one of the worst features of the Finnish working environment already in the study of Ally on international degree students at University of Helsinki (Ally 2002, p. 80). Some informants also mentioned low proficiency in English by some teachers, although they did not regard that as a major problem. Also this is corresponding to the findings of the study of Kinnunen (2003, p. 40). As a conclusion, the Chinese degree students seem to be satisfied with their experiences at UTA and JYU. Apparently the departments of computer science and information technology, as well as the other MA programs at JYU and UTA, can meet the expectations of the most Chinese degree students. The high-tech information infrastructure (the hardware and the extensive utilisation of Internet) of UTA and JYU as well as professional teachers are the core actors in constituting the satisfactory study environment.

4.8. Advantages of overseas studies

In addition to the advantages stemming from the quality of education, my informants also stressed many external factors influencing to their decision to study abroad. As I noted in the chapter 2.3.2., there are many social, cultural, and economic incentives promoting international experiences. Hence, the expectations on the outcome of the overseas studies go far beyond the gains in the academic knowledge production per se.

Most of my informants stressed how the experiences abroad have changed their way of thinking or they had learnt to encounter people with differing cultural backgrounds. The changes may have concerned either the approach and methods of academic studies, i.e. the academic culture, or the more general way of understanding the communication and negotiation frameworks in different cultures. Many found that overseas studies forced them to become more independent and to take more responsibilities on her/his own well-being. In China, many students are still in a weekly contact with their parents and the parents also provide more support to daily duties as well as financial survival. Also, many basic habits and activities may essentially differ from the ones common in China. Ms. Xu puts her intercultural learning experience as follows:
I think the most valuable is the mind and discipline of following rules. Because people here really follow the rules, that’s very different from China. What we have used to is not that strict. And it’s not only on the street but also when doing business or something formal. Maybe [the Chinese] use different ways to compromise and negotiate. But here it’s very strict and it is always yes or no, but in China you can find a middle way. So, I think it’s much easier to do things here. There’s a rule, you follow it or not. But in China you always cannot say it, nobody can say you do this, there may be some other ways. So, I think that kind of attitude is quite important.

The excerpt above clearly demonstrates how different the communication cultures and the ways of managing in daily duties are in China and Finland. Studies in the West provide intercultural skills which can rarely be gained in the Chinese environment.

The views on the benefits of international studies were very similar among my informants as in the study of Kinnunen. Also in Kinnunen’s study, international degree students had pointed out the skills related to the interaction with the people from other cultural spheres; more knowledge on different ways of living, increasing independence, and the ability to be responsible for one’s daily duties. (2003, p. 79.) Similar kind of learning experiences can be obtained during the student exchanges inside the EU, although the cultural differences are often far more extensive between the people from East Asia compared to that of Western Europe. Compared to other international degree students in Finland, Chinese students have less previous experiences on international communication (Kinnunen 2003, p. 29). It is also worth noting that such experiences are not dependent on the country of overseas studies, as such, but rather a general feature related to living in a foreign country. Generally speaking, such opportunities to international experiences are more common among European university students than among their Chinese fellow students.

In addition to the opportunity to learn new skills and practices on the academic field, two of my informants had received an opportunity to publish their academic papers in an international conference. Such opportunities, Mr. Huang notes, are unheard of if studying a MA degree in China.

According to my informants, international experiences are highly appreciated on the Chinese labour market. China is the destination of an increasing number of foreign direct investments, and as a result, international companies and institutions are recruiting a great deal of young, highly educated employees who meet the requirements of international working environments. Mr. Gao, the informant who had already returned to China estimated that finding a good work is not a problem.

The following describes how he regards the value of cultural knowledge obtained in Finland:
It has lots of advantages if the Chinese people know about the culture and the current economy development situation, and economy development experience, especially in the fields in economy, trading, IT, etc. Advantages including: learn the western countries’ development experience, learn the language, be the communication bridge between foreign country and China etc.

Compared to the findings of the study conducted by Netherlands Education Support Office (NESO), the prospects of my informants are rather optimistic. Especially the Chinese higher education experts interviewed in the NESO study estimated the prospects of Chinese overseas students too high when returning to China. Although some foreign companies still may prefer international degrees, a foreign degree does not influence on higher starting salary anymore. (NESO report 2005, p. 18.)

In addition to the experiences in Finland, the student status in the EU region opens also an opportunity to travel freely inside the Schengen area. As mentioned in the chapter 2.3.1., there are few possibilities for Chinese students to travel in the EU area and even official travel groups sent by Chinese state agencies have difficulties to obtain visas for the Schengen area, let alone individual travellers from the PRC. Therefore, almost all of my informants have taken advantage of the opportunity to travel as tourists and visit friends in other European countries, for instance in Denmark and England. However, the most popular destinations were the old cultural centres of Europe, such as Paris and Rome. Most of my informants had visited Paris which is commonly regarded as the city representing the old European culture.

[The European cities] were quite interesting already when I was a young, like Barcelona, they had the Olympics. And Paris, it’s a romantic city. And now I can say “I’ve really been there” [laughing]. [...] Especially, Europe has a long history, like China, you can see quite different architectures and designs. (Ms. Wu)

The travelling in the old continent offers an opportunity to understand European culture and history that radically differ from the Chinese ones. In addition to the trips in Europe, all but two of my informants had visited China at least once during the MA studies in Europe. Many of them had visited China during the Spring festival, or during the summer holiday. During their stay in China they visit parents, grandparents, relatives, and friends. In the first two years three of my informants had also visited their common school which had rapidly changed since their graduation there. However, in general the visits in China were dedicated to the relatives and friends, for eating Chinese food by parents and relatives and for going out with friends. One of the informants had spent a summer holiday for an internship in Beijing where his aunt also lives.
5. TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL REALITY BETWEEN CHINA AND FINLAND

5.1. Media and news from China

Chinese students in Finland are connected to the Chinese reality in various ways and through a number of communication channels. The circulation of news has widely transformed into the Internet environment and taken new, more interactive forms in the web portals providing platforms for discussions on various topics as well as a part of traditional newspaper web pages. The most popular Chinese news portals are Sina.com, Sohu.com and the news services of Yahoo and Google search engines, although also many other portals were used by my informants. Obviously, the same portals provide also international news in Chinese. For instance, Wenxue.com is a portal providing information from various fields for the needs of students. Additionally, Ms. Wu occasionally followed news on overseas Chinese in different locations around the world.

Although Chinese newspapers are widely available in Tampere and Jyväskylä, only one of my informants, Mr. Guo, told that he is reading the Chinese newspaper. He receives China Daily (Renmin Ribao), the newspaper linked to the PRC government, from the embassy of the PRC because he used to be the coordinator of the local Chinese student association (CSSA). Since he lives close to many other Chinese students, they would be free to come and read the paper at his place. Also friends tell about daily news in the home cities through various communication channels in Internet.

The overseas studies have enabled many of my informants to get familiar with different kinds information sources, not only those which are available in the PRC. Ms. Wu put it as follows:

If you watch daily newspapers there, news are almost the same everyday, or every week. They report, but not all. Normally I check BBC everyday, and I know what happens, so, it’s different. There are also many discussions on China, it’s a hot topic in the media.

Especially BBC is a popular source of Chinese news when living abroad. In China BBC is banned and the BBC.com web portal is blocked. The most popular source of Chinese news, SINA.com, was mentioned by all but one of my informants who commented their news sources. The Ministry of Information under the State Council in China approved SINA.com in 2000 as the first private Internet-company in China to publish news on the web (Sun s.a., p. 3). Later, Sina, as well as fundamentally all popular Chinese web portals are following the media policy of the Ministry of
Information in China. Sina and Sohu, among over 300 other Internet service and content providers, signed in 2002 the Public Pledge on Self-discipline for China’s Internet Industry which binds them to self-regulate the “posting or disseminating pernicious information that may jeopardize state security and disrupt social stability” or any reference to the outlawed religious movement Falun gong (Weber 2007, p. 776). Jeopardizing state security and the disruption of social stability are defined in a broad sense by the Chinese government. In practice, the information and news provided by big Chinese news portals are filtered, relocated or asked to be modified in a way that the main principles of transparent and multi-dimensional data transmission seem to be followed, but in reality the socially or politically sensitive information is filtered (Weber 2007, p. 775; Reporters Without Borders 2007).

During the overseas studies, Sina and Sohu portals have remained as the most popular sources for Chinese news and information. During their stay abroad, some students have found that the Chinese websites have lost their relevancy as trustworthy sources of news, and thus, they have got accustomed to search for news and information from other sources. For instance, Mr. Hu had discovered alternative sources when studying abroad:

*That’s bullshit, you cannot get anything from there [SINA.com]. When I was in China, yes, I thought they have something valuable. But now when I’m here, I think there is something more valuable than that. You can go for BBC Chinese for big events. If you go to Sina you cannot see it.*

Regardless of the changing habits of some students, for the most of my informants sina.com and sohu.com are still the most relevant sources of news.

5.2. Changes in political views

For some of my informants, new sources available for news and other information had given a thrust to reconsider their political views towards the rule of the Communist Party in China. In China, different political views and criticism towards the government policy are rarely discussed in public through media, except in some web portals. When studying abroad, there are plenty of opportunities to receive information from various sources and get familiar to critical information on the governmental policy in China. For instance Mr. Zhao found that this had influenced his political thinking:

*Yes, it’s very complicated. When I first came here many foreigners say that we’re just*
cheated by our government, lot of things we don’t know. We think that no, it’s not true. But after two three years we’ve seen something, bad sides, which we can see in China. Then we know something. Communism is really really bad. And the corruption is really really high. Also the economy is growing. But the government is rich but people are very poor. You can say, wow!, China has changed a lot, but the money is in the government.

However, the changes in political views are recognizable only on the individual basis, and no clear tendencies can be discovered in the whole group of my informants. When living in the big cities in China, the political uproars in the countryside are rarely visible in news or the public sphere. Political participation and activism in the Chinese society is challenging due to lack of recognizable reciprocity from the government’s side to the initiatives presented in the public discussion (Weber, Jia 2007, p. 786). Hence, the following citation by Ms. Sun represents a rather common stance among my informants: "No, I’m not that interested in political things. If I can be in good environment and be happy, I don’t think so. I grew up there, so, for me it’s fine." When considering the changes in political attitudes, it seems that a wider availability of mass media agencies and polyphonic opinions in the public sphere influence the political opinions of Chinese degree students. However, the changes are dependent on individual interest in political issues. Nevertheless, as Appadurai’s theoretical approach suggests, the mass media obviously creates space for (political) agency among Chinese overseas students (See Appadurai 1998, p. 7).

5.3. Contacts to China

New communication technologies have had a vast impact on transnational communication opportunities. The possibilities to inexpensive phone connections, new chatting programs and video-intermitted real-time communication facilities have remarkably influenced the possibilities to maintain personal relationships and recreate symbolic ties by transferring information back to one’s home country. Many of my informants noted that the communication technology has had a significant impact to their sense of being apart from their social peers, even girl- or boyfriends residing in China. As Mr. Zhao, who has a girlfriend in China, put it: "When I first go back to China, I don’t feel like we’ve been long time apart. Not that much, I don’t have that kind of feeling." Compared to the times only some decades earlier, when phone calls were a luxurious rarity, the change in transnational communication has been revolutionary1.

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1 The difficulties of the past times when families and lovers were living apart in distant locations and the communication was limited to short phone-calls and letters are best described in literary works, such as in the first chapter of the novel Sefarad by Antonio Muñoz Molina (2007).
My informants applied new technologies more extensively than average degree students who were studied by Kinnunen (2003, p. 73). This is understandable since nine of my thirteen informants studied computer sciences or information technology. Obviously, the new technologies have also gained more popularity among all the international students since the study of Kinnunen was conducted almost five years ago.

In the case of Chinese MA degree students, the transnational contacts to China and elsewhere are strongly centred on personal relations. Although some of my informants had formal relations to their previous college or university professors, the most important contacts were based on family relations and the circles of old friends. The students commonly utilized internet-based call programs or simply called by mobile phone. Also, the parents at home in China were accustomed to use a chatting program, such as MSN Messenger, or to call by Skype, the most popular Internet call program. Some parents had accustomed to be online at the time when calling or chatting was expected, and thus, the communication as such did not require intensive preparations or strict agreements on schedules. The time difference of five or six hours, depending on the winter or summer time in Finland, puts some constraints to the real-time communication. The afternoons in Finland and the late evenings in China were mentioned as the most common time for phone-calls or real-time chats. Ms. Ma used the QQ forum, a popular Chinese communication program that enables chatting with many friends simultaneously (as also MSN Messenger does). Therefore, she can keep in touch with the old circle of friends despite of the geographical distance:

*Because of the Internet, I normally contact with my family, friends, like daily. But of course, I also use the mobile phone to call my family members. Because the mobile is quite expensive if I call from here to China, so, I only call to my family with my mobile, and friends by Internet chatting, it’s easier, and free. That’s almost on the daily basis. We’ve our own chatting program, QQ, and normally my friends join the same group, and when they write, history will stay. So, it’s still in the society, but far away.*

Some students contact their family almost on a daily basis, while others have set up a fixed time for calls in weekends.

*At least I need to call them every week, sometimes on Friday or Saturday. Normally once a week, if something happens, like some festivals, I’ll call more.* (Ms. Wu)

*Internet is the main way. Just during the Spring festival I call to my relatives, one by one, just to say hello and happy new year. My parents just see me online, say hello to me and we talk a little bit.* (Mr. Zhao)
The distance from parents as such may not be such an extraordinary condition for the Chinese student; distances from hometown to the university town in China may be long as well.

5.4. The meaning of Chinese organizations to Chinese Students in Finland

The connections to Chinese organizations or any governmental agency were limited to very few contacts to previous professors or some unofficial high-school alumni networks. Also in these cases the contacts were mostly based on friendships rather than to academic or professional intentions.

Mr. Guo was the only informant who had constant relations to the Chinese academic community. He had arrived to Finland through a bilateral academic program between his home university in China and the partnership university in Finland. He has a clear intention to return to the same academic institute and to obtain a post as a teacher and researcher there. He is frequently in contact with his professor on the progress of his studies as well as on other academic matters. Evidently, his position as a PhD student greatly differs from the ones of MA degree students.

Also the contacts to the embassy of the PRC in Finland were very limited among my informants. The embassy asks for the registration of every Chinese student in Finland. As for the Finnish students abroad, the registration at the Embassy is not compulsory but rather a way to know about the Chinese citizens in Finland. In addition to the registration, the Chinese student may receive an official certificate from the Chinese embassy in order to prove the authenticity of the Finnish university certificate when returning to the PRC. For all the other informants except one who was actively involved in the management of the local Chinese student association, the contacts to the embassy of the PRC in Finland were limited to the above-mentioned formal bureaucratic procedures.

The influence of governmental programs for return mobility is very limited among the Chinese overseas students. The Chinese government has introduced various privileges to overseas students in order to promote good facilities to the returning students in China. For instance, the government provides incentives for launching new business ventures in China, as well as grants a tax reduction if buying a new car after returning to China. (Xiang 2005, p. 7; NESO report 2005, p. 10.) Certain cities, including Beijing, Shanghai and Suzhou, grant hukou permission, a municipality-level residence permit, to all the overseas students returning to China in order to attract more highly educated residents. The Chinese cities also provide different kinds of incentives, including office
space and start-up funding for launching business ventures after the overseas studies. (See e.g. NESO report, p. 10.) Despite the privileges, no one of my informants was interested in the potential benefits provided by either the Chinese government or the cities in China. All of my informants were aware of the programs, however, many of them found that they are not skilled enough according to the criteria of the return programs. Since almost all of them originated from big Chinese cities, they were not in need for the residence permit in any big city other than their home city. Furthermore, Mr. Hu considered the tax reduction for a new car insignificant and not as a real incentive to the decision to return.

5.5. Chinese views of the Finnish social environment

The Chinese communication culture and urban Chinese living environment constitute an essentially different kind of framework for the daily social interaction than what the relatively small Finnish towns of Jyväskylä and Tampere do. Hence, the adaptation to the Finnish communication habits had added a new dimension into the adaptation process to the Finnish university environment.

Meeting Finnish people was generally considered challenging by my informants. Finnish people are not very talkative and rather difficult to approach. Many also complained it was very difficult to get into serious conversation with the Finns. If one wanted to get into conversation with a Finn, one should plunge into nightlife among the heavy drinking Finns. However, it is not the way how the Chinese youth, as Mr. Zhu, has accustomed to get familiar with new people: "Just like if you go to a bar you can have a lot talks with people. But, next morning, she or he totally forgets you. This is like I wanted to make friends but it's kind of difficult." Differently put, approaching Finns was considered difficult by my informants. However, if they had problems, Finns were usually very eager to help. As a conclusion, the general characterization on the Finns could be summarized as quiet and friendly.

Compared with the Chinese social structure, the Finns are regarded as very independent, or differently put, very individual in their management of personal lives. Mr. Zhu put it as follows:

Yes, really, you’re really independent. This is good, you don’t have to ask other people, you can totally rely on yourselves, but I think sometimes it’s good there’re some resources, there’re people you can lean on. You’re not just totally independent, [you] don’t care about other people.

Compared with the Chinese youth, the Finnish young people are very independent from their
parents. In China parents are providing for financial resources to their offspring during the university studies, while in Finland the state provides financial benefits to all the university students in need. The Finnish university students have accustomed to be responsible of their financial resources, also by entering to working life during the university studies. In China, part-time or temporary work during the studies is rarer. One could suppose that when the parents are providing almost full financial support, the life of Chinese university students is more safe and secured. However, Ms. Xu found that the life of the Finns is too stable and secured since the government is providing all the basic needs:

"Because government provides a lot of things to the people, someone may get lazy, to do better. Maybe you can do better, but someone already gave that to you and you don’t need to. [...] I think there are kind of people who think they are superior. They don’t need to go other places, because in most places life is not better as here."

Ms. Xu’s statement hints that the Finnish welfare state with a number of free services is not the priority when considering the future location for living and work. However, many informants also found free education, good study facilities, a number of public services, and social security as strong assets of Finland. Mr. Zhao even regarded dysfunctional governance of the PRC as one of the reasons to stay abroad (See also the chapter 5.2. Changes in political views).

5.6. Social life of Chinese students in Jyväskylä and Tampere

Since all but two of my informants had resided in Finland more than two years, the most of them had already relatively stable social circles which were often formed through studies, hobbies, and the place of apartment in particular. As it is common for international students, they often get to know many other international students from different parts of the world. As I already described in the previous chapter, to make acquaintance with the Finnish people is regarded relatively difficult. However, most of my informants had contacts to Finnish people, although for many the Finns were not the part of the closest circles in Finland. The easiest way to get to know with the Finns was having a Finnish flatmate. Also, two of my female informants had a Finnish boyfriend who had further led to contacts with the Finns. However, Mr. Zhu estimated that it is more difficult for male students to find a partner in the West than it is for female students. On the later stage, this may even lead to return migration among the male students and immigrants. Therefore, the return decisions related to social reasons may become gendered on the later stage of sojourning abroad. In my humble sample of thirteen Chinese students, only two female students had found a Finnish partner.
During the lessons and classes at the Finnish universities, many of my informants had made acquaintances with Finnish people. However, the friendships had rarely led to spending time together in spare-time activities. Especially for male students, ball games provided a good channel to meet other people. Nevertheless, when comparing to the Chinese way of having common time after the ball games, the Finns are not very social. Mr. Guo describes his experiences in the following excerpt:

*When I play football, we have a team, we play and after the match is finished they are all gone, they don’t say anything. We just come, chat a little bit, and then just go. But in China it’s quite different because if we’ve a team we have some friends. After playing we maybe have a drink, eat in a restaurant and talk. That’s quite common.*

When I studied at the university in Beijing in the spring and summer 2007, common activities after football matches proved to be one of the best ways to get familiar with Chinese fellow students. Contrary to China, it is not common to have a drink or dinner with teammates in Finland. This might be the case because of the special nature and relatively expensive prices of having drink or dinner with friends in Finland.

International friends in Finland had often become familiar through studies. Evidently, in the international MA programs there are students from all over the world and the studies are mainly conducted with the same group of people. Obviously, there are also Finns participating in the programs which makes it easier to get to know them. However, Mr. Zhu noted that the students in his MA program do not frequently meet each other because everyone has her/his own social circles, or his fellow students have left the university town in an early stage of their MA program. Many of my informants also have Chinese and international friends elsewhere in Finland because some of the friends from the previous years’ studies have moved other towns for work, often either from Jyväskylä to Tampere or to the capital area. Many of them have become a part of the Nokia community as so-called Nokia Chinese.

The Chinese students often meet each other at their apartments instead of cafés, bars or clubs. It is common to gather for a dinner, chat, drink, and play games together. For many of my informants social life had become more stable since the beginning of the studies in Finland. In the first months or years they might have been busy with student parties and other activities; however, after a while the need to graduate in time has made them to concentrate on studies. This is how Ms. Xu put her course of social activities in Finland:
Actually the first two or three years I was really with many exchange students, many were short time here but then they might have got a stable job in Finland or something. So, we have some contacts. Those years exchange students had lots of parties on. And after that, I have had really tight time in the studies, and I mainly contact with my close friends, some two or three Chinese guys. (Ms. Xu)

Also, the location of an apartment may limit the possibilities to stay late in the centre of a town. In Tampere, many Chinese students live far away from the centre what makes transportation difficult during late hours and at night. Either one has to go home before eleven o’clock, or take a taxi, which is relatively expensive in Finland\(^1\). Therefore, evening activities are often organized near the apartments. In Jyväskylä most of the Chinese students live in Roninmäki, a block of student apartments approximately two kilometres from the IT department, and almost three kilometres from the centre of the town. Therefore, most of the activities among the Chinese students are taking place in the apartments in Roninmäki although some Chinese students also prefer going to bars in weekends.

*During weekends, we Chinese all get together, we cook and drink, have desserts, have tea and play some games. That’s all, but some go to bars, but I think it’s quite few. Most of them, in other people’s eyes, are quite dull [laughing].* (Mr. Hu)

There are many other exchange students living in the same block of buildings, and thus, the area as such provides possibilities to socializing with the English-speaking student community in weekends.

To conclude, my findings on the social life and networks of the Chinese degree students correspond to the ones of Kinnunen among the international degree students in general. The both groups are firmly connected to their family members in their home countries. The friends in Finland are mainly from the same country of origin (i.e. from China), or they are other international students, although exceptions and contacts to the Finns are not uncommon. (Kinnunen 2003, p. 74.) However, many of my informants considered that the Finns are reserved and difficult to approach.

Compared to the findings of Kinnunen, my informants are not as connected to their colleagues in other universities and countries. This difference may reflect the greater number of PhD level

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\(^1\) Taking taxi at night time in Beijing is at least eight times cheaper than in Finland, and in many Chinese cities much more than that.
students involved in the data of Kinnunen. (2003, pp. 74-75.) According to Xiang, as well as my modest sample on Chinese students, PhD students are more firmly connected to their Chinese and international colleagues than the MA level students do (Xiang 2005, p. 27).

5.7. Chinese student associations and common Gatherings

In both towns, Tampere and Jyväskylä, the Chinese students have an organization called Chinese Students and Scholars Association, CSSA. In Tampere, the activities of CSSA Tampere bring together Chinese students from University of Tampere and Tampere University of Technology whereas CSSA Jyväskylä unites the Chinese from University of Jyväskylä and the Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences. There are more Chinese students in Tampere than in Jyväskylä, and also the CSSA activities have been more active there than in Jyväskylä. For both associations the main objective is to provide a platform for common activities and to distribute information on the Finnish student life for newcomers. The activities are mainly focusing on sports and cultural festivities, such as the Mini Olympics organized by the CSSA Tampere, or the celebration of the Spring festival both in Tampere and Jyväskylä. The associations are fully focusing on recreational dimension of the student life instead of being involved in any kind of advocacy work, or other political or societal activities for their members.

The both Chinese Students and Scholars Associations receive funding for their activities from the Embassy of the PRC. The embassy also organizes annual sports events for all the CSSAs in Finland which bring together Chinese students to play football, badminton, volleyball or other sports. The events are relatively popular, not the least because the embassy reimburses the travel costs for all the participants and organizes the events.

In the both universities, University of Tampere and University of Jyväskylä, I conducted an interview with one or more informants who were active in the local CSSA. They regarded CSSA meetings as a common forum for all the Chinese students to meet and plan common, very grassroots level activities. According to their description, the associations had not become the battlefields of power struggles or political affiliations as what had happened in some overseas Chinese organizations in the Western and Central Europe (see Nyiri 1999, pp. 96-116). The recreational nature of the CSSAs in Tampere and Jyväskylä is understandable since the associations do not provide financial benefits, direct relations to the power cliques in the PRC, or any other
major benefits for the future of overseas students. The former facilitator\textsuperscript{1} of one of the associations was granted with a daily delivery of the People’s Daily, the official newspaper in China by the Chinese Embassy. That is certainly a minute compensation on his voluntary work for the association.

Despite of the very open structure of the associations, most of my informants were not very interested in the local CSSA activities, as is the case of the most peer student associations in Finland as well. Most of the Chinese students were informed on the activities through friends or an email list, but they rarely participated in the activities. More frequently, even for the active members of the CSSAs, the Chinese students gathered with their good friends without associational constraints, as is described in the following excerpt\textsuperscript{2}:

\textit{Every month we’ve a CSSA board meeting. We just talk about our next step, what we want to do and serve Chinese people here. Sometimes there’re small festivals with Chinese people living together, small group, to talk...}

My findings on the organizational activity of Chinese degree students strongly correspond with the results of Kinnunen and Ally on the international degree students at the University of Helsinki (Kinnunen 2003, p. 75; Ally 2002, p. 59); foreign students seldom become involved in associations, although for some foreign students associational activities play an important role in the social life.

\section{Chinese cultural festivities}

The Chinese students maintain the traditional Chinese festivities in Finland. However, most of the traditional days, such as the Mid-Autumn day and the first of May, are celebrated among the small circles of good friends. The main occasion is obviously the Spring Festival (also called as the \textit{Lunar} or Chinese \textit{New Year}). Both in Jyväskylä and Tampere, the CSSAs have played an important role in the organization of the local Spring Festival gathering. For instance, in Jyväskylä more than hundred people gathered for the dinner in 2007, including invited guests from the university administration, the municipality of Jyväskylä, and the China Finland friendship association. In Tampere, the Spring Festival celebrations in 2007 gathered approximately 200 participants for the dinner and to follow the Chinese New Year’s television show. The Spring festival can be compared with the Western Christmas as the most important annual celebration in East Asia. Traditionally the

\textsuperscript{1} The informant deliberately avoided using a more formal term on his leadership position.

\textsuperscript{2} The names of the active members of CSSAs are omitted since it would threaten the anonymity of my informants. The data of this paragraph is received by the informants.
family members gather together for the dinner party and give presents to each other. The Chinese New Year is also a common time for overseas students to visit home in China. Some of my informants had visited home either every year or at least once at that time, even though the celebrations are dated in the late January or in February.

Again, some Chinese students prefer more intimate celebrations than common dinners, and therefore, they spend the Chinese New Year with the best friends.

Yes, in the first years I and my friends took part in the New Year’s party in Finland, also in the middle-Autumn festival, or the Chinese culture festival in the recent years. But after a few years, we didn’t take part in so many festivals. We just see with friends, like close friends, we don’t join so big parties. (Ms. Wu)

The decreasing activity in the common cultural festivities over the years hints that the Chinese overseas students become less bound to their national peer group in the course of the time. This is understandable as a part of adaptation process and after finding one’s own social circles.
6. REASONS TO STAY, RETURN OR FURTHER MOBILITY IN EUROPE

6.1. Preparing for professional career in China

Three of my informants, all males, had already decided to return to China after finishing their studies. All of them had a quite distinctive position compared to the most of my informants: two of them were my only informants conducting PhD level studies, the third one was the only one who had already returned to China in order to finalize his thesis there. Differently put, all the MA level male informants who are about to finalize their studies here prefer to stay in Finland or elsewhere in Europe.

All three returning informants had very positive future prospects in the Chinese labour market. Mr. Guo is planning to return to his academic home institution and receive a post as a teacher and researcher there. Mr. Lin, a PhD student on the IT field who already has four-years working experience in China regards his future opportunities in a very positive tone:

"For every person in China, the outstanding background, high education degree, abundant working experience in the foreign company will give him a special advantage and more opportunity for his personal development no matter in industrial or academic area. That is the main reason why I want to go back to China."

He regards three possible options to his future career: working in an international company, setting up an own company, or receiving a post in a university. In all of these options a person with a foreign PhD degree and experience in an international company would fast obtain a position which provides a relatively high social status and a salary which ensures a higher material standard of living than a 30-years-old PhD graduate could expect in Finland.

Mr. Gao, who is about to finish his MA degree, has not as high expectations as the PhD student Mr. Lin on the career prospects in China. However, also he is highly confident on the opportunities what the Chinese labour markets are offering. He believes that he can easily find a job, or alternatively, launch his own business in China. Finally, almost all of my informants mentioned that China is the country of opportunities, even though the opportunities were not attractive enough for all of them to prefer returning to China.
6.2. Work-related reasons to leave Finland

The language barrier was regarded as the most important hindrance when searching for work in Finland. The language gap in the Finnish companies is still evident, although it was not explicit in managing the work tasks as such. This issue was also highlighted by the foreign experts in the study of Raunio. They considered to be left out from many informal discussions and email list chats because they were not able to understand Finnish. (Raunio 2003, p. 30.) This so-called coffee-break syndrome was also regarded as a reason for discrimination when applying for a job.

Of course, I can also understand because then they can manage in Finnish, they don’t need English so much, but for us, the competitors, it’s not so equal. [...] And I was also surprised that if you know someone in the company, you have some kind of relations, it would be easier than to other outsiders. (Ms. Wu)

All of my informants have realised that it is very difficult to get the first job in a Finnish company. Many of them had sent a number of applications but only two of them had finally got a job on their own field.

Yes, yes, and then I applied for a job, that interview was quite complicated but I think I was just so lucky. Just so lucky. Because all the people of my friends keep sending their application but, you know, in the very beginning you just have to do something shitty. ... I'm just so lucky, just sometimes people step on the dog shit, and sometimes... (Ms. Sun)

Since the chances were scarce, many of my informants prefer concentrating on finalizing the studies and then start looking for work either in Finland or elsewhere in Europe.

Even if one may find work, my informants were highly aware of the difficulties in getting promotion. Many of them had heard stories how Finnish colleagues had been given a priority in the promotion decisions. For instance, Mr. Lin obviously refers to the coffee-break syndrome while linking the language skills and the limited opportunities to promotions:

Even a person could find a job without the requirement of Finnish (only English), but he still needs to learn and get deep into the Finnish life, otherwise getting promotion in the company seems impossible. And you couldn't acquire [as] high social position as you are in China. Living in China could give me more development opportunities and stay in higher social class.

The estimates of my informants on the Finnish labour markets correspond to the findings of other studies on the employment prospects of international university students and highly educated
professionals in Finland. Although finding work from one’s own field for the international students on the technical field may not prove to be a problem, the career prospects in the Finnish working environment may be dim (Kinnunen 2003, p. 65; see also Ally 2002, p. 96). The study of Raunio on highly educated professionals in Finland suggests that lacking social networks and being an outsider among the Finnish workers are regarded as the main reasons to the limited promotion opportunities. Although the assumption on the privileged position of the Finns is not validated, it is widespread and may cause as such negative feelings towards the employer and the Finnish working environment. (2003, p. 20.) In general, my informants were already aware of the assumed poor promotion prospects in the Finnish working environment that had made them reserved on their career plans in Finland.

6.3. Work-related reasons to stay in Finland

The experiences on working life in Finland had been positive for those who had been working here, although only one my informants had worked on her own field so far, and three others had worked in menial jobs, mainly as a cleaner. Many of my informants had been looking for work – either from their own field or menial jobs – but everyone of them had realised that finding work in Tampere or Jyväskylä was difficult for a Chinese student who does not know Finnish language. However, Mr. Hu, an informant who had arrived Finland only two months before found the service in the employment agency very positive:

*I have been to a lecture, organized by the job service. I was quite astonished, here they have these lectures in English for foreigners. Normally I think that local people think that I came to take their jobs. But here they organize such a lecture. ... They told us in the lecture that “You are a resource.” [laughing] “You are not a problem.” [laughing] It’s quite impressive.*

For four of my male informants obtaining work in Finland was the primary objective. Since none of them had working experience from the field of their studies in Finland so far, their perceptions on potential working opportunities were quite obscure. However, Mr. Huang had already found a work from his own research field. For all but one informant, Finland was not regarded as a definitely preferred place to work but they would be ready to move elsewhere in Europe if they could receive an interesting, well-paid job. Mr. Zhu, my only informant from the faculty of humanities, had been actively studying the Finnish language since he found that proficient knowledge in Finnish would be a primary condition in obtaining a work in Finland.
First of all, I want to have a job here, but first I have to talk Finnish, it’s like compulsory. Because this is a country where English is not so widely-spoken, and the language is a barrier.

Also he found that Sweden could be a potential alternative because Swedish culture and media industry is far more developed than that in Finland. All the informants regarded Finland as a peaceful living environment with less stress than in Chinese cities. The advantages Finland has to offer are mainly related to the high standard of living with less work than in China. In Finland the salary is easily more than 2000 € a month, while in China such a salary (20 000 ¥) would be regarded very high and usually only achieved in a very stressful and responsible position. However, the salary was not regarded as the most important factor – although it surely is an asset – which follows the findings of Kinnunen on Asian degree students (2003, p. 100).

But I have to say frankly, the payment here is quite good, compared what you can get in China. ... It’s eight hours [working time everyday] and flexible, and you’ve the coffee brakes every time. In China the pressure – I can see – it’s quite high. You get much but you also pay a lot. (Mr. Hu)

All the informants emphasized the less stressful working environment in Finland. According to their estimates, Chinese working culture is very demanding compared to the European societies.

And the welfare is quite good, like you’ve Pekkaspäivät, or you’ve summer holidays, it’s really like impossible in China. And the salary is ok. And the living conditions are very good, except the winter is cold and dark. (Mr. Zhu)

The international degree students studied by Kinnunen and Ally, the African and Asian (Chinese) informants in particular, had estimated their experiences on the contacts with the employment and immigration authorities in Finland in a more negative way than my informants did (Kinnunen 2003, p. 32; Ally 2002, p. 53-55). When compared to the findings of Kinnunen, my Chinese informants considered the communication with the Finnish authorities very positive. For instance, no one had faced problems with the Finnish working or immigration regulations. According to my informants, Chinese degree students and Chinese residents in Finland have a very well functioning information network and web portals which provide information about the regulations and practical matters on working and immigration issues in Finland.

1 The so-called Pekkaspäivät refer to the paid holiday days that are originating from the decision to shorten the official working weeks to 36.6 hours in Finland. Therefore every Finnish worker employed full-time gets approximately one holiday day per each month.
To conclude, the advantages of the working life were related to other sectors of life such as peaceful social environment and opportunities to take time for other activities. The preferential environment combined with the relatively high salary constituted the framework for the decisions to search for work in Finland or elsewhere in Europe.

### 6.4. Social and cultural factors as reasons to leave

Contrary to the male students, the reasons linked to social relations were dominant in the decision-making of my female informants. All but one of the female students were planning to return to China in order to live near their parents. However, two of the female informants preferred international working experience in Europe before the return, and another of them was already working in an internationally oriented Finnish company. Only one of the female students was willing to stay in Finland although also she had preferred to stay mainly by social reasons. She had already finished her studies and moved out from the university town with her Finnish boyfriend.

Hence, the social reasons were the core factor for all the female informants who were planning to return, however, cultural reasons were also mentioned by all of them. For instance, Ms. Wu found that she had already stayed too long apart from her family. Her parents were becoming old and as the only child it is her duty to take care of them. Also her Finnish boyfriend had agreed to move China after they have finished their studies. She put it as follows:

*My parents, they are becoming old and they wish me to go back. And also, in China I can find more opportunities, also cooperative companies. Also my boyfriend prefers Asian cultures and could go to China.*

Even though Finland has many advantages compared to the Chinese cities, the decisions are made by balancing the advantages and disadvantages according to one’s individual preferences and values. The need for balancing is obvious in the following excerpt by Ms. Wu:

*I like that Finnish working environment does not have so much pressure. You have enough time to do your tasks. But I would like to go back to China because I have left my parents so long time ago.*

Nevertheless, social reasons are always intertwined with the conditions in the Finnish labour market and cultural environment. The impact of the labour market and cultural factors are presented in
other chapters.

6.5. Socio-cultural and environmental factors as reasons to stay

When considering the future place or residence, the male students did not find it important to live close to their families. For them the parents were still able to take care of themselves and they did not think of their future in such a long-term perspective. Mr. Zhou wanted to find a job in Europe and then offer his parents an opportunity to visit him in Europe since they had never travelled outside of China:

*I want to bring my parents out, have a European trip. ... If I can get a job here, first, I can support them for travelling, and then, second, it’s easier to get a travel visa for the family.* (Mr. Zhou)

In addition to the factors related to the social and working life, some informants mentioned the clean environment as an incentive to stay in Europe. On the one hand, the pollution in Chinese cities has become an increasingly important issue and it has evident consequences to the health of the Chinese city residents\(^1\). On the other hand, the high population density of Chinese cities was regarded stressful. The congestion is such a visible feature of Chinese cities that it is influencing the daily life of almost all the urban citizens. The traffic jams make transportation troublesome, recreational resorts are packed of thousands of peer holidaymakers, and even a trip to a supermarket can cause hours of waiting both in traffic jams and the queues in a supermarket. If one is not enthusiastic about lively city life, a small European city – as almost all the European cities could be described in the Chinese scale – may provide a lucrative option to hectic lifestyle in the urban China:

*[T]hen I’d consider the living environment, like in Beijing, there’s a lot of pollution, and lot of people and it’s crowded on streets. I don’t like that actually, it’s kind of high pressure. I’d like to say Helsinki is better, it’s not so large, it’s not so small, it’s very suitable to live. But Jyväskylä is so small.* (Mr. Zhu)

Compared to Tampere, Jyväskylä was regarded to provide only few opportunities for work. My informants had many Chinese friends, often so-called Nokia people who had moved to Tampere or the capital area in order to work for an IT company there.

Three of the male informants mentioned the expected future prospects as the main breadwinner of

\(^1\) On the degradation of the Chinese environment, see e.g. Maailman tila 2006.
the family who does not only have to raise a child but also to take care of four elders: both the parents of himself and his wife. As Mr. Zhao put it in the following excerpt, the pressure to provide for the whole family is expected to be even higher than it has accustomed to be in the families with more than one child:

You know, at the moment the house price [in big Chinese cities] is almost the same as in Europe, but our salary is maybe one tenth of the European. [...] And the study, we must pay a lot of money for studies, and in our Chinese customs you have to pay money to your chosen’s [wife’s] house [home], your chosen’s marriage. [...] You know, we’ve one child for my parents. When I get married, I and my wife, four old people. Oh... That’s a really bad situation. I prefer start living abroad. But this situation, many Chinese people didn’t see this coming.

Although the male informants focused more on the working prospects when regarding the selection of the future place of residence, they fully acknowledged the importance of social ties and the obligations they have towards their families in China. Many of my informants compared the Chinese obligations to the parents to the Finnish state-led system for providing the social security. In the following Mr. Hu contemplates the importance of taking care of the parents:

Yes, it’s a legal thing. It’s very obscure, it’s a moral thing. You know, in our generation everyone has one child. And when parents’ generation gets old, and when you get married and you’ve a family, you have at least one child and four old people, it’s quite a problem. Even people who are working here, I don’t know, because after ten years or so parents get old. [...] But you still have time for some ten years.

Taking good care of the parents in their old age was regarded as a law-alike obligation, if not strictly a binding law but very similar in nature. Hence, caring of the parents may still remain as a valid reason to return, although it may not lead to an instant realisation of the return after the graduation. The reasons to return are always compared to the pulling factors of the expected higher salary and a more relaxed way of living in the West.

6.6. Cultural and societal factors as the reasons to stay

Other external factors which did not encourage the students to think of returning were related to the political and social environment in China. For two of my informants, dealing with the Chinese social environment was regarded unpleasant and challenging. For instance, trading often involves negotiation uncommon in Western Europe, and the chances to become cheated are higher since the consumer rights are not as strongly protected than in Western Europe. Also, the restrictions in the freedom of expression were influential factors for two of my informants. However, students seem to
take differing stance towards the governmental policies in China. For some, the present political rule was regarded very positively, while the others considered it unpleasant and unfortunate.

*If you're sensitive about free expression, then it means to you. But if you're very good at being pragmatic and you've very good opportunities there, you can go back. And I can see, if you've a good job in China and lot of money, the life is quite fabulous. You know, the things are cheap.* (Mr. Hu)

Similar to members of any society, some of the Chinese students are more interested in political issues and the principles of just society, while for many others they are regarded as secondary issues as long as they do not hinder the development of the core sectors of wellbeing. The role of political consciousness is presented more extensively when analysing the role of media and changing political opinions in the transnational social reality in the chapters 5.1. and 5.2..

### 6.7. Cultural factors as reasons to leave

Most of my informants mentioned that the Finnish living environment is quite boring even though the Finnish people are friendly. Compared to China, the alternatives for spare-time activities and having fun are relatively limited. The Finnish young people prefer going to bars and drinking whereas in China opportunities are plentiful. For instance karaoke rooms and *xiangsheng*, a popular Chinese form of stand-up comic sessions, are missing in Finland. The bar and clubbing-culture as we know it in Finland is still relatively marginal in China. Hence, spending tens of euros in a bar or club among drunken Finns has not gained wide popularity among the Chinese as their weekend activity. The following excerpt by Ms. Xu demonstrates the common feelings of my informants:

*Maybe... the life is not so various, a little bit bored. It's like single life: you don't have lots of choices, like going karaoke, or to have good food. Sometimes you really need to relax, and meet friends. But here you just have to go to bar, and how much you spend, it's quite much. But in China there are many ways to relax.*

Many of my informants mentioned how much they are missing the Chinese cuisine. Eating out in Finland is far more rare and more expensive than in China. Even if they want to eat in a restaurant in Tampere or Jyväskylä, it is difficult to find real Chinese food. In China I found out that even common university students afford eating in restaurants many times a week, and there are tens, even hundreds of different kinds of dishes available in one block of restaurants. Also normal university canteens are offering much wider variety of dishes than a normal Chinese restaurant in Finland.
And the food, it’s very important. [laughing] The food is really important, with my friends here, most of the time our topic is in the Chinese food. We are so missing restaurants where you can pick whatever you want, and it’s not expensive. (Ms. Xu)

In addition to the detailed cultural factors such as food or Finnish bar culture, two of my informants were explicitly missing more vivid city environment with more various opportunities to meet new people and to participate in recreational activities.

I feel this country is too smooth, there aren’t changes, no changes, difficult to get new people in my group, or get in groups. It’s difficult to change. I feel like everything is stopped, I’d like to get some changes. Like life is everyday, from morning to night, almost same. I’d like to see the city changing, and to identify differences. (Ms. Wu)

Addition to Ms. Wu’s and Mr. Zhu’s longing for more lively city culture in Tampere, Mr. Zhu had concluded that Jyväskylä is a too small, and also too peaceful town even to try to find work from his field. Therefore, he was going to move to Helsinki after finalizing his studies.

However, Mr. Zhu also mentioned that he would be willing to find an Asian wife since the women in the Nordic countries are too independent, and their conception on the family-life is essentially different from the one of most Chinese women. Thus, he hopes to find a wife from China although he might stay in Finland for good. Nevertheless, according to his perception, finding a Chinese wife is increasingly difficult since the number of men is so radically exceeding the number of women in China.

The tendency is that many men are going back to China. Because, the first matter is that for women it’s very easy to find a mate abroad. Foreigners, they call it cross-cultural communication. But Western women are so independent, and this is like a cultural (issue), it’s hard to find a mate, for Chinese men it’s difficult to really get involved in this society. So, they like to go back. (Mr. Zhu)

If this is a common tendency among the Chinese male students, the socio-cultural factors may become crucial for the Chinese male students soon after their graduation although they were not expressed by most of my informants. However, two of my male informants already had a girlfriend in China, and they may join their boyfriends abroad in the future.

As a conclusion, social and cultural factors – which I have found strongly intertwined – had a relatively strong role in the return decisions. What surprised me most was that no one mentioned problems with the Finnish labour migration regulation or any other official regulation as an
obstacle. Instead, all the mentioned reasons were related either to social or cultural factors, or practical difficulties to enter the Finnish labour market, or alternatively, to the economic, cultural or social pulling factors in China.

6.8. Plan Bs for the future

The international students coming outside of the EEA region are allowed to search for work for six months after the graduation. If a student has not found employment within the six months, or she/he has not become eligible to receive visa extension due to other reasons, she/he is obliged to leave the country (Maahanmuuttoravasto 2007). Since many of my informants were about to graduate soon, they had contemplated alternative schemes in case they could not find employment in time. All of them had come into realization that the lack of working experience is the main reason in finding difficulties in finding work. Therefore, if unsuccessful, they were planning to go back to China, and either look for work there, or continue to PhD studies. Mr. Zhu put his plan B as follows:

*If I cannot find any satisfying job, I can consider going back to China or pursue my PhD studies. ... But I haven’t decided to go further to study, I mean, perhaps I’d like to go back to Beijing and find a working place there. [...] Some other countries, like Australia and Canada if I go back to Beijing. I could consider them.* (Mr. Zhu)

Mr. Zhu also considers moving elsewhere to such popular countries of Chinese immigration as Australia or Canada. They are providing relatively easy channels to permanent immigration since their requirements for the naturalization, i.e. obtaining the citizenship of the country of immigration, are less demanding than in most EU countries. For instance, Canada may issue naturalization after three years of permanent employment and continuous residence, while in Finland it can be considered only after six years of continuous stay (Ray 2005; Suomen kansalaisuus 2003). Leaving Finland for another EU country is also an option for them. However, since they have become familiar with the Finnish culture and they have many friends settled down here, Finland would be the most convenient choice for the future place of work and residence.

*The first is for me to get my degree as fast as possible. Because we’ve this policy, we can stay here half a year after getting the degree, so, I’d best find job here, if I cannot, I’ll go back and work for two or three years and come back again. That’s my plan.* (Mr. Zhao)

Also the informants who are planning to stay in Finland find that China is full of opportunities, although not as interesting as in Finland.
7. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND PATHS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

7.1. Similar but still different foreign students in Finland

Compared to the findings of the previous studies on international degree students in Finland, the student life of the Chinese degree students and their other experiences related to the studies in Finland do not greatly differ from the ones of the average international students (See Ally 2002; Kinnunen 2003). However, the Chinese cultural background and familial responsibilities in particular are recognizable in the daily life of most of my informants, as well as in the future plans for mobility. Strong financial support from the family seems to differ the Chinese from other international degree students in the Finnish universities. While many European university students are expected to take care of their own study expenses, in China parents are expected to provide for their child’s (or children’s) university education.

The willingness to live near one’s parents and the familiar culture in the future was stressed especially by my female informants more than what can be found from the studies of Kinnunen and Ally (Kinnunen 2003, p. 101; Ally 2002, p. 104). This tendency can be explained from the cultural premises and the traditional Chinese value of filial piety. Also the one-child policy has had a clear implication to the social expectations of the students. Since there are no siblings to take care of one’s parents in their old age, the students may find to be obliged to return to China. However, my findings suggest that there is a clear difference in the plans of the female and male students to return China after the studies. In this regard my findings also differ from Pieke’s argument stating that the daughters are freer to move from the family than the sons are (Pieke 1999, p. 2). Pieke argues that the Chinese cultural framework stresses the role of sons as a guarantor of the family prestige and taking care of the parents and the honour of the family, while the daughter is expected to detach from the original family and to finally become a member of her husband’s family (Pieke 1999, p. 2). My findings hint that it is more the female students who feel an obligation to return, while for male students it did not prove to be an issue. As Mr. Guo put it: “Yes, but if I’m considering my work back in China, my family won’t influence me very much. Most important is the work career itself.” In general the male students hardly mentioned the needs of their parents at home whereas every female informant explicitly noted the parents as one of the main reasons to return. However, my sample is quite small and does not allow for generalisations. Therefore, more research is needed to verify the gender differences in the mobility plans of Chinese degree students abroad.
In the study of Kinnunen, Asian students were regarded as more study- and career-oriented than the international students in general. Regardless of the incomplete points of references, my findings correspond to the results of Kinnunen, and my male informants in particular (Kinnunen 2003, pp. 20, 27). This is not surprising if considering the high respect of education in the Chinese culture and the current meritocratic living environment of the young urban Chinese. The strong orientation to professional career may not fit very well with the plans to permanent stay in Finland. Many of my informants had discovered that more than pure educational or professional merits, personal relations and the Finnish background might be the way to advance in the Finnish working environment. Hence, their willingness to return to China with many opportunities has been encouraged by the experiences and news from the Finnish labour markets.

The gendered tendency in the fast return to China seems to have cultural causes. In the study on adolescents’ filial piety, Fuligni and Zhang estimate that adolescent girls feel more obliged to support their families than boys do (2004, p. 182). This may also reflect the changing nature of the assistance needed in the urban environment. The female offspring is expected to help in the tasks which require caring and household duties, while traditional tasks expected by the male offspring are more rare in cities than in the rural environment. However, the situation may reverse when the male offspring become adults and take a role as the main breadwinner of the family (Fuligni, Zhang, p. 189).

The overseas studies and following international work career of the sons may also function as an instrument of giving face, i.e. bringing respect to the family. Working abroad is also a source for probably higher income than what could be gained in China. Therefore, the strategy of working abroad for a couple of years may be a practical solution also to the parents since they are still in rather good condition and not in need for daily caring. This view was also expressed by the parents interviewed in the study of Netherlands Education Support Office. They believe that the working experience abroad would later contribute to better career prospects in China. (NESO report 2005, p. 28.)

There are only very few studies on the change of family relations in the Chinese urban middle-class

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1 There was no distinction made between sexes in Kinnunen’s study.
2 According to the study of Netherlands Education Support Office, the salary expectations of the returning overseas students were generally overestimated; due to the increased competition in China, the starting salaries for returning students and scholars have dropped considerably (2005, pp. 18, 26).
and the consequences of the increasing transnational mobility of the offspring. Although it is obvious that the family obligations continue to constitute an important framework for the mobility and the future plans of the Chinese university students, the recent changes discovered by Fuligni & Zhang open an interesting dimension to the studies of student mobility and potential migration abroad. The changes in family relations are apparently stemming from the one-child policy, highly meritocratic living environment of the urban Chinese youth, and new retirement plans for securing the livelihood of the parents (Zhang, Goza 2005, pp. 155-162). Hence, further changes may emerge, depending on the political and societal changes in the PRC. Certainly, the impacts of social, economic and cultural changes in China open up and interesting field for more elaborated studies on family relations and their impact on transnational mobility.

7.2. Small potential labour resource for Finland – but rarely for good

While finalising their Master and PhD-level studies, Chinese students constitute a potential group of highly educated transnational migrants. EU countries are competing on these students with the United States, Australia and Japan. The competition on the highly skilled migrants has become an increasingly organized and systematic part of national education policies in the OECD countries (International Migration Outlook 2006, p. 76). Also, the Chinese students are feeling an increasing pressure back home in China because they are expected to provide safe and prosperous future for both their parents as well as for their child (more probably than children) whose upbringing may cut a remarkable proportion of the future salary. The pressure coming from home combined with the highly competitive working and living environment constitute the framework of the most important pulling factors, which may continue to attract the Chinese degree students to stay abroad.

Finland has strongly invested to the education and research & development of technical fields, and computer sciences and informmation technology in particular. Also, Finnish universities provide high-quality education in the specific academic fields which might not even be available in China. The free tuition enables studies also for those Chinese students who would not afford to enrol into universities in the UK, Australia, or the United States. The high quality of education, with the reputation of Nokia, has made Finland an attractive place for the Chinese students of information technology and computer sciences.

However, the scale and volume of the Chinese student mobility to Finland are still relatively low compared to the most popular European destinations of the Chinese degree students, not to mention the flow to the United States. The number of Chinese students in the Finnish universities hardly
reaches a thousand students, unless including the universities of applied sciences, and the technical fields are distinctively the most favoured study field for the Chinese in Finland. Meanwhile, there are tens of thousands of Chinese students both in Germany and France. Hence, the Chinese students do not constitute even a potential flow for the emerging chain migration from China, to say nothing of emerging migration systems between China and Finland. For such developments the volume of Chinese students as well as their living and working opportunities in Finland should undergo a complete transformation.

My findings on the experiences of the Chinese IT students suggest that obtaining a decent work from one’s own professional field in Finland continues to form the biggest single challenge for their future residency in Finland. The students are highly aware of the prospects provided by the Finnish working environment; the hopes for promotions are dim, and the high social respect and position are far more difficult to achieve than in China. In these terms the Chinese students seem to follow the mobility pattern of global economy’s experts in Finland discovered by Raunio: Finland is a desired location for a short period of work or studies because it is a good credit for the CV and the future professional career (Raunio 2003, p. 47). However, it seems that the mobility of Chinese degree students rarely leads to permanent immigration to Finland. As all of my informants noted, Chinese metropolises provide increasing possibilities for career development.

In case Chinese students find a decent job from their professional field in Finland, they are willing to stay, be it for some years or to settle down permanently. Finland can provide many benefits compared to the Chinese urban environment, such as peaceful living environment near the real nature, a decent salary with reasonable working hours, and according to some students, a more functional and just governmental system. Chinese students rarely take a strong initiative and become involved in the social activities with the Finns, unless they find a partner in Finland. In general, the Chinese students do not seem to have a strong impact to the Finnish society or become an important part of the employment solutions of any industrial sector in Finland, be it through working in Finnish companies or participation into institutional or business relations between Finland and China. In the course of time new links may emerge from the basis of student mobility; however, at this stage radiating impacts to the Finnish society or to institutional transnational relations seem to be very limited.
7.3. Drops in the flow of the Chinese to Europe

Chinese degree students in Finland can be regarded as a part of the expansive Chinese student mobility around the developed world as well as a potential subgroup in the larger context of the so-called new Chinese migration. Chinese university students in Finland follow the characteristics attached to the new Chinese migrants: they have relatively high education and they come from the big Chinese urban centres from different parts of the PRC and not only from the traditional migration regions of the South East Coast. Distinctively, their plans for the future mobility are manifold, including the plans for permanent immigration, temporary working periods of some years abroad in order to thrust the career in China, as well as direct return near the family and old social circles after the graduation. Furthermore, the Chinese students represent a new group of the mobile Chinese who are able to take advantage of the benefits of the globalization. They are benefiting from the globalization of education and the globally rising value of the knowledge-based human resources. The skills and competences obtained in Finland are increasingly applicable in the fast growing centres of China, and in different regions of the industrialised world. Therefore, it seems that the majority of the Chinese students do not seek to permanent residence in Finland but they are willing to return to China, or move elsewhere in Europe.

The ongoing flow of Chinese students to the Western universities is related to a historical phase of a more general opening of China, which makes it possible for the Chinese to benefit from various opportunities to study and seek employment abroad. The students interviewed in this study are a part of this opening process and are still very much anchored to China. Studying abroad for this generation seems to be also a response to the lack of highly skilled manpower in China, which provides those with higher education and working experience from abroad good employment opportunities once back in China.

By following the categorization by Raunio (2003, p. 16), I have re-formulated three simplifying categories to describe differing future plans of my informants:

1.) Career-oriented “nomads” aim at furthering their professional skills by seeking challenging work and research opportunities which may advance their career prospects. They may stay in Finland, move elsewhere in Europe, or return China depending on professional opportunities. However, for the most of them the present China is a land of opportunities for advancement and careers, and hence, many of them decide to return.
2.) *Quality of life –migrants* seek working opportunities on the international ICT sector either in Finland or elsewhere in Europe in order to lead relatively prosperous life liberated from many immediate social constraints faced in China. This group includes students who are dissatisfied with high competition, stressful life-style and/or political constraints in the Chinese urban environments.

3.) *Social relations returnees* prefer going back to China, either directly after the graduation or in the next few years in order to be close to their family and take advantage of the benefits of the rising Chinese economy and familiar cultural features, such as the Chinese cuisine and acquired communication practices.

However, only few of my informants were able to imagine their future beyond five to ten years, and hence, especially the students belonging to the first group are probable to be omitted in the categories 2.) and 3.). Also, the intentions of some students were ambiguous to certain extent, and thus, their plans may include features from more than one of the categories presented above.

Although the plans of some Chinese students refer to the future as a part of the new Chinese migration, their previous mobility experiences do not correspond to the patterns of frequent transnational mobility. None of my informants had previous experiences on transnational mobility before the beginning of her/his studies abroad (Nyiri 1999, p. 122). Although my informants might be on their first stage of transnationally mobile life-style, the future plans of most of my informants hint that they may soon return back to China, and thus, only few of them will join the diverse group of new Chinese migrants.

As previous studies suggest, the Chinese mobility should be increasingly regarded as a part of the global context of transnational migration. The student mobility of the Chinese middle-class offspring to Finland cannot be regarded as a part of the wide-scale labour migration patterns from the developed parts of developing countries to the lower niches of labour markets in the developed world (See e.g. Sassen 1998). Such a development may have emerged as a part of the Chinese student mobility to France, Germany and the UK; however, the highly controlled labour market and a small number of labour immigrants in Finland have effectively prevented the labour immigration through student visas to Finland.
Instead, the Chinese student mobility to Finnish universities seems to be a spill over of the student mobility from developing countries to the Western world. The number of overseas students has increased in Western Europe since 9-11 that has also brought a growing number of Chinese students to Finland. While the middle classes in China and India grow, the student flows from Asia may continue to increase in the coming years. However, the Finnish labour market does not seem to be prepared to benefit from the Chinese students, their skills and competencies, and the potentiality for building transnational contacts between Finland and China. However, further studies on those Chinese students who have stayed in Finland would provide an interesting perspective on the prospects of new transnational relations between these countries.

At this stage, Chinese degree students may be regarded as a vanguard of the new mobility pattern between Finland and China. The direct co-operative flights of Finnair and Air China from Beijing to Helsinki may bring an increasing number of Chinese students to search for Western education and cultural experiences in the Finnish universities. Although the university education of Chinese students does not seem to strongly contribute to the cultural, social or economic resources in Finland, the growing group of the Chinese with Finnish education may promote the knowledge of Finnish culture, education system and technology industry in the Chinese metropolises. As many students of international migration have noticed, in the long run transnational migration leads to various benefits to both the receiving country and the country of emigration. In the case of Finland and China, the consequences may prove to become visible only in the course of time.

At any rate, the Chinese students in Finland do not seem to support the fears of massive brain drain from China. On the contrary, most of the students seem to seek for strong educational background and the needed working experience from the international companies in Finland in order to settle down in China and benefit from their foreign experiences. Thus, they may probably become a part of potential and relatively fast brain circulation patterns between China and Europe. Such an outlook is also expected by most researchers of international migration as well as Chinese university officials. Therefore, the degree studies in Finland seem to provide an additional contribution to the Chinese modernization and the needed academic and technological resources for the Chinese knowledge-based society.

Providing the return of the majority of my informants, the migranthood as a state between of more permanent states of residence seems to gain further relevance from my study (see also Wang 2007, pp. 176-177). A period of studies abroad provides a moment to consider different kinds of options
for the future residence and professional career, albeit it might be regarded in the most cases as a temporary epoch between the more stable residence in the familiar Chinese society. However, for some students the state of migranthood may continue when obtaining temporary work in Finland or elsewhere in Europe. As a concept of describing the temporary, open-ended state of sojourning, migranthood offers a meaningful way of understanding the reality of studies abroad and the times following the graduation.

My findings on the changes on ideological and political matters indicate that the foreign experiences may have remarkable implications on the ideological standpoints of the Chinese degree students. Regardless of many cultural and societal differences between China and Western Europe, the free and multi-voiced mass media in Western Europe may feature one of the most visible differences when compared to China. Therefore, it seems that student mobility constitutes a framework for a political and ideological revival, if not the political agency in the future. Nevertheless, the interest in ideological and political matters is highly dependent on individual cases, although my humble sample suggests that it is not extraordinary. Evidently, the impact of differing mediascapes in the PRC and Western Europe among the Chinese students, be it abroad or in China, would offer an interesting perspective for future research in the field of transnational studies.

7.4. Evaluation of the study methods and the validity of the results

Considering my study questions, the selected research methods provided a good insight into the life and transnational reality of Chinese MA degree students. However, in case the study resources were more extensive, a bigger sample group would still provide a deeper insight into the studied phenomena. Not only the size but also a more multi-faceted sample would provide a richer understanding of the study questions, especially of those touching the transnational reality of Chinese overseas students and their prospects. Hence, studies including informants from the groups of post-graduate students, the returned graduates, Chinese highly educated workers both in Finland and elsewhere as well as the family members would further enlighten the expectations set to the Chinese degree students to enter into the European labour markets and becoming members of the Chinese overseas communities in Europe, no matter how transnational and mobile their life-style may be.

Finally, my findings in the interviews were featured by a certain degree of ambiguity. For instance, although an informant had decided to return, she/he may be willing to stay for the near future in
order to foster her/his career opportunities on the later stage. When taking into consideration various opportunities to my informants, the vagueness of answers is understandable. However, when analysing the reasons and their consequences of mobile Chinese students, one of the frequently noted differences between the Chinese and European thinking may be highlighted. According to Tim Ambler the Chinese way of thinking stresses the ability to combine different poles of a question to a harmonious conclusion rather than the ability to find rational reasons to prefer one option to another (2000, p. 72). Hence, the ambiguity of some answers may need to be interpreted in the proper context of cultural differences between Finland and China.
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**Book review**

Annex 1: a sample email for approaching my informants

Hi ***,

as you may have noticed, *** gave me your email and recommended to contact you for my thesis interviews.

My MA thesis concerns Chinese degree students in Finland and your future prospects after the studies. I’d like to ask how you guys find living and working opportunities in Finland, or differently put, I’ll try to figure out how so-called highly skilled Chinese experts from technical/IT fields can get employed in Finland and what are possible difficulties, bureaucratic obstacles etc. Or more scientifically, I’ll try to figure out how Chinese students in Finland can be seen in the frameworks of general migration theories and the increased Chinese overseas migration. Therefore, I’m interested how you ended up to Finland, how do you sustain your social relations back to China, your future plans etc. I’m also like to know a bit about your background in China.

The interview would take about an hour. I’d tell more about the purpose and background of my study and how I use the interviews. Anyhow, the principle is that everything is 100% confidential.

If you’d have time next Wed I would be very grateful. Thu morning might be ok as well, or then I could come to Tampere another time. (After staying last Semester in Beijing, I’ve moved to Jyväskylä, and only visit Tampere every now and then.)

Hope to see you next week, best wishes,

Simo Salmela

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Annex 2: Questions for interviews

Personal data and background information

- Age, place of origin, field of study?
- When have you arrived to Finland? And when have you started your studies?
- Was moving in Finland your first time abroad?
- Have your parents lived abroad?
- What are your parents doing in China? What is their occupation?
- Have your relatives or close friends of your family lived abroad?

Studying abroad

- How did you get the idea of studying abroad?
- *What do you think you can gain by studying abroad?*

Finances

- How do you finance your studies?
  - Is anyone else, like relatives supporting you?
- Do they push pressure to your studies? Are there expectations because of the financing arrangements?

Travelling

- Have you had a chance to travel other countries in Europe?
  - Are there some places many Chinese students find important to visit?
  - Is travelling just for fun, or do you think it is important to know European culture when in Europe?

Social life in Finland?

- Where do your closest friends in Finland come from?
- Do you usually meet Finnish or international people in other occasions, like in your hobbies in Finland?
- Are there special occasions when you hang around and meet up with special groups of people, for example with Chinese in special annual celebrations etc.?
Finland as a country for future working environment?

- What factors influenced your selection of the country
- What are the best sides of Finland, what the worst sides?
  - (+)
  - (−)
- Have you tried to find out how to get into working life in Finland?
- Do you think Finnish employment regulation is difficult?
  - Finnish working and residence permissions; the Finnish Alien Act?
- After staying in Finland for some years and getting more knowledge on European countries, where else would you go for work/further studies?
- Are you happy with your study so far? What would you change?

Prospects for working life and future plans

- Have you already decided whether to stay here or to move somewhere else?
  - If you’re going to move, do you already know where to move?
- What do you want to do after your studies? Start working or continue studies?
  - If going to China, why would you like to go back to China?
    - Family? Friends? Girl-/boyfriend? Better job opportunities?
- What is important for the future working and living environment?
- What things do you prefer in Finland, or in Europe?
- Does Chinese political situation / state of environment / any other so-called external factors influence your decision to stay in Europe?
- Does Chinese government encourage return migration? If yes, what kind of means or incentives they have? Do they influence to your decision?
- Has your opinion on your home country or city changed since you started your overseas studies?
  - What things do you see important in your home country?

Possible Contacts to Chinese institutions:

- What kind of regular contacts do you have to China?
  - Anything beyond your family members? Girl- or boyfriend in China? Close relatives or friends? Studentmates?
  - Do you have contacts to other overseas Chinese?
  - How about Chinese governmental organizations
Embassy?

Do you still have contacts with professors of your previous university?

**Associations**

- What kind of associations have you been involved in? Why?
  - Are there professional associations?

- Do you follow the news and information on China through websites?
  - What kind of websites?
  - Do you follow government-based websites?
  - Or local-based websites?

**Gender and Chinese overseas migration**

- (Jean) (Questions for both sexes)

- Do you think that it is somehow different for women to move from China than to men? Why so?
- Do you think that women have better chances to develop their work careers in Finland or elsewhere in Europe than in China?
  - Does this have influence in your decision for the future place of residence and work?