THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOUSE AND HOME IN CHINA'S RURAL TO URBAN MIGRATION



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ABSTRACT

Building on previous work that focuses on rural to urban migration and class formation among urban Chinese youth, this thesis explores ideas of middle-class consolidation dynamics centered on the house, as well as on changes in perceptions of home that come with the migration experience. My research shows that, in contemporary China, the house stands at the center of a hierarchy of privileges in middle-class consolidation processes, especially for the middle-class rural migrant group. With this dissertation, I contribute to research that studies rural to urban migration in China by looking at a social group that has been widely overlooked, i.e. middle-class migrants with rural origins and who are employed in high-end industries of the service sector, and to research that examines class distinction by placing homeownership at the center of class-related hierarchies of privilege. I argue that house, as well as ideas of home, is key in middle-class consolidation and reproduction processes, as it is the principal asset that confers class-related legitimation and power, and that it is able to provide both inter-class and intra-class distinction. As a theoretical basis to support my argument, I avail myself of the Bourdieusian approach, which provides an effective categorization model based on the

relational aspects of class membership, as well as the concepts of distinction and class symbolic boundaries, both of which are key to understanding class-related dynamics in contemporary China.

The present project is composed of three empirical chapters that present and analyze the significance of house and home in rural to urban migration from three different perspectives: the effects of migration and class status on perceptions of home; the effects of homeownership on ideas of class and status; and the effects of education on migrant families' housing strategies.

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Introduction

When I was in Shanghai in 2016, a woman whom I met for the first time who hereinafter will be referred to as Wife 3, had just moved into her new house and was experiencing one of the most challenging moments in her life. Certainly, finding herself in a new environment that smelled like fresh paint and cardboard boxes did not help. She looked around, disoriented, struggling to find her own place in the city and not knowing where to start. Like many others in her situation, she found herself with one foot in each of two houses: sometimes, objects or even family members are divided between two or more places.

Gaining a sense of home is a process that every individual experiences at some point during their lifetime. In the contemporary era, people often experience several changes in home as their life takes them along different paths and to different places. Wife 3 observed:

> "Migration is an accepted path nowadays. After all, this generation of ours is always on the move and perhaps we don't need to follow our parents' example: living a whole life in one place and having the same job for a lifetime".

Another person I met during my year in Shanghai, hereinafter referred to as Husband 9, wanted to buy an apartment in Shanghai, but the prices were prohibitive. He had just moved to a slightly bigger apartment with his wife and mother: after the move, they lived in a 60 sqm space with two bedrooms. Every time we met up, he expressed his deep concern about the housing market in the city: he felt very bad about the whole situation in Shanghai, especially because owning a house is important when the children start school as well as for the man's sense of worth and respectability. He was also worried about the new housing policy enforced in March 2016,

according to which migrants needed to have worked in Shanghai for at least five years before being allowed to purchase property. On the other hand, another respondent, Husband 11, had just bought a small apartment in the Pudong area. He was very happy about it, although he still felt bad that prices in Shanghai were so expensive:

> "My wife and I got married last January, we had a 'naked marriage', which means we didn't own a home at the time. I felt very uncomfortable because of this and, therefore, I am really happy to have purchased this apartment, even though it is quite small. I feel like I am luckier than many other migrants, who are still struggling to afford to buy a place."

These individuals' aspirations around housing and their changes in home were far from exceptional. In today's China, there are nearly 285 million rural-to-urban migrant workers (Bureau of National Statistics, 2017) and migration is becoming an ever more accepted path of life.

The first time I had the chance to deeply know and interact with migrants was in 2013, when I was pursuing my M.A. in the city of Hangzhou. At that time, I was working as a volunteer at a local migrant recreational school: migrant parents would take their children there to learn dancing and music skills on weekends or after their regular school day. As part of my M.A. thesis project, I had the chance to interview some of the parents and families on the topic of migrant children education challenges and opportunities in Hangzhou. However, during our conversations, all the parents expressed their concern and disappointment about their accommodation conditions, describing their accommodation facilities as the greatest challenge

and cause for unhappiness in their new life as migrants: many families, in fact, shared experiences of forced relocation as well as the demolition of their dwelling.

A couple of years later I moved back to China, this time to Shanghai, with the aim of investigating individuals' ideas and perceptions of home after migration for my doctoral project, and during this year I spent much time with the members of eleven families, including the individuals discussed above. I started my fieldwork by conducting explorative interviews in urban villages in the suburbs of Shanghai. Although these informal interviews confirmed the importance of house and accommodation in the life of migrants, I realized how an investigation on ideas about home was extremely difficult in such situations of mostly temporary migration and precarious existence in the city.

This realization led to the idea that it would be best to work with middle-class families instead: for nearly a year, I had access to a renowned international high-tech company in Shanghai, where I met my first middle-class respondents. Similar to their working-class counterparts, middle-class migrants shared concerns about housing, describing how the situation of the Shanghai real estate market was making things more and more difficult for potential homeowners in general, but especially for the migrant category. They also seemed interested in discussing their perceptions of home: their migratory journey had, in fact, caused mechanisms of separation and change with respect to their original rural home and identity.

This dissertation aims at building on previous literature on rural to urban migration and class identity in China by arguing that, in contemporary Chinese society, the house stands at the center of a hierarchy of privileges in middle-class consolidation processes, especially for the middle-class rural migrant group, to which the subjects of this project belong.

With this study, I contribute to research that investigates rural to urban migration in China by looking at a social group that has been widely overlooked, i.e. middle-class migrants with rural origins who are employed in high-end industries in the service sector, and to research that examines class distinction by placing homeownership at the center of class-related hierarchies of privilege. The most relevant studies, in fact, have focused on working-class migrants, therefore eliding experiences and challenges of housing aspirations in the city (e.g. L Zhang 2002; A Hanser 2008; W Sun 2009; N Pun 2009; CC Fan 2011; TE Woronow 2012). Furthermore, other studies have dealt with the expanding service sector as a mere destination for working-class migrants, hence overlooking the higher-end industries of the service sector (e.g. A Hanser 2008; TE Woronov 2012; MH Ling 2015).

In this dissertation, I argue that house, as well as ideas of home, is key in middle-class consolidation and reproduction processes, as it is the principal asset that confers class-related legitimation and power, and that it is able to provide both inter-class and intra-class distinction.

As a theoretical basis to support my argument I avail myself of the Bourdieusian approach, which provides an effective categorization model based on the relational aspects of class membership, as well as the concepts of distinction and class symbolic boundaries, both of which are key to understanding class-related dynamics in contemporary China.

As noted above, I carried out in-depth research with eleven middle-class migrant families. The data collection and research methodology is described in greater detail later in this introduction. For now, I wish to highlight that these family members' accounts and experiences provided me with the data to answer the following research questions: "What are the significance and

implications of home owning for middle-class migrant families?" and "How do migration and class status affect middle-class migrants' perceptions of home?".

My efforts to answer these questions were guided by two key concepts: social distinction and capital convertibility. Social distinction is essential for individuals to secure middle-class status belonging, and derives from the presence of strong symbolic boundaries that discern and separate the middle class from the lower classes. My data shows that one of the strongest assets that middle-class families need to obtain in order to achieve their social distinction is a house. A house is not only linked to economic capital; most of all it allows for conversion into other forms of capital (P Bourdieu 1979): symbolic (i.e. status), social (creation of strong networks based on class belonging) and cultural (allows middle-class youth to attend quality schools).

The present dissertation comprises three empirical chapters that present and analyze the significance of house and home from three different perspectives: the effects of migration and class status on perceptions of home; the effects of homeownership on ideas of class and status; and the effects of education on migrant families' housing strategies. First, though, I introduce the subjects of this project and identify both the meaning and requirements of middle-class membership in contemporary China.

Subjects: middle-class wàidìrén with rural origins

The participants in this project belong to a specific category of people in Chinese society. In fact, the members of the migrant families all have rural origins and they have all embarked on an inter-provincial migratory journey. Subjects who experience migration and, therefore, found

themselves residing at some point in their lives in a place that was not the one they were born or raised in are often referred to in Chinese as “外地人” (*wàidìrén*) or “外来人” (*wàiláirén*). The two labels, often used interchangeably, are opposite to “本地人” (*běndìrén*), which identifies the “local population”. As the principal recipients of migratory flows, urban areas are the major contexts where labels “本地人” and “外地人” are used. Furthermore, cities like Shanghai, where the population is composed of a large number of “outsiders”, tend to suffer from phenomena of provincialism: owing to the city’s advanced economy and high levels of human capital investment, locals and foreigners are often in sharp contrast, with “外地人”usually being associated with an inferior social status.

Nevertheless, the label of “外地人” is much more desirable in the Chinese context than “农民工” (*nóngmíngōng*), with the latter referring to migrant workers and denoting the peasant and rural origins of an individual, associating him or her with hard labor and poorly paid jobs. “外地人”, on the other hand, provides a more objective connotation by simply conveying a geographical meaning. As far as the participants in this study were concerned, given their high social status as well as their white-collar occupations, they identified themselves and were identified by others as “外地人” rather than “农民工”. Moreover, the majority of my participants had received a university-level education, which has allowed them to secure middle-class membership and an advanced social and professional position. Therefore, the subjects of this project differ from the so-called “ant tribe”, or a social group made up of graduates who have not managed to secure a job after graduation and, consequently, are living in precarious conditions. Although it is important to make such distinctions among different

categories and labels which classify the Chinese population, in this project I refer to the subjects of my research as “migrants”.

Definition of class in Chinese society

Class is one of the most contested sociological concepts, and definitions of class are often characterized as falling into various categories. In this study, I will use Bourdieu’s definition of class and middle class, as I believe such definitions are the most useful for this analysis.

According to Bourdieu, social class refers to the position of individuals in a given social space, a system of objective determinations related to the so-called “class habitus”, or socially constructed dispositions which are class-specific (P Bourdieu 1984). When determining class identity, a central element is class difference awareness: what differentiates one class from another are the economic and symbolic boundaries between different social classes. Such boundaries are essential as they provide each social class with specific elements of “distinction” (P Bourdieu 1984). In this analysis, for instance, middle-class migrant families aim to secure a place in the middle class by keeping economic and symbolic distance from the urban working class or, more particularly, from other rural migrants to the cities. When analyzing class differences, income and wealth alone are not enough to determine class identity and membership. Therefore, Bourdieu identifies four different types of capital that are sources of power and socially valued as important elements of class distinction: economic capital (income and wealth), cultural capital (education, language and taste), symbolic capital (status and consumption patterns) and social capital (networks) (P Bourdieu 1984). Defining class identity with the aid of these four categories provides a clear framework for class analysis.

Before defining the Chinese middle class, it is important to clarify the connection between class and status, which is also a key element in this analysis. As seen when introducing the four different types of capital, status is a symbolic component of class identity. An individual's position in social space affects status, which is a manifestation of social class differences and distinction based on symbolic boundaries (P Bourdieu 1984). The presence of such boundaries causes the creation of "status groups", which are formed primarily in the area of consumption (P Bourdieu 1984). In Chinese society in particular, it is a common conception that material goods match personal identity and, therefore, that economic and symbolic power are often closely connected (P Bourdieu 1984). That is why status, or lifestyle as Bourdieu defines it, is an essential element in the pursuit of middle-class belonging as well as a very strong symbolic component in a family's quest for social standing.

Another important symbolic element of class distinction in Chinese society is 素质 (*sùzhì*), a concept concerned with the idea of human capital. *Sùzhì* can be described as a set of social distinctions that contribute to the definition of an individual's quality in terms of consumption practices. It is a term strongly related to status and social esteem, education and consumption (A Hanser 2008; L Tomba 2009). Starting in 1999, and following the dramatic reform and expansion of higher education, the term *sùzhì* quickly spread from being used solely in the language of public policies into a broader connotation (A Anagmost 1997; A Hanser 2008). In fact, the dramatic expansion of education shortly anticipated the decision by the CCP to encourage the rise of the middle class in order to achieve greater economic and political goals, as defined below, as well as a "high-quality" and "civilized" citizenry: it goes without saying that in the achievement of these goals, education plays a central role. Hence, s*ùzhì* gradually became the Chinese variant of "cultural capital" (M Chen, D Goodman 2013) as well as a critical

element of classification among different social groups. Generally speaking, high *sùzhì* started to be associated with university education, good manners, a white-collar job and an urban residence (M Chen, D Goodman 2013). Furthermore, various goods and services, such as clothing, cars, foreign goods and holidays were advertised as being beneficial for increasing *sùzhì*; at the same time, many books, newspapers, magazines, and television programs provided advice to parents about how to make sure that their children had a high *sùzhì* (V Fong 2004; A Kipnis 2006; A Hanser 2008; T Kuan 2015). When the term is used in relation to a middle-class lifestyle, it usually extends to: advanced technology purchases, shopping in malls with international brands, eating out often, consuming foreign foods and drinks, learning foreign languages, engaging in leisure activities and foreign travel, and providing foreign education for one's child (A Hanser 2008). *Sùzhì* basically means that people are different, and people with a high *sùzhì* can enjoy a status of distinction and a set of privileges. In order to be considered a person of high *sùzhì*, one must convert his or her economic capital into cultural and symbolic capital, and middle class standards represent the ideal benchmark against which everyone is measured.

The middle class in China

Generally speaking, the category "middle class" refers to an intermediate class whose members possess skills, knowledge or organizational experience rather than significant economic capital (the dominant class), labor power or nothing (the subordinate classes) (D Goodman, 2014). In China, the middle class is now usually referred to as 中产阶级 (*zhōngchǎn jiējí*), or the "middle stratum", by one estimate accounting for 13% of the Chinese population (Y Miao 2016, 2017).

Although the middle class includes a heterogeneous group of individuals (M Chen, D Goodman 2013), members of the Chinese middle class generally meet the following requirements, which I have classified according to Bourdieu's aforementioned four species of capital.

In terms of economic capital, middle-class families may own or not own property; however, they should have the potential purchasing power to acquire property at some point in their lifetime, possibly before their child starts kindergarten; they should also have an individual annual salary (in Shanghai) in the range of 150,000 to 400,000 RMB, while the annual income for a middle-class household is in the range of 200,000 to 500,000 RMB (D Goodman 2014). In fact, the average income of the individuals I interviewed in Shanghai was 200,000 RMB, thereby placing them in the category of middle class (in terms of jobs, middle-class members are usually white collar or entrepreneurs). With respect to cultural capital, middle-class members should have received at least a secondary level education. When it comes to symbolic capital, middle-class individuals are perceived as having a high "social quality", or *sùzhì*. Such a high human capital is mostly noticeable in family lifestyles, which include high quality or Western consumer goods (D Barton, Y Chen, A Jin 2013), or in the pursuit of knowledge. Connected to symbolic capital is social capital, meaning that middle-class families have "prestigious" networks that also belong to the middle class or even the dominant class. Middle-class members usually have a high-quality network of social connections, which can be potentially beneficial to the social advancement and reproduction of the family.

In the words of A. Kipnis (2012), the re-creation of one's own networks and relationships implies the re-creation of the Self. Individuals are socially determined, and therefore one's relationships in fact constitute one's Self. In Chinese society, the creation of relationships is both a means and an end: having a wide network of relationships is an ideal state for most

individuals and, at the same time, relationships can affect one's social life and are essential within the process of class identity formation (E Tsang 2014). Practically speaking, a strong network can be the source of new job opportunities or even the means through which one's child can access a "key school", as I discuss in Chapter Three in relation to Family 6. In terms of family networks, the cooperation of multiple family members is extremely beneficial to the middle-class reproduction and advancement of the nuclear family, as analyzed in the second subsection of Chapter Two.

Middle class in China is a fairly recent phenomenon. It was only in 2002 that the CCP decided to control the expansion of the upper class, encourage the growth of the middle class and reduce numbers in the working class (L Tomba 2014). Such a decision was largely motivated by the fact that middle class educational and professional aspirations, as well as their tastes, would help increase consumerism and, therefore, boost the domestic market (L Tomba 2014). Another reason has political implications: the middle stratum is an important means to achieve political stability. In fact, middle-class members can help to moderate income inequalities and to diminish the risks of social dissatisfaction (L Tomba 2009). A final reason regards behavior and human quality: the middle class is largely used by the Chinese government as an example for the general population to improve *sùzhì*, especially as concerns migrants. In other words, the middle class was born as a means for the government to achieve economic and political goals, as well as a high-quality citizenry (T Jacka, A Kipnis, S Sargeson 2010).

The members of China's middle class (including my respondents) belong to the first generation of the middle class in their country. As the first generation, Chinese middle-class members are different from their parents and their extended family members. They feel disoriented in this new middle-class world, which is characterized by feelings of insecurity and anxiety arising

from the precariousness of their middle-class state (E Tsang 2014; Y Miao 2017). In fact, in contemporary China, resources are not concentrated in the hands of the middle class; instead, the middle class are trapped between the upper and lower classes. In other words, this "sandwich middle class" strive for upward mobility in the face of extremely intense competition, trying desperately to climb the ladder of success with the risk of sliding down to the bottom of society at any moment. Therefore, when it comes down to real life, many members of the Chinese middle class feel a strong sense of pressure and lack of security (K Mok 2009; Y Miao 2017). Husband 5 made a statement which was shared by many of my other respondents:

> "Yes, I'm considered a white-collar city person and part of the middle class. Many people envy my life, my family, my work, my holidays and leisure time. But I always feel anxious. What if I lose my job? And even if I manage to stay in this company, how far up the career ladder can I climb? What if I cannot afford to buy a house for my family? Even if I can buy a house, then comes the mortgage. What if I can't provide my children with a decent education? And though I am healthy today, will I become poor if I have a serious illness one day? I spend days and nights looking at housing prices and feel very worried. There is always something to worry about, we can never relax."

As a result of such insecurity, many of my participants found themselves working overtime and even felt guilty when going back to their hometowns because they were taking time away from their work and their possible career development, which adversely affected their prospects of accumulating economic capital and increasing their purchasing power.

My participants were all middle class if measured against the economic, cultural, social and symbolic indicators outlined above, and all of them shared feelings of anxiety. However, the

middle class is not a monolithic category; on the contrary, it is heterogeneous (B Gustafsson, T Sicular, X Yang 2017). Therefore, it is possible to occupy stronger or weaker positions within the middle-class group, on the basis of the possession of class-related social privileges as well as of stronger or weaker shares of the four species of capital. As for my participants, they all belonged to the lower stratum of the Chinese middle class and in this dissertation I explore their journey, ideas and strategies aimed at securing their membership to the urban Chinese middle class. My subjects, therefore, can be categorized as "middle class in the making", i.e. a social group who has embarked on a journey of consolidation of their urban middle-class status through the means of homeownership.

In terms of heterogeneity, I have identified the salient differences among my middle-class participants for the four main indicators of middle-class membership.

Starting from economic capital, the participants' occupations varied. Although all of the main participants (the nuclear family members) were employed in the service sector, the range of jobs was wide, ranging from software engineers to teachers to tour leaders to entrepreneurs. In terms of symbolic capital, the main differences were related to consumption patterns and lifestyle. I found that the more educated participants would not depend on purchasing material goods to improve their *sùzhì*, but would instead rely on knowledge accumulation and personal improvement. Meanwhile, some less educated individuals paid much attention to brands. A small minority (three migrant households) owned property, but most of them were struggling to find housing opportunities. They also differed with respect to cultural capital: most had received a degree, but there were also participants with a high-school diploma (two members of migrant households). In the case of "mixed couples", as was the case in Family 6, where the wife had a degree and the husband did not, the latter was more than once defined by the spouse and her

family as being of "lower quality", 素质低 (*sùzhì dī*), due to the "lack of knowledge", and therefore conversations with him could not go beyond a certain depth. Other elements of heterogeneity include the knowledge of the English language and of foreign languages in general, and related to this, travel experiences outside China. These factors all contribute to an individual's or a family's symbolic and cultural capital, affecting their prestige among other things.

Furthermore, my participants' rural background affected their journey to secure urban middle-class belonging. In many aspects, the Shanghai urban working class and my participants shared similar struggles. Although a rural *hùkǒu* can be an obstacle to achieving the middle-class dream, social, symbolic and cultural capital are convertible (P Bourdieu 1984) and may be obtained through economic means. This explains why my participants put all of their energy into their career. At the same time, a main difference between the urban working class and my middle-class participants of rural origins pertained to social capital, or networks of support, which are usually present from the start in the case of locals, whose families are most likely to be already settled in the city. Migrants, on the other hand, may have to face reunification with their families or extended families, which can be a source of struggle and stress, although ultimately it can also be a source of support.

House purchasing procedures also differ for long-term residents and migrants because the latter must have lived in Shanghai for five years and must follow specific regulations for stay permit holders, whereas local residents need fewer documents and, if in possession of a local *hùkǒu* for at least three years, have no waiting time (The State Council of the PRC, 2016). Moreover, in terms of migrant children's education, when not in possession of a local *hùkǒu* a migrant student

must go back to his or her place of residency in order to attend high school (this is why many migrants would prefer to obtain a local *hùkǒu* before their children attend high school). Rural origins also affected my participants' sense of belonging. A feeling that one does not have roots in the city made home owning a route to belonging for migrants, whereas for locals a sense of belonging was mainly linked to networks in the city, specifically their family and friends.

Participant families, field site and methodology

As noted, the fieldwork for this study was conducted in Shanghai from September 2015 to June 2016, where I conducted repeated in-depth interviews and participant observation with the members of eleven families. What follows is a table which summarizes the most salient and relevant characteristics of the families: Deng, Li, Liang, Mao, Meng, Shi, Tong, Wang, Wang, Ye and Zhu. The families will be cited throughout the following chapters.

		Age	Province of birth	Shanghai *hukou*	Level of education	Major	Year of arrival	Job title	Economic sector	Homeownership status
Family 1	**Mr Deng**	28	Hubei	No	Postgraduate	Software engineering	2014	Software engineer	Private	Renter
	Mrs Deng	27	Hubei	No	Postgraduate	Software engineering	2014	Software engineer	Private	Renter
Family 2	**Ms Li**	27	Heilong jiang	No	Undergraduate	Foreign languages	2009	Luxury brand clerk	Private	Renter
Family 3	**Mr Liang**	35	Hebei	Yes	Undergraduate	Foreign languages	2009	Tour guide	Private	Owner
	Mrs Liang	31	Guangdong	Yes	Undergraduate	Design	2009	Entrepreneur (tourism)	Private	Owner
Family 4	**Mr Mao**	28	Sichuan	No	Postgraduate	Software engineering	2013	Software engineer	Private	Renter
	Mrs Mao	28	Sichuan	No	Postgraduate	Literature	2013	Teacher	Public	Renter
Family 5	**Mr Meng**	29	Hebei	No	Ph.D	Software engineering	2015	Software engineer	Private	Renter
	Mrs Meng	28	Hebei	-	Postgraduate	Finance	-	Financial analyst	Private	Renter
Family 6	**Mr Shi**	39	Anhui	Yes	Diploma	-	1995	Entrepreneur (Wi-Fi services)	Private	Owner
	Mrs Shi	36	Hubei	Yes	Undergraduate	Literature	1998	Teacher	Private	Owner

Family 7	**Mr Tong**	25	Jiangsu	No	Postgraduate	Software engineering	2015	Software engineer	Private	Renter
Family 8	**Mr Wang**	25	Hubei	No	Postgraduate	Software engineer	2015	Software engineer	Private	Renter
	Ms Wang	22	Hubei	-	Undergraduate	Finance	-	Student	-	Renter
Family 9	**Mr Wang**	30	Anhui	No	Ph.D	Software engineering	2014	Software engineer	Private	Renter
	Mrs Wang	28	Anhui	No	Postgraduate	Foreign languages	2014	Employee	Private	Renter
Family 10	**Mr Ye**	27	Guangdong	No	Ph.D	Software engineering	2014	Software engineer	Private	Renter
	Ms Ye	24	Guangdong	No	Undergraduate	Journalism	-	Student	Private	Renter
Family 11	**Mr Zhu**	27	Jiangsu	No	Postgraduate	Software engineering	2014	Software engineer	Private	Owner
	Mrs Zhu	26	Jiangsu	No	Undergraduate	Marketing	2014	Employee	Private	Owner

As indicated above, I followed the members of each family for ten months, and I am still in contact with them. Although in the notes above I only introduce the main participants, i.e. the nuclear family members, I have met and interviewed extended family members and close networks as well. The main criteria for case selection (ML Small 2009) were the following: all of the families had migration experiences and had lived in Shanghai for at least one year (a reasonable time length that allows migrants to settle in). Furthermore, the adults in these nuclear families were all employed in service sector industries with individual annual salaries in the range of 150,000 to 400,000 RMB, preferably working as white-collar workers or entrepreneurs. This last criterion was personally selected in order to interview families who shared a common professional background and, therefore, a similar status: as a result, the selected households all belonged to the Chinese middle class.

The main research method used to analyze the data was grounded theory (Glaser, Strauss 1967), which provides a methodology that allows the concerns of the social participants to emerge in context (C Goulding 2002; K Charmaz 2006) and is thus useful for research of a social nature. In order to address my research questions, I needed to identify a methodology that was not fully pre-framed and which enabled data to emerge without being predefined by a theory, a research paradigm, or the researcher herself. Grounded theory is an inductive methodology that looks for patterns within the data in order to explain the research question and generate theory. The methodology does not attempt to understand social phenomena as the individual participants in that social phenomena view it; rather, it uncovers systematic patterns in their experiences.

The *modus operandi* of grounded theory entails asking individuals about their own experiences in a given social context and, subsequently, uncovering patterns that participants might not even be aware of (Glaser, Strauss 1967). It is clear how data becomes the focus of analysis in such a

methodology; the data is analyzed to illuminate patterns and social processes that answer the research questions. As such, it is a methodology that develops data from simple description through conceptualization in order to explain the social phenomena in question. It is, therefore, a practical pattern-finding method that limits interpretation through an *a priori* theoretical framework or the subjective interpretation of the researcher (K Charmaz 2006). Because of these features, grounded theory methodology is useful in addressing the critique that empirical inquiry is descriptive and inferior to philosophically driven inquiry, or that empirical inquiry is theoretically bound within preconceived ideas about the phenomena, either through the lens of the research framework or the researcher (K Charmaz 2006). It is a methodology that is not used to test or reaffirm existing theory, and it is useful when little is known about a social phenomenon and/or to provide a fresh slant on current knowledge (C Goulding 1998). Because there is little existing literature about how middle-class migrant families in China experience migration and home in an urban context, grounded theory is useful because it is not tied to any one theoretical stance.

In order to answer my research questions, I used a variety of data collection strategies, which I adapted throughout the ten months of fieldwork in order to obtain data which were significant, personal and relevant for this study. Along with face-to-face formal interviews, I used other more informal means of data collection, such as guided conversations in informal settings, e-mail exchanges, video-calls and voice-messages. The selection of such a varied range of data collection approaches mainly derived from the personal rapport I built up with the participant families, who expressed a desire to share personal experiences and thoughts with me through more informal means of communication as well. I therefore welcomed the participants to get in touch with me whenever they wished. These informal means of communication also allowed us

to keep in touch even after my fieldwork research had concluded: three years after our first meeting, I continue to be in contact with all of the families. The approach of combining formal and informal means of data collection was not only a consequence of the strong rapport and trust that developed with the families; it was also valuable for my goal of obtaining meaningful and personal data, an objective which is harder to achieve when merely relying on formal interviews and meetings. Formal interviews are, in fact, not as natural as informal conversations, and in interviews an "asymmetry of power" between the interviewer and the participants is more salient (M Cardano 2003).

During my formal face-to-face interview meetings, I relied on semi-structured interviews, participant observation and a memo (G Gobo 1999; J Corbin, A Strauss 2015), and I have recorded these interviews both in oral form on a recording device and in written form in my fieldwork diary. The use of a memo is helpful to note down observations and insights that are not includable during the audio-recording process. Regarding the participant observation, I paid particular attention to four aspects: linguistic (what is expressed through language), paralinguistic (modulation of the speech when significant variations occur, such as intensity, tone, etc.), extra-linguistic (intentional or non-intentional forms of communication that are expressed through body language, such as posture, laughter, tears, etc.) and context (external elements that may or may not affect the interview, such as the arrival of a third person or details of the setting that may convey specific ideas (M Cardano 2003). As regards the semi-structured interviews, I covered the following general topics, which I adapted as the interviews proceeded and as new data emerged, and which relate to two major categories: ideas of home; and housing and homeownership.

1. Ideas of home

- Home-related terminology and ideas in the Chinese language and culture
- Gaining a sense of home, i.e. creating a new home
- Experiences and ideas of place identity
- Individual identity: perceptions and changes
- Ideal home: memory and nostalgia
- Sense of home *versus* private life
- Separation and reunion: going back to and leaving the rural home
- Ideas of family in the Chinese culture
- Migration and changing perspectives (urban *versus* rural)
- Ideas of networks and *guānxì*

2. Housing and homeownership

- The Shanghai housing market
- House and home owning: ideas, challenges and goals
- House and status: ideas of status in relation to interior décor and neighborhoods
- Ideas and experiences of the Chinese middle class
- Connection between housing and public schooling
- Ideas of networks and *guānxì*

- Ideas of housing for the extended family

To analyze my data, I transcribed and summarized all of the audio-recordings and field notes in a Word file and then grouped the data into core categories, common categories and lower level concepts. This process allowed me to organize my findings in preparation for theory building and to identify the core themes which would constitute the heart of the three empirical chapters in this dissertation. Apart from collecting data through interviews and conversations with the families, I also kept a fieldwork diary where I noted down observations and information which derived from both my personal insights and experiences during my ten-month fieldwork and official sources. In this dissertation, in fact, I address themes such as the Chinese education system and urban development planning in Shanghai. To do this, I had to turn to more official government written sources for more official data, such as official documents, statistical yearbooks and government websites.

As noted above, I carried out in-depth interviews and conversations not only with the nuclear family members but also with the members of the extended families and close networks. When planning the interviews, I opted to use a variety of interview forms and conditions. For instance, I interviewed each family member both alone and in the presence of other participants in order to detect differences, if any, in their replies under different conditions. Interviewing my participants in a group setting showed two specific characteristics: first, some participants did not feel comfortable sharing delicate or personal information in the presence of their family members, especially the nuclear family members. Secondly, group interviews allowed participants to recall past experiences and anecdotes with more precision: when one participant was missing a detail in the story or was unsure about a certain event, most of the time another participant would cut in and provide the required information.

During the ten months of fieldwork, I formally met once a week with the participants, with the exception of Family 6, who I was able to meet with twice a week. I used video-calls with some of the extended family members instead of in-person interviews whenever reaching their hometown for face-to-face meetings was not possible, often times with the help of the nuclear family participants. Although the interviews were mainly conducted in the respondents' homes or at their workplace, other more informal locations were selected for informal interviews and conversations, such as restaurants and cafés, which allowed me to meet with the participants more often and deepen our relationship. I believe building personal relationships with the families was essential for them to share their most private and intimate thoughts with the researcher; therefore, I worked to create multiple formal and informal occasions to better know my participants during the fieldwork months. I believe that in studies of this nature it is essential to have a well-rounded picture of the participants: this was made possible by building friendly relationships and repeatedly visiting the families, which also made the families feel comfortable when disclosing personal information.

The approach of interviewing all family members is extremely valuable in understanding intra-family relationships and highlighting the relational aspect of ideas of house and home. Family is a significant component of the home as well as of the migratory experience, and housing aspirations and projects are the result of practical considerations that often involve the extended family as well. Furthermore, combining the experiences and perceptions of each family member contributed to the complexity and the significance of the accounts, which consequently have provided me with extremely rich and valuable material. As I highlight specifically in Chapter Two, the extended family and kinship networks directly or indirectly contribute to the social reproduction of the nuclear family: therefore, understanding the perspective of different family

members has turned out to be invaluable in order to draw a complete picture on the migrants' housing aspirations as well as on their ideas of home.

The material collected constitutes the heart of the three empirical chapters in this dissertation, which are organized as follows.

Map of chapters

Chapter One centers on the home, the perceptions of which are challenged and modified by migration dynamics and outcomes. One core finding pertained to the effects of migration on people's perceptions of home: I noticed how some families identified their original home as their "home", whereas other families had managed to achieve a "shift" in the location of their home from their original home to their created home in Shanghai. These two opposite perceptions about where the home of primary reference was located are not coincidental. Rather, I have identified a pattern that connects home-shifting to upward mobility and social advancement: in fact, the shift in the location of the home happens in parallel to an increase or change in quality of the four types of capital that are held by the middle-class migrants (economic, cultural, social and symbolic). In other words, the upward mobility process of migrants towards securing middle-class belonging parallels the process of them "gaining a sense of home" in Shanghai, and this acquires more significance for them than their home in the place of origin. This chapter is organized around three themes (career, time and space, and networks), each of which serve the purpose of providing practical insights to answer the research question: "How do migration and social class affect perceptions of home?"

Chapters Two and Three center on the house, the physical dimension of the home.

Chapter Two investigates ideas of house and home in relation to status and class ambitions. The main argument is that processes of social mobility and the urbanization of the migrants parallel the processes of home owning and of the house becoming home (through decoration, for example). The quest for middle-class status as well as middle-class reproduction of the family are achieved through house and networks, two elements that are closely connected. The analysis in this chapter proceeds in three subsections to examine the key themes of: entitlement to property, the symbolic consumption of house-related items and network reinforcement through the home. The first subsection compares renters and owners, in order to demonstrate why owning a home is so important for migrant families in Shanghai who are pursuing middle-class reproduction. The second subsection looks at how middle-class identity is achieved through consumption and home decoration choices. Specifically, it demonstrates that the construction of the home is an expressive form associated with middle-class identity and the pursuit of social distinction (P Bourdieu 1984), because expenditure patterns and the consumption of furnishing and décor reflect individuality, lifestyle and social mobility. The third subsection shows how migrant families can achieve social status through family and networks by purchasing a home. Indeed, the extended family is a very strong aid in the achievement of the family's middle-class reproduction: the help of family members allows migrants to focus on their career, potentially increasing income and status.

Chapter Three looks at the house in relation to education, demonstrating that children's education is the strongest driving force affecting middle-class migrant families' housing aspirations and strategies. The option of a good school for one's child strongly drives the desire to purchase a family home rather than rent one. Moreover, the *de facto* capitalization of school

quality though house value in China directly affects families' housing and neighborhood strategies, leading to educational as well as residential segregation along class lines. Housing strategies gravitate around school options, creating a two-way dependency between school and education on one side and class, status and housing on the other. Schools drive middle-class migrant families to be willing to utilize every means to purchase a house as well as to work towards obtaining a Shanghai *hùkǒu*, since house and *hùkǒu* facilitate the process for children to attend public schools. This chapter examines the pursuit of middle-class reproduction through school-related housing strategies by focusing on the three themes of entitlement to property, status by association (i.e. the effects of consumption patterns on class identity), and the link between education and cultural status.

The three empirical chapters of this dissertation provide a holistic and multi-faceted picture of how ideas about house and home are closely connected with the families' social advancement and middle-class belonging. Homeownership, as well as building a home in Shanghai, not only brings social distinction and more secure class belonging to middle-class migrant families, but also allows for capital convertibility. In this way, homeowners can convert their shares of economic capital into other forms of capital, which are key for middle-class membership and reproduction. In social distinction and in capital conversion lie the significance of the house and home for middle-class migrant families, as is presented and analysed in this dissertation starting from ideas of home (Chapter One) and then moving onto the significance of housing and homeownership (Chapters Two and Three).

CHAPTER I

THE EFFECTS OF MIGRATION AND SOCIAL CLASS ON PERCEPTIONS OF HOME

Introduction

In traditional Chinese culture, the family was the heart of society. In the family home, according to neo-Confucian ideals (prominent during the Song and Ming dynasties), the management of domestic spaces meant most of all management of its members: an individual decision, undiscussed within the family, was not conceivable, and the head of the family would always have the last word. Social relations were also only conceived of as relations among families: families organized weddings and careers for each member, decided which individual abilities each member could cultivate and whether they should receive an education (J Chin 1987).

Identification of family with domestic spaces is also linguistically evident: the Chinese term both for "family" and for a "house inhabited by a family" is 家 (*jiā).* In the word 家庭 (*jiātíng)*, which means family, the character 庭 (*tíng*) is the one for "courtyard" (C Stafford 2000). The connection between house and family, therefore, is very strong and, together, house and family generate the concept of home.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the meaning of home as a subject for empirical investigation and theoretical exploration. However, there are multiple views as to how "home" is to be defined and analyzed: Gurney, one of the most influential scholars in the field, argues that home is merely an ideological construct created from people's emotionally connoted

experiences of where they happen to live (CM Gurney 1997). However, I argue that home is a definable and analyzable "socio-spatial system". Specifically, home is not merely a question of feelings and experience, but rather an intellectual construction that can be affected by numerous factors that derive from life experiences.

Home is an especially interesting concept when applied to migration, a phenomenon which implies a separation from one's original home in order to create a new home in a different place. Separation produces the need for adaptation to new contexts and patterns, but most of all separation produces change: for middle-class migrants, the most important change occurs in terms of social status and class belonging. Individuals and families of migration acquire new skills, experiences, perspectives, as well as new identities that reflect the new urban environment and lifestyle.

This chapter advances a new framework for analyzing the concept of home from the perspective of migration. I argue that advancement in social class and the consequent increase or qualitative change in the four types of capital that most affect class belonging (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) are the most influential factors causing a "shift" of the home and generating distance for the migrant between the place of origin and that of destination. A shift of the home occurs when the place of destination (created home) acquires more importance than the place of origin. Furthermore, when a shift of the home occurs, the dominant urban context exerts a higher influence on individuals' beliefs, behaviors and aspirations.

First, however, I review the existing literature on home and migration.

Migration, family and home

Numerous studies have focused on housing policies for migrants (Y Huang, WAV Clark 2002; W Wu 2004; L Shi, S Li, H Sato, J Chen, F Guo, Y Wu 2011; T Sicular 2013), while others have examined housing preferences and consumption patterns and the channels used by migrants to find a house (L Zhang 2001, 2010; W Wu 2002, 2004). Some studies have looked at migrant experiences from a psychological point of view, highlighting migrants' struggles in recreating their social identity in a new urban context (T Jacka 2006; E Florence 2006; W Sun 2009, 2014). Finally, research has focused on the role of return migrants in the countryside, left-behind children and migrant children's education (J Kwong 2004; F Yan 2005; Z Huang, K Xu 2006; C Duan, G Yang 2008; M Zhou, R Murphy and R Tao 2014; R Murphy 2014).

Further studies have analyzed migration from the perspective of family dynamics. In fact, studies on migration have shown that household deliberations and strategies are central when investigating migration decisions, patterns and outcomes. However, the conventional household strategies approach stresses the economic benefits that households achieve through migration (TP Boehm 1991). Thus, migration is often viewed as a strategy to increase income and diversify income sources for the entire household (V Ortiz 1996; GF De Jong 2000; RH Adams and J Page 2003). Moreover, in some developing countries and poor areas, migration and remittances from migrant work are fundamental for the subsistence of rural households (FK Goldscheider 1987; J Itzigsohn 1995; SA Radcliffe 1991). An approach that merely focuses on economic considerations, however, tends to pay little attention to the social relations and hierarchy hidden behind household decision-making. Furthermore, most studies on migration in China focus on the economic calculations of household strategies rather than the power

dynamics among household members (C Wallace 2002; RH Adams and J Page 2003; CC Fan 2008).

Increasingly, however, researchers have begun to consider the non-economic factors of migration strategies (Y Zhao 1999; G Hugo 2005; WAV Clark and Y Huang 2006). Odland and Ellis (1988), for example, found evidence that potential migrants may decide to sacrifice the economic benefits of migration in order to keep the household intact. Moreover, recent updates to the household strategy approach, especially by feminist scholars, have drawn attention to intra-household power relations, including gender hierarchy (S Chant and SA Radcliffe 1992; JH Momsen 1992; S Chant 1996; VA Lawson 1998; M Jarvis 1999; R Silvey and VA Lawson 1999; KD Willis and B Yeoh 2000; L Lingam 2005; K Eder 2006; R Fincher 2007). Marriage and gender roles within marriage are found to be central in explaining differences in migration patterns and decision-making between men and women (SA Radcliffe 1991; M Cerrutti and DS Massey 2001). However, few studies have dealt with middle-class migrants, and no studies so far have investigated how rural to urban migration can change perceptions of home and which factors may cause a change in perception. My research intends to address this lacuna.

Home: a conceptual analysis

Scholarly research has revealed multiple meanings of home, such as decent material conditions, emotional and physical wellbeing, loving and caring social relations, control and privacy, and simply having a living/sleeping place (CM Gurney 1997). Home is a multidimensional concept, and although it may appear to be a subjective idea, it is actually possible to analyze it with a certain degree of objectivity.

A conceptual definition of home is illustrated in the table below. My year of interacting with and listening to migrants in Shanghai led me to identify at least eleven dimensions of meaning for the multi-faceted concept of "home". These dimensions refer not so much to the home in general (although some of them are in common), but rather to the ideological construct of home after migration and separation, which comprises ideas of translocal home:[1]

DIMENSION OF MEANING	DEFINITION
Shelter	Physical structure, such as a house, connected to the concepts of security and status
Hearth	Psychological feeling of coziness, domestic intimacy
Heart	Peaceful and loving atmosphere in the home
Family	Psychological feeling of belonging to a group, which includes both nuclear and/or extended family
Private Life	Inner, private world of the home. Each member may have its own. It also includes personal objects invested with symbolic meaning

[1] The content and analysis in the table are a personal product of fieldwork research

Roots	Source of meaningfulness, which also includes social relations, cultural and linguistic identity, and rituals. This may also be connected to the concepts of origins
Archetype	Ideal home. This includes the key concepts of memory and nostalgia
Familiarity	Psychological feeling of belonging, security and continuity; the home is a comfort zone that gives meaning and security to one's life. Familiarity also includes routines, language and physical objects in the home. This dimension gives a sense of intimacy with the world: knowing that things are in their place along with the individual who inhabits the home
Magnet	Psychological feeling of having a place to go back to. The home can also be the place that attracts reunifications and family reunions
Backstage	Psychological feeling of being oneself; the home is the place where all masks come off and where individuals prepare themselves for

	their "performance" in the outer world. It is also connected with the feeling of both physical and emotional relaxation and personal freedom, 任性 (*rènxìng*)
Externalization	Meets the need for personalization and for being surrounded by things that represent the Self. Individuals and home go hand in hand, finding a proper balance only when they reflect one another. This is also connected with status and public image

All of these dimensions contribute to creating the idea of home, and changing the perception of these elements can cause a shift of the home in favor of a new one.

Home and family terminology

In Chinese, there are different ways of referring to the home and various home-related concepts and terminology, all of which came to my attention at different points in my interactions with migrant families in Shanghai.[2]

[2] This glossary comprises both personal research and fieldwork participants' contributions

- 家，*jiā*: home, family, inhabited house, household, hometown, lineage.

  The concept of *jiā* has evolved through time: while the neo-Confucian *jiā* can be represented as a tree that grows to accumulate different generations, with migration and fragmentation *jiā* is no longer a tree but a nest, which conveys ideas of place and home. In Shanghainese, *jiā* is referred to as "*woli"* or "*wolixiang"*, which means "toward the inside of the nest/room", showing a more intimate view of the home. *Jiā* is the central fulcrum around which family members revolve. There is still a collective view of the family, and family members are often introduced as: "我们家… (小孩)" (*wǒmen jiā… (xiǎohái)*), "our family's… (child)", where *jiā* is the central fulcrum that gives family members a sense of belonging. From a temporal perspective, *jiā* in the meaning of "house" refers to the present home.

- 老家, *lǎojiā*: hometown, original home.

  This usually refers to male ancestors, representing a concept denoting an individual's roots or origins, leading back to a previous time and place.

- 家乡, *jiāxiāng*: native place, hometown.

  This concept refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a family and to a shared culture.

- 故乡, *gùxiāng*: old home, birth place.

  This concept has a temporal meaning, referring to an individual's past.

- 异乡, *yìxiāng*: foreign land, everywhere but one's hometown.

In migration, *yìxiāng* is connected to an individual's present and is, in many ways, the opposite of *gùxiāng*: the former refers to the present and to the "real home", whereas the latter refers to the past and to the "ideal home", where the term "ideal" indicates a home that resides in one's memory or mind.

- 故居, *gùjū*: former residence.

  This term refers to the places where the dead lived during their lives.

When dealing with family and home in the Chinese context, it is not always easy to distinguish between the terms "family" (*jiā*, 家) and "household" (*hù*, 户), which are often used interchangeably. The term "family" usually comprises individuals related by blood or marriage, whereas "household" encompasses individuals living under the same roof. It is common, however, especially in the countryside, for several nuclear families, married children with their spouse and children, to share a house. Clearly, the terms overlap to a large extent. In migration, it is not uncommon to encounter situations of "split household families", where family members who, under "normal" circumstances, would be living in the same residence find themselves living in separate places (CC Fan 2007).

As stated by Lawson (1998), the concept of "household" and its relationship with migration is not static, as this term can be structured supra-locally, incorporating multiple members in diverse places who financially contribute to the household or who continue to exercise influence over household dynamics.

For the purpose of this research, and in order to focus on the most common types of split households, I shall adopt the following definitions. “Family” is defined as consisting of the spouses and their children. In the context of rural to urban migration in China, this “nuclear family” definition enables an analysis of the existing forms of splits between spouses and between them and their children. “Household” is defined as consisting of the migrant, his/her spouse, their children, and the migrants’ parents who live with them or in the village. This definition highlights the extended-family dimension of Chinese rural families as well as the role of migrants' parents in taking care of left-behind children and farmland. In other words, it is the continued ties and interdependence between the nuclear family and the migrants' parents that justify migrants' parents being considered part of the household. In fact, since the 1990s, newer forms of migration have emerged which have contributed to leaving behind large numbers of children and the elderly. The tendency for migrants to bring their spouse along, leaving their children behind, has been increasing, as well as the propensity for couples to bring their children with them, leaving their elderly parents in the village (CC Fan 2007).

Migration and family dynamics

Domestic relations are not only central to understanding the concept of home but also that of translocal homes, one of the effects of migration. In fact, the effects that the processes of migration have on the characteristics and dynamics of family structure, both in the place of origin and destination, are multiple and closely intertwined. This is why many authors emphasize the necessity of placing family at the center of analyses of migration phenomena, since it is within the family that the migration decision is made, although in different and often

conflicting ways (P Bonizzoni 2009). When investigating the causes and reasons behind the achievement of a shift in the home, familial and social relations play a central role, as relationships are the fulcrum of identity creation and change. Identity is, in fact, produced through ongoing interaction with others, which brings the subject to construct a representation of himself or herself starting from the distinction between his or her own identity, that of his or her social group, and other identities that allow for comparison (JB Nezlek, CV Smith 2005). Family largely contributes to creating individual and migrant rural identity and to educating members through traditional family values, since the family, as the link between an individual and the broader social context, prepares its members with reference to the values and standards of society, defines kinship rights and obligations, and establishes appropriate economic roles (SF Harbison 1981).

However, the fact that family is inevitably placed at the center of analysis does not imply that the choices of individual migration are made as a mere product of a common decision formulated within the household. Individual cases can be very differentiated: they oscillate from one pole where the departure actually stems from a common decision that favors the well-being of the group at the expense of that of the individual, to the opposite pole where the influence of family and context bring the individual to choose for himself or herself against the will of the household. In cases such as the latter, migration is an event causing a rupture and conflict, of varying degrees of intensity (P Bonizzoni 2009). For women, for example, sometimes it is a rupture of kinship or conjugal relations that causes the exodus; at other times departure signifies a definitive establishment of the non-adherence of women to traditional values and the will to escape a condition of life regulated by cultural and social norms they no longer accept (G Favaro, M Tognetti Bordogna 1991). In China, for example, this can be the case of the so-called 打工

妹 (*dǎgōngmèi)*, or working girls, who choose for themselves to leave their homes in order to earn money, develop their skills and see the world. “My mother tells me to come home and get married, but if I marry now, before I have fully developed myself, I can only marry an ordinary worker, so I’m not in a rush”; “When I went home for the New Year, everyone said I’d changed. They asked me: ‘What did you do that you have changed so much?’ I told them that I studied and that I worked hard. If you tell them more they won’t understand anyway” (LT Chang 2009).

What emerges, at this point, is an interactive relationship between family and migration, where each of the two parties somehow affects the other. On the one hand, the structure and functioning of families affects the possibility of migrating, but on the other hand, migration transforms and affects the family at both its place of origin and place of destination: the impact of migration obviously varies considerably for the migrant and for the left-behind family. Migration involves processes of fragmentation and grouping of the family unit that usually cause substantial structural changes in the functioning of the family (R Torrealba Orellana 1989). However, migration mainly causes separation and change, as well as the achievement of a fresh perspective on the original rural community and home. This new acquired perspective is particularly evident in the descriptions and “labels” of the “rural lifestyle” narrated by the participants throughout this dissertation. It is important to underline that many ideas on the rural way of life which are expressed by the migrant families draw from their own perceptions and memories, rather than from the researcher’s first-hand observations: this implies that many ideas and anecdotes on the families’ rural lives may result to some extent biased and stereotyped as a result of the effect of their own experiences of migration and separation on the view of their original rural home and identity.

Migrants live experiences that the left-behind relatives do not share and start processes of adaptation, learning and growth which are largely unknown to their original family. This gap is even more evident for individuals who "run away" from the home as well as for those who have significantly obtained an increase in status and social class in the urban context. Differences in ideas of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital inevitably cause distance between the left-behind rural community and the migrated individual or nucleus.

However, especially in the case of translocal families, migration affects those who are left behind as well, bringing major short and long-term changes. If traditionally more attention is paid to the effects of migration on the family at destination, it is rather important to take into account the simultaneous effects that involve migrant members along with those who remained in the place of origin.

> "To study the nature and the entities of the correlations between migration and construction processes of the family nucleus, it is necessary to gather information from the life stories not only of migrants but also of non-migrants who remained in the place of origin and in the place of arrival, so as to have appropriate references for these groups."

As Tribalat (1991) has noted:

> "In order to study the evolution of migrants and their families, it is important to draw their story in the double space created by the places of origin and arrival. Unfortunately, typical research on families covers only one of the areas where migration develops." (H Zlotnik 1995).

The investigation of dynamics and the reasons behind home-shifting mechanisms will be organized around three significant themes for analysis, all of which provide meaningful insights

on both the increase and qualitative change in the four types of capital to which the migrants I met in Shanghai had access. These three themes are: career aspirations and whether people worked to meet necessities or also to meet professional development desires; migration as a journey whereby time and place overlapped such that becoming established in the city represented the migrants' departure from the past; and how ideas of networks are affected by the migration experience. I will now examine each of these themes in turn.

Career and work: desire versus necessity

Husband 5 worked as a software engineer for an internationally renowned high-tech company in Shanghai. When we met in 2015, he had only been working there for nearly half a year, but he was extremely ambitious and keen on obtaining a promotion by the start of the new year. He shared his concerns multiple times, and these were mainly due to the fact his manager did not seem willing to promote an employee with such little experience in that company.

> "I don't understand why I am always not good enough. Today I had my second interview for a higher position and the manager failed me again. He says I do not have enough experience here, but I work better and harder than most of my colleagues. Some of them have been here for years, but I think I am better than many of them. I am very diligent and I learn fast, so why can't I get this promotion?"

He and I discussed this issue many times until he finally realized that the fact that he was not climbing the career ladder as fast as he had hoped for was not due to individual intrinsic causes, but rather to a more objective one: he was a new employee. He eventually obtained his

promotion a year later, but he admitted that waiting patiently for his moment to come had not been an easy task at all. During this time, he put a lot of effort into what was under his control: he was a hard-working, precise and efficient employee who gave his all to his job with the goal of a promotion clearly in mind. Oftentimes he had both lunch and dinner at the company.

In one of our conversations, I asked him about his work-to-life balance: his wife was living and working in Baoding, near their hometown, and he did not seem to be willing to go back there very often.

> "I know what you mean, but as human beings we often have to make choices. I could go back to my hometown more often and spend time with my wife and family, but the harsh truth is that I do not want to. In the past, I often felt like I had to make excuses every time, I felt like it was not very nice of me to tell my family I wasn't coming home because I preferred to stay in Shanghai and work, it felt kind of selfish really. But now, I'm actually fine with it and my wife understands me. I think that at this stage in life, focusing on my career is the best and most important thing I can do: career brings status, money and hopefully a house in the near future, career is the foundation for my family's happiness. If I don't do it now, when I am relatively free and with no kids, when can I do it?"

He went on:

> "I know I probably shouldn't be saying this to a woman, but I believe that the fact that I live away from my wife is actually a good thing. If she were here, I would not be able to concentrate on my career: she would expect me to come home at a certain time and

do things with her. But now that I have this freedom I can devote it to my job, which is the most important thing at this point in my life."

When his wife came to Shanghai for a visit during the Qing Ming Jie weekend, we had a chance to discuss her working situation back in Baoding:

> "I work in the finance sector and I am quite happy to be doing this kind of job. However, I don't think it is challenging enough, so I'm keeping my eyes open for a new position somewhere else. Although I understand and support my husband's career-focused approach, I do not feel the same way. Yes, I do want a more challenging job and I do want to improve both personally and professionally, but I think that at this stage in life my most immediate plan is to start a family of our own. For this reason, I think I will keep my current job for a while longer, at least two more years, because I feel that it is not ideal to have a baby right when I'm starting my new job."

Further interviews with the eleven middle-class migrant families as well as informal conversations with their neighbors, peers and extended family confirmed the impression that women are more likely than men to adjust their career plans to family plans, although all of the middle-class wives considered their job and career important.

Wife 5 also tended not to go back to her hometown as often as she could have, even though she lived quite near her family home:

> "It's not that I don't like to be back. I enjoy the time I spend in my original home mostly because I feel like we can be children again: everything is taken care of, we have no responsibilities and, best of all, my parents do all the cooking and cleaning. One thing I

dislike is that my family drinks a lot; I'm sure you've heard this rumor about Northerners. I like to be back, but not that often and not for too long."

Her husband added:

"I agree with her, so we usually only go back for the Chinese New Year, unless there are emergencies or special occasions. I also think that the Chinese New Year is not so special anymore: when families were poor in the past, they would keep the best food for this occasion, like meat dishes for example. But now, we can enjoy good food all year round, especially in a city like Shanghai. So I think that once a year is enough. I do not want to go back more often, it is really not worth it. I would rather focus on my new life and on my personal development, and I can only do this by staying here in the city."

Husband 10 works as a software engineer in the same company as Husband 5. His hometown is a village near Guangzhou and he, too, seldom goes back unless it is Chinese New Year.

"I think that the main reason for going back to my hometown is not to forget the faces of my family and relatives, most of whom are new anyway. Every time I go back, I notice a change in them, like new glasses, a new haircut and so on. This makes me feel like I don't go home enough, but I really don't want to, it's not worth it. I think that my life is best spent here in the city, where I can work hard and go on improving my life. Even my parents say that I shouldn't spend so much time at home, that it's a waste of time I could be spending doing more rewarding activities."

He went on:

"I feel guilty when I'm home; I feel like I'm taking time away from my personal and professional development. As a matter of fact, I don't think I want to go back next year.

> I think it would be best to invite my immediate family over to Shanghai. This would be the most reasonable thing to do."

In the accounts of the eleven middle-class families I interviewed in Shanghai, career (which entails the possibility of both economic and symbolic benefits) was a primary driving force that both kept migrants in the city and attracted them back to the city after visiting their hometown for family visits and reunions. A satisfactory career, which for my respondents had been created through entrepreneurship or white-collar jobs, is a characteristic of middle and upper classes: poorer working-class migrants also move to the city in search of job opportunities; however, their type of work is labelled differently in the Chinese language. The work of working-class migrants is usually referred to as "打工" (*dǎgōng)*, which Wife 3 defined as "working for a boss". She explains:

> "When we hear *dǎgōng*, we think of a simple, unstable and non-lucrative employment. It is used for the working-class, but middle-class families like ours are unlikely to use that term when speaking about their job."

In fact, middle and upper class members use more "official" terms to indicate their job, like "工作 (*gōngzuò*) or 上班 (*shàngbān*)", which "sound a bit classier (更高大上一点, *gēng gāodàshàng yīdiǎn*)", Wife 3 concludes.

The dynamic that career is a strong driving force that makes the city the predominant context in the eyes of middle-class migrants can be argued to be true for *dǎgōng* as well: in fact, poorer migrants also tend to sacrifice frequent visits to their hometown in favor of opportunities for extra work and money in the city.

Cousin 1 worked in a small electronics store in the suburbs of Shanghai. He was quite good with phones and computers and, therefore, he offered extra services to clients who needed to repair their electronic devices.

> "This service I offer is not part of my regular job: at the store I just sell and give advice on electronic products. But I realized that many clients and people in my networks often need assistance for broken phones or other devices. The more I work, the more money I make. So I don't always go back home for New Year's, because that is the best time for business, and when all of my colleagues are back home, I can take their clients and make more money."

Individuals who *dǎgōng* often decide not to go back to their hometown during traditional festivals due to the need to accumulate larger shares of economic capital to support their family, their left-behind family and their original home. However, there is a key element that characterizes career and *gōngzuò* only, and this element is a reason for the tendency of middle-class migrants to privilege their city life rather than returning home even for short periods of time: desire. Middle-class individuals, in fact, have the privilege of choosing.

Although poorer and uneducated migrants expend much effort and strategy on their jobs in order to increase their share of economic capital, they "have nothing else to do but get married and have kids" (LT Chang 2008). Working-class migrants have a very different idea of work than wealthier ones, and women may be told not to work too hard, but to marry a rich man instead. Cousin 4 explained:

> "My parents were quite happy when they learned I had planned to move to the city. They think that life in the village is too hard and I would have to make my own living. I think

their expectations of life and work in the city were not very realistic, though. They just want me to marry a rich man and live comfortably for the rest of my days. However, life went differently for us: my husband and I work a lot to support our family. He makes money and I take care of our son."

Poorer and uneducated migrants who *dǎgōng* (as well as their original families) have no experience of being intellectually or economically satisfied. Therefore, they often consider only two possible alternatives: an exhausting job or nothing.

Wife 5's story of her family also shows how traditional family dynamics and beliefs can affect gendered ideas of work and life:

"Before I was born, my mother was married to a very bad guy. He eventually went to prison and my mother visited him for years. Once he came out, he started doing illegal things again, and so she left him. When she remarried, she had me and my brother, but only after she had my brother did she gain status in the village. Villagers all want to have sons. Girls are not really part of the family: they marry into the husband's home and we don't pass on the family name. Traditionally, sons are meant to do commercial business, not to study, so my brother started working in the village. Some guys do study because of their own will and some of them find better jobs in the city, like my husband. I also wanted to study, but rural parents don't invest too much in girls. I think my desire to study was probably because I needed to leave that village, I felt oppressed there. However, my family couldn't support me, so I started working and I supported myself. I have to confess, I took the *gāokǎo* twice: I hated the first college I was admitted to. The second time around it was a bit better, not great, but better than the first one. Because

> of my studies, I got a good job in finance. Separating from my original family was not easy, but if I had followed their "gendered rules" and waited for their support I would still be in my village living a deeply unsatisfactory life."

For educated middle-class migrants, career opportunities and intellectual development are essential to living a fulfilling life. In some situations, such as the one just described, the original home is depicted as a trap, especially for single women, which impedes them from moving forward. Their way to create a life for themselves and a satisfying identity entails them running away from home. In this case, departure signifies a definitive establishment of the non-adherence of women to traditional values and the will to escape a condition of life regulated by cultural and social norms that the migrant no longer accepts.

The difference between work and necessity, on the one hand, and career and desire on the other are key in this analysis: middle-class migrants desire to remain in the city to pursue their career, thereby increasing both their economic and symbolic capital. This desire affects the migrants' perception of home and generates a shift in their idea of the home: the receiving urban community becomes predominant as it is the one that grants individuals the opportunities to improve both their personal and professional life.

Rural to urban migration: a journey through space and time

Wife 3, originally from Suxi, Guangdong, has changed 12 homes in her lifetime. When she talks about her childhood, she remembers the hardship that came with having to move house every few years.

> "It was really hard for me as a child, because I would lose my group of friends every time and I would have to make new ones. It was always hard to fit in, and I often wished that my parents would just settle on one place and stick with it. My parents still live in Suxi, and my brother and my sister live in Guangzhou, so it's good to be back once a year and see everyone, including my nieces and nephews."

She went on speaking about her hometown:

> "There are not many changes every time I go back; probably the roads and infrastructure are gradually improving and the buildings are growing taller. Suxi is in the countryside and, unfortunately, I realize every time that the farmers' prices are not increasing, which means that the farmers there have a hard time making a living. I have many good memories of when I was living there: I mostly remember the trees and the vegetation, which is less present in Shanghai. There was one home that had a big garden in the back. When I was little, I used to go there all the time, sit under a tree and listen to the birds sing. I have the best memories of that home."

She eventually left her hometown to pursue her education and work goals and, in spite of all the good memories related to her childhood homes, she now belongs to the city of Shanghai. With separation comes change, and her newly acquired identity and beliefs no longer allowed her to identify herself as belonging to her hometown:

> "I do miss my family and my hometown, but if I wanted to plan my own life I had to leave. I think education is the most important thing if you want to live an independent life and if you want to be able to make choices that are different from what is expected of you. I want to be a good wife and a good mother, that's why I studied finance. I want

to guarantee a future for my family that is economically stable. I am 32 years old and have no children, so you can imagine what my family thinks of this. But I don't care, I still have time and right now I want to focus on my career."

A few years ago, she started her own business focused on travel and education.

"I have my own business and I cannot afford to be distracted, otherwise it will never grow. I'm so proud of what it has become, I'm proud of all the places I've visited and the things I've learned thanks to this business. The reason I want to become a mother is that I want to pass all of this, all of my experiences and all of my knowledge, on to my children; otherwise it's a pity, it would all be lost."

Listening to her accounts, what emerged was that her separation and departure from her original home to pursue her ideals had generated a gap between her, on the one hand, and her original family and original identity on the other:

"When I talk to my parents about these beliefs, about my job and my idea of motherhood, they don't get it. They are always saying that my job is not stable and that I should do something else. Besides, every time I go back, everybody is pushing us to have kids: for them, it's only about making the family bigger and abiding by the traditional social and familial duties. I feel in a very different way, I want to do something for myself first so that when the time comes I'll have something to pass on to my children."

This gap with the original family mostly derives from a difference in education and cultural capital, which usually causes migrants to feel closer to their receiving community than to their original home, as experienced by Wife 3. As their cultural capital increases, the destination dominates in migrants' understanding of where their lives are. This is due to their need to be

immersed in an environment that reflects their acquired cultural status and that can allow for their growth and upward mobility. The more migrants gain cultural capital, the more they feel the need to immerse themselves in a stimulating context that reflects their middle-class identity and related values: the city.

When discussing the rural home with my participants, recurrent labels were attached to the rural context as opposed to the urban context: namely, "fixed", "backward", "traditional" and "equal" as opposed to the "dynamic", "advanced", "modern" and "multi-leveled" city. What emerged when interacting with the families was that with migration and separation comes a kind of critique of the hometown and of what one has left behind. In fact, migration involves the creation of a new identity that reflects both the personal and professional process that migrants have embarked on so far as well as the new urban environment. This new perspective, which inevitably entails a shift in the location of the home from the place of origin to the place of destination, generates a "loving distance" with the original rural village life. Husband 5 explained:

> "I lived in my village for most of my life. I had a happy childhood, life was quite simple and all of my family and relatives lived close by. I never felt lonely. In the countryside, there is not much competition, apart from material possessions maybe, like who has the biggest TV. But in terms of the quality of individuals, we were all the same. Up to a certain age, I felt like my life path was very clear and almost taken for granted: I was going to finish school, then join my family business, get married, have kids and live a simple life. Life in my family home was ruled by traditional values and expectations. Now that I'm experiencing life in the city, I realize that the fact everything back home had already been decided for me gave me a feeling of security. I didn't know what

anxiety felt like before I moved here. However, when I finished high school, I had the opportunity to attend a good university and one thing led to another. A good education led to a good job, which led to a good lifestyle. The city is so different from the village: here everything moves so fast and you always have to keep up, otherwise you may lose all the privileges earned so far. Competition is so fierce in Shanghai, not only in terms of material objects; people are also different: there are high quality and low quality people, educated and uneducated, really rich and really poor people, people with right opinions and people with wrong opinions. There are so many different levels, I'd never realized this before I left my hometown."

Wife 5 added:

> "I feel the same way about my hometown. I love my original home, my family and my relatives, but I do not belong there anymore. Every time I go back, I feel like I've been living in a different world. There's not much we can share anymore. I love them, but we are so different now and I am happy and proud of what my husband and I have accomplished since we left the village."

Individuals who have left their original home and achieved their goal of conducting a middle-class lifestyle associate the moment of separation from their hometown with ideas of fulfillment, independence, status and high individual quality. Therefore, middle-class migrant families associate these ideas with their personal identity goals and, consequently, tend to identify with the context and values of their urban receiving community rather than with their original homes and identities. In other words, the created home in Shanghai reflects the present and what the family has achieved so far, unlike their rural home, which is perceived as outdated and which

only reflects migrants' past identities and beliefs. In fact, there is a coexistence and interaction between space and time (present = Shanghai *versus* past =original village), and the moving process from a rural to an urban context cannot be separated from a metaphorical journey from past to present (Shanghai = modern and adulthood *versus* rural village = backward and childhood) (D Massey 2001).

Migrants such as my respondents have successfully gained a sense of home after migration and have created a new home that reflects their ideal standards of status, lifestyle, culture and values. The importance of achieving such an identification of the Self with the surrounding context when analyzing cases of home shifting is true for the wider context as much as it is for house and home. The context must reflect an individual's achievements and expectations to the same extent that the home must be a place that represents the families who inhabit it. The homes of the families I interviewed are all filled with objects that reflect their present lifestyle as opposed to their original home, which usually contains childhood memories, or in other words, the individual's past. Analyzing the accounts of the families, it appears that to them going back to their original home is seen as a temporal journey to the past, where the "new" individual often feels out of place. This feeling of "out-of-placeness" is also felt, in an opposite direction, by elderly relatives who move to the city in situations of family reunification.

Husband 9 is originally from a village in Anhui, and he moved to Shanghai with his wife. They lived alone for two years, until they decided to start a family. As soon as the decision was made, and Wife 9 got pregnant, they decided that it would be best if his parents moved to the city to take care of the child. During the Qing Ming Jie weekend, he went back to his village to pick his mother up and take her to their new apartment in Shanghai. He discussed his mother moving to the city extensively during our interviews, unable to hide his concerns:

> "I think the fact that she will be living with us is the best choice for our family. When our child is born, my wife and I will still need to focus on our jobs and won't have the time to take care of our child, or to cook and clean. But I'm very worried about her moving here. She only speaks dialect and she is uneducated; she won't fit in the city. Actually, we have relatives in Shanghai, my uncle lives here too, but I'm still afraid that she will feel lonely at first."

When his mother arrived, she did feel lonely, but his wife and uncle kept her company and took her around the city. When asked what she thought of Shanghai, she replied:

> "I don't like it at all, it's so different from my hometown. Especially the food. The food here is not as good. I miss my hometown and my house, I feel like some kind of ghost, I'm here but I'm not, I don't know if you can understand this feeling."

Mother 9's account, as well as other similar stories shared by other families, confirm that it is hard for elderly relatives to gain a sense of home in the new city. The reason for this is that the city does not reflect their identity or their traditional values and lifestyle. Furthermore, they are not able to identify with the objects in the home, which make them feel merely like a presence, or as Mother 9 described, like a "ghost" who does not belong.

Therefore, the feeling of "out-of-placeness" shared by middle-class migrants once they go back to their hometown is often equal and opposite to the feeling shared by elderly relatives who reunite with migrated individuals in the city. Relatives, such as Mother 9, have not achieved a change in their identity, from rural to urban, and have not achieved a change in economic, cultural, symbolic and social capital that would allow them to identify with the receiving community and feel at home.

What happens with elderly relatives, temporary migrants or other migrants who fail to gain a sense of place in the city is that they also have a strong feeling for their ideal home (the desire to go back to life in their hometown), which is made up of memories and a product of nostalgia. Such an attachment to the ideal home impedes a successful shift of the home. Nostalgia, or the yearning for a different time, is closely connected to both time and space: instead of aspiring for the progressive and universal, the nostalgic individual looks backward and yearns for the local (D Massey 2001). Although for most individuals nostalgia is a coping mechanism that helps them deal with change, it often produces erroneous representations that cause individuals to lose touch with the present (S Boym 2001). As the above accounts confirm, the most common types of nostalgia are gastronomic (food and home are very closely connected), olfactory and auditory (most commonly nature sounds, like birds singing). When analyzing home and migration, nostalgia can be seen as a side effect of progress, where progress is represented by separation and autonomy.

Nostalgic individuals, or those who fail to gain a sense of home in the new context, are unable to experience "home" in the city; instead, they experience what is called a "private life". Private refers to personal meanings invested in texts, objects and spaces. Private includes dreams, memories and all domains of personal experience (S Boym 2001). In the home, as well as in the wider context, objects that reflect an individual's private life are extremely significant in the process of gaining a sense of home. Homes are, in fact, assemblages of artifacts familiar to the senses, which give a sense of comfort, continuity, solace and security in a new space. Especially when one has no particular place to call their own, personal belonging can take on great symbolic value.

In the example of elderly relatives, who arrive in a context that they will most likely never identify with, the presence of places in the home that are filled with personal objects or the possibility of continuity of traditional hometown rituals (like food) in the new home are essential to feel like one is a part of that home.

In cases of separation from the hometown, space can also mean distance, which for middle-class migrants is usually overcome virtually, rather than physically through reunions. As Wife 9 explained, most families nowadays have WeChat family groups: although the left-behind family is often not educated, they can record voice messages in order to connect and feel close every day.

My participants' stories show there is a relationship of "loving distance" with their hometown and original family: they love their roots, but they do not identify with them. It is not possible to go back in time and it is not possible to go back in space, nor to hold spaces still: migrants who have achieved middle-class by leaving their home do not want to look back, in time or space, as they have gained a sense of place in the city, their new home.

Networks and familial solidarity

Husband 11, from a village near Yancheng in Jiangsu, has recently married and has just returned from his honeymoon in Okinawa. Upon their return, the couple shared they plans and wishes for the future.

> "We are planning to have a child this year. Ideally, we would both love to have two kids, this way our home would be more *rènào*, more lively. In the village, we are used to

being around family and friends all the time: I lived with both my grandparents and parents, but life in Shanghai is very different. We live a quiet life here and, to be honest, I don't mind it at all. I feel like *rènào* was my destiny until I moved to the city: I didn't get a break even in school. You know, in middle school I had to move into a ten-people dorm. Things got better in high school, when I switched to a six-people dorm which had a private bathroom as well. I was sent to a dorm so early in life because my home was about 5 km away from the school, while the local school policy stated that students had to reside within 1 km from the school. I never had my own space until I moved here."

His wife agreed that a quiet life in the city was much more desirable for them: only after moving to the city were they actually able to live their life on their own terms, without the burden of family and societal duties typical of traditional village lifestyle.

"Relationships in China are very complicated and of course similar rules and duties apply to urban families as well. But my feeling is that the collective way of life that is still present in Chinese villages has increased social and familial expectations. It's much different in the city, where people's lifestyle has become much more individualized. Life in the countryside is exhausting and full of familial obligations, which often include neighbors and close friends as well. I'll give you an example of what I mean. In rural communities, whenever something happens to someone in the village, they expect you to be there and support them. This can be a problem when you are working because your family and community expect you to constantly take leave from work, which means fewer hours on the job and a lower pay at the end of the month. The point is that, in spite of obvious difficulties, you can't really make a choice: if you don't go, the villagers will

criticize you and they will most likely not be there for you in the future when you need them. So for every wedding or funeral or social event you are expected to leave work."

She went on to explain that her relationship with her family and with her rural community has deeply changed since she left to work outside the province: now she is only expected to return to her village when something happens to her family, simply because the migrated family members are too far away.

Wife 8 also shared her personal feelings about the collective way of life back in her home village near Changsha:

> "I think that most of my *wàidì* friends in Shanghai share similar opinions on going back to the village. Life in the village is not relaxing, they always expect you to socialize with family, acquaintances and neighbors. Even at home it is a constant negotiation: I'm 28 years old and I still can't go anywhere without my family asking where I was, with whom and why. So when people ask me why I don't stay for longer, during Chinese festivals for example, I always share these stories with them. You cannot stay home. My grandparents, they wake up at dawn, they go downstairs and make breakfast. So they expect me to wake up at 4 am and eat. If I don't, I would get criticized and come off as rude and disrespectful towards their kind gesture. I may seem selfish, I know my family means well, and when I was living at my original home I was used to it, I didn't know any better. But now that I have taken some distance from that reality, I realize that true gratefulness and true feelings towards your family and friends is not like that. You don't have to be together all the time to care about someone and you shouldn't have that many expectations of other people. What is missing is communication; it's just expectations

and rules. The fact that I don't want to eat breakfast at 4 am doesn't mean I don't care for my grandparents, but they won't listen. If you don't do what you are expected to do, you are automatically disrespectful. Only after I left my hometown did I realize I felt oppressed there, but it shouldn't be like that. I love the freedom I have now."

The stories above, as well as other interviews, confirm that leaving the home village has brought about a fresh perspective on the meaningfulness of social relationships. Separation produces change and reflects conflicting desires for autonomy as opposed to dependency, an idea that is strongly present in the traditional Chinese culture in the form of being and establishing good *guānxì*. In rural areas especially, where welfare systems are not as advanced as urban ones, relying on family and networks is still considered the most efficient support system to face hardship and challenging moments in life.

Moving to an urban context and identifying with new values, such as ideas of freedom and individuality that come with middle-class membership, can generate a shift of the home in favor of the urban community and create distance from the original rural home.

The above-described sense of freedom and release from oppressive social and familial duties that come with leaving the original home are attributable to the fact that middle-class migrants learn to create and maintain networks differently in the city. Firstly, the basis for network-creation and *guānxì* becomes the presence of similar socio-economic status, rather than kinship, proximity and gender, as is the case in their original rural contexts. Therefore, middle-class migrants perceive status as the key to securing strong and useful *guānxì*. Husband 9 recounted:

"Since I moved to the city, I learned to establish relationships differently. I feel like I'm more on my own since I moved to Shanghai, that I am not constantly surrounded by

family and acquaintances like it used to be back home. I moved to Shanghai because I received a good job offer at a renowned international company. For sure, my lifestyle has changed a lot during my time here. My job and my career are key to me, not only for the money but also for the status. Most of the friends I've made in the city have a similar status, and I believe this is really important. I want to go out with friends with whom I share interests or conversation topics. I think friendships should be stimulating. I can't really have that back home, even with my family and my oldest friends. Most of the time I feel like we don't have much to talk about."

His wife added her own insights:

"I feel close to my old friends back home, but it's merely a matter of affection. You know, we grew up together, they are like family. But they don't really share my lifestyle and values, sometimes I feel like they don't really understand me. Since I've moved to Shanghai, I've learned to look for friends with similar backgrounds, values and interests. Carefully choosing who you surround yourself with is really important, because we are the result of the people we spend the most time with. However, in the village this is not important at all: villagers don't care about similarities. What they look at is only who lives closer, or who you work with. I think they choose convenient relationships more than valuable ones. I mean that they don't make an effort to meet the right people, it's all about who is closer. So, of course, family is sacred; you don't need to go out looking to meet family members, they are right there from the start. I think that working-class migrants use the same logic. My cousin works in the textile sector and doesn't earn much money. Her closest friends are her colleagues and people from her hometown, *lǎoxiāng*.

> She doesn't really care about the quality of the people she spends time with. I could never go back to that…relationships are so important, we must select them wisely."

A further difference is that networks for middle-class members are based on ideas of "quality" rather than "quantity": what middle-class migrants learn is that small but good networks are better than wider but lower quality ones.

Wife 3 has changed many homes in her life, and one of her most vivid memories are the friendships she has lost and made every time. Things changed dramatically since she moved to the city to study and work. During our interview, she could not help but compare her own adult life to that of her parents: they have a totally different way of conducting relationships and view the importance of social life very differently. She remembers that in her childhood years her parents would always have people over to chat, play cards or *májiàng*, or for dinner or afternoon tea. In her memories, she was hardly ever alone with her immediate family: every occasion, trip or celebration had to be shared with others. Her explanation of this was that the presence of a wide network brought her parents a sense of security, or the feeling that she could rely on multiple people in case of need. Her parents were always very eager to cultivate these relationships by keeping in touch, meeting regularly, offering gifts on special occasions, and by always being there to lend a hand even when unsolicited or inconvenient for them. As for her, she had always thought that this was the natural way of making friends and managing her social life: being surrounded by many people who function as a support network. However, just as in the above account by Family 9, after she moved to the city she realized that this was not what she wanted and that she could have never put up with such a busy social life.

> "Once I was even told off by my parents. A friend of my cousin called and told me he was coming to Shanghai on a business trip. I just said I would be happy to meet up. The next day my mother called me saying that my cousin's friend had expressed his disappointment. She said I should have offered for him to stay at my place or, at least, help him book a hotel. I felt bad about this, but he didn't say anything. There are so many unwritten rules: if others don't communicate their expectations to you, then how should you be aware of them? You can't expect people to behave as you wish if you are not clear on what you want. But to my mother all of this was so natural."

She expressed feelings of oppression towards expectations in terms of relationships and felt glad to have discovered a new freedom in the city. Since moving to Shanghai, the most important thing for her was making progress in her career; therefore, she does not have too much time to devote to her social life. Similarly to Family 9 and other middle-class migrants, she feels more at ease at having selected a few good colleagues and friends to spend time with who are able to support her in case of necessity. She is, of course, also happy to support them in return, as relationships are a form of exchange. Thanks to her middle-class status, she has managed to create strong networks, which to her are more meaningful than having an overly wide network of lower quality acquaintances.

> "Work is really busy and family needs a lot of time and attention as well. So I prefer to invest my time in quality relationships rather than being an average friend to many. I don't think it's as meaningful."

A final difference is that for middle-class members, the idea behind the importance of networks is that they could come in handy in key quality moments, such as key work or education

opportunities. In rural contexts, however, *guānxì* are exploited continuously for smaller necessities as well.

As Husband 1 recalls, when he was living in his village, his family constantly relied on neighbors and acquaintances for daily errands, from grocery shopping, to going to the bank or holding a package for someone. “Since we moved to the city, we certainly help or are helped by our family and friends, but we tend to think of a solution first, before asking others”. Wife 6 also noticed a difference between her and her husband who, unlike her, has still maintained a rural identity due to the accumulation of economic capital alone (but not cultural capital) after moving to the city:

> “My husband knows many people, mainly due to his job. Even at home, he cannot be alone, he is always inviting his colleagues over or going to their house. It’s the same when we travel, he always asks someone else to join us, but I don’t really know these people that well.”

She often shared his family stories during our interviews:

> “This year, his family and extended family all came to Shanghai for the Golden Week. Our son turned twelve at the end of September and for us it is an important birthday, so they all wanted to come. However, my husband was busy working, so I had to deal with organizing their stay. It was really hard. I understand the reasons why I had to help them that much: they don’t know Shanghai and they are all uneducated (they only speak dialect), but still, they took everything for granted. I understand, but I am not used to such high expectations from family anymore.”

She went on:

> "Another time, my husband's cousin and his wife, who had just moved to Shanghai with their son, expected him to find jobs for them and a school for their child. It was easy for his cousin, who soon after started to work with my husband, but it was harder for his wife. Honestly, she didn't really want to work and behaved really rudely towards my husband. He found her three jobs, but she performed terribly in all of them: either she didn't like them or she claimed they were not interesting. You know, it wasn't easy for my husband to find these jobs and she should have just been grateful to have been given an opportunity. She is uneducated, so she shouldn't be too picky. My husband's boss even found a school for their child, but she said it wasn't good enough. After all this, she announced she was pregnant again, and they moved back to Anhui".

She added:

> "Relationships are completely different for educated middle-class people. I think we don't take help for granted and we understand the effort our friends and family went through to do something for us. It's still normal to do our best to help those who are closest to us, but we still feel the need to thank them in ways we feel are appropriate. We also do not continuously ask for favors; we just turn to others for the important things, like work or school. When my son had to start middle school, I didn't hesitate to ask a friend for help to get him enrolled in a good school. Although we do turn to friends for smaller things as well, we tend to save our requests for the important things."

What emerges is that, as far as my interviewed migrants are concerned, middle-class membership has meant a change in the creation and management of social capital, which has reinforced their urban identity. The way of selecting and conducting relationships has, in many

cases, created a distance between them and their original home and generated a shift of the home – as the place where they belong and the people with whom they identify – in favor of the receiving urban community. However, such a change in terms of social capital does not usually happen for those migrants who have maintained their rural identities and values after moving to the city, showing that ideas of social capital are affected by status and middle-class membership.

Conclusion

The present chapter has explored the research question: "How do migration and social class affect perceptions of home?" by analyzing middle-class migrant families' anecdotes about both past (rural village) and present (Shanghai). Their comparisons in these anecdotes have helped to elucidate the dynamics and evolution in the shifting process regarding where they identify their "home" to be.

The main argument is that a shift of the home happens parallel to an increase or qualitative change in terms of their access to the four types of capital that Bourdieu identified in his description of middle-class membership requirements and characteristics – economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. Migrants who have left their original home have also started mechanisms of separation and change that reflect on ideas about these four kinds of capital. Specifically, the more migrants increase and modify their possession of the four types of capital, the more they shift their identification of the home to the city and gain distance from their original rural home. In other words, the upward mobility process of migrants in securing a middle-class belonging is parallel to the process of "gaining a sense of home" in the place of destination, which acquires more importance than the place of origin.

Career is paramount for middle-class families, as it entails economic, symbolic and personal development benefits, as well as being an important means to achieve a middle-class reproduction of the family. The accounts presented in the first subsection show that the pursuit of a successful career is more important to middle-class migrants than going back to the original home during holidays, a pattern which stresses the predominance of the urban context and of the opportunities that the city offers. Poorer migrants also tend to work during holidays, but for different reasons, which can be understood in terms of their need to accumulate larger shares of economic capital in order to support their left-behind family in the original home. Middle-class migrants have a desire to remain in the city because a career entails both economic as well as symbolic benefits. It is different for their working-class counterpart, for whom "work" merely entails economic benefits and, therefore, a necessity to remain in the city. A shift in identification of where the home is happens only in the presence of an affinity with middle-class values and desires.

Among the changes that come with separation is a change in perspective when looking at one's original home. Middle-class migrant families learn to enjoy a lifestyle that reflects their newly achieved class status. The fact that status is created and developed in the city creates a distance between such families and the rural home, which is perceived as fixed and backward as opposed to the dynamic (as it allows for development and upward mobility) and advanced city. Furthermore, migrant families gain a sense of home through acquiring a house in Shanghai, which comes with the idea that the new home reflects the achievement of the family's urban and middle-class identity. The created home is a reflection of the present and of how far the family has come, unlike the "outdated" rural home, which only reflects past rural identities. Therefore, rural to urban migration is not merely a geographical journey but a temporal one as

well: the more an individual achieves the urbanization of his or her identity, consequently increasing separation and change, the more it is difficult to go back to one's rural roots and identify with them.

Change can also be evident in terms of networks and relationships. In fact, middle-class migrants create networks differently in the city: network-creation and *guānxì* are based on similar socio-economic status and cultural affinity, rather than kinship and proximity, as is the case in rural contexts. Networks in urban environments are based on the idea of "quality" more than "quantity": small, good networks are better than wider but lower quality ones, and status is key to securing strong and useful *guānxì*. Furthermore, in the city, the idea behind the importance of networks is that they could come in handy in key "quality" moments, such as work or educational opportunities, whereas in rural contexts *guānxì* are exploited continuously for smaller necessities as well. These two different systems also reflect on ideas of familial solidarity. This change in "networking" styles causes distance from the original rural home in favor of the new urban context, reinforcing and reflecting the newly acquired ideas of freedom and individuality that come with middle-class membership.

Middle-class members want to be immersed in a challenging and dynamic environment, which allows them to achieve upward mobility. An urbanization of their identity as well as their identification with urban lifestyle and values generate the mechanisms of home shifting that I discerned from the accounts of my respondents.

CHAPTER II

THE IMPORTANCE OF HOME OWNING IN MIGRANT FAMILIES' QUEST FOR MIDDLE CLASS AND STATUS

Introduction

"When asked to describe our family's status, many labels come to my mind: we are middle class, we have rural origins and we are educated. It is quite an interesting mix, I believe. Many of our peers and family members envy us for our education and class status, but the thing is, we are still *wàidìrén* with rural origins struggling to find our place in a mega-city like Shanghai. Our social group is placed somewhat in the middle: we are not middle-class locals, but I would not say we are a disadvantaged group either. In China, there are currently four big "disadvantaged groups": the peasants, the migrant workers, those formerly employed by government-owned corporations and left unemployed by the economic reform, and the so-called "ant tribe".[3] So what are we? We share the peasants' rural origins, the *míngōng*'s sense of out-of-placeness in the city, the ant tribe's education level, but we also have a middle-class status. Right now, I feel like the only way for me to secure a future for my family is to purchase a home in this city and benefit from all the advantages that homeownership brings: sense of security (安全感, *ānquángǎn*), status, *hùkǒu*-related benefits and education opportunities for my

[3] "Ant tribe" is a neologism for a group of low-income university graduates who settle for a poverty-level existence in the cities of China.

> child. But if this goal is not too difficult for the local middle class, it is indeed very challenging for middle-class rural *hùkǒu* holders." (Husband 5)

In today's China, most urban couples are pursuing the homeownership dream: the country's homeownership rate has, in fact, remained stable at 90% since 2012 (Peking University Institute of Social Sciences, 2017). Between 1998, when the central government announced the end of welfare housing, and by the time of the 2005 census, China had become the largest home owning society in the world (D Davis, 2010).

Starting from Deng Xiaoping's reforms in 1978, private real estate has been an important engine for the country's economic growth and a symbol of status and financial success for the general population. In this new environment of privatization and individual property rights, every Chinese household had permission to dream of home ownership and to view their homes as their own private space where they could display family and individual prestige (D Davis, 2002). Furthermore, homeownership was soon aligned with ideas of class-consciousness and mediated through the mass consumption of visual and material culture: newspapers, magazines, catalogues, television and the internet are all part of the global marketplace where people shop for houses, furnishings, and ideas and values of family life (D Miller, 2001).

Historically, the construction of the home as an expressive form has been associated with the consolidation and formation of the middle-class identity. The house and its interior decoration elements are, in fact, used as a form of self-presentation, a way to codify an image of oneself to others through the appropriation of the material environment (D Miller, 2001). In contemporary China, house and decoration choices play an important role both in constructing individual or family identity and in stating a household's social status. In the case of middle-class migrant

families, purchasing a home in the city is seen as necessary for achieving a full urbanization of the individual and of the family. This is because home ownership confers a sense of stability and belonging to the new urban environment, at the same time enabling the migrants to express a personal image of respectability and success.

The present chapter advances a new framework for analyzing the social mobility of migrants, which centers on home owning and on the process of the "house" becoming a "home". I argue that home owning affects and reflects migrant families' quest for securing middle-class belonging and social status in Shanghai. I have identified three key dimensions to how home owning can affect a family's pursuit and/or affirmation of class identity. The first dimension is entitlement to property, which indicates the family's social status and class status in multiple ways, especially when it aspires to a middle-class reproduction of the household. The second dimension is symbolic consumption, or the idea that the symbolic nature of the material environment (specifically, the house and home décor choices) enables the family members to demonstrate their social status and affirm their middle-class identity through consumption patterns and lifestyle. The third dimension is network reinforcement (in particular, at the household level), where the house is seen as a means of ensuring a stable middle-class reproduction of the family in the long run, as well as of reinforcing family networks. Home owning, in fact, can affect family dynamics and, consequently, a nuclear family's journey towards securing middle-class belonging and the ability to sustain reproduction. These three dimensions, property, home-related consumption and networks, represent the three essential components of a dwelling: the house (property), the home (chosen decorative elements) and the family (kinship networks).

This chapter examines the aforementioned three dimensions regarding the importance of an owned home in migrant families' quest for middle class and social status. First, however, it is appropriate to review the existing literature on housing, migration and middle class in contemporary China.

Migrants and housing in contemporary China

Much of the literature on migrants and housing in contemporary China deals with the challenges migrants face. Numerous studies have investigated the *hùkǒu* system and its inequalities (T Cheng, M Selden 1994; KW Chan, L Zhang 1999; S Zhan 2001; S Jiang, M Lu, Z Liu 2005; CC Fan 2008; H Sato 2008; KW Chan 2010). Other studies have looked at migrants' experiences from a psychological point of view, highlighting migrants' struggles in recreating their social identity in a new urban context (T Jacka 2006; E. Florence 2006; W Sun 2009, 2014). Other relevant studies have focused on housing policies for migrants (Y Huang, WAV Clark 2002; W Wu 2004; L Shi, S Li, H Sato, J Chen, F Guo, Y Wu 2011; T Sicular 2013), migrants' accommodation issues, housing preferences and consumption patterns, and the channels used by migrants to find a house (L Zhang 2001, 2010; W Wu 2002). There has also been considerable treatment of the Chinese housing market, as well as of the social implications of owning a house in contemporary Chinese society (D Davis 2002, 2004, 2010).

Separate studies (D Miller 2001; C Li 2010; D Goodman 2014; Miao, 2016, 2017) have dealt with the middle class in China and what it means to belong to the middle class in contemporary Chinese society. Other scholars have analyzed the rise of the middle class and its social as well as political implications (C Li 2010; H Lu 2010). Other studies have looked at the Chinese

middle class in relation to housing (JY Man 2010). L. Tomba (2010) has analyzed Chinese neighborhood planning as a way for the Chinese government to achieve social clustering and engineering. Enclosed residential neighborhoods are, in fact, a means for the government to promote ideas of social distinction as well as to encourage the pursuit of a higher *sùzhì* or "quality" by the middle-class residents, who serve the purpose of setting a social example for the general population. The ideas of *sùzhì* and social distinction, also in relation to the Chinese middle class, have been dealt with extensively (A Anagnost 1997; V Fong 2004; A Kipnis 2006; A Hanser 2008; W Sun 2009; T Kuan 2015; R Zavoretti 2017). Several studies have also looked at social class and social inequalities in rural to urban migration (T Jacka, A Kipnis, S Sargeson 2013). Lastly, L Zhang (2010) has extensively investigated the new homeownership and living revolution that has hit middle-class professionals and entrepreneurs in search of their own private paradise in Chinese society, which is now dominated by consumerism. The author has also looked at how housing is the key to achieving both material comfort and social distinction for Chinese families.

However, there are no studies so far that have placed house and home owning at the center of migrant families' social advancement and middle-class pursuit in an urban setting. The present study will address this lacuna.

Residential space distribution in Shanghai

When analyzing potential strategies for achieving homeownership, Husband 9 explained:

> "Shanghai is composed of three rings: the inner ring, where housing prices reach 50,000 RMB/sqm, the middle ring, where houses cost 30,000 RMB/sqm, and the outer ring,

where the price/sqm equals 10,000 RMB. As migrants, we can only hope to purchase an apartment in the outer ring, if we are lucky."

Husband 9's concerns reflect the reality that, owing to economic constraints, migrants tend to reside in specific areas of Shanghai. However, before analyzing the spatial distribution of migrants in the city, it is useful to first look at the evolution of the city's residential layout in order to better understand migrant families' housing strategies.[4]

The development of residential space in Shanghai mainly results from two changes that occurred during the same period: the restructuring of the city center and the subsequent relocation of the local population to the suburbs, and the arrival of migrants from rural areas. In the thirty years between 1949 and 1979, the distribution of resources (labor, housing, food rationing system) driven by the dictates of the Central Government shaped the urban space. Owing to the system of housing allocation and the *dānwèi* system, the distribution of the residential population was strongly connected with the area where the workplace was located. In this period, over twenty million square meters of residential areas were built, which increased the per capita living space by 0.4 square meters. However, after 1978 the pace of urban development accelerated and, due to a series of laws on the rights of land use as well as the restructuring of the city center, residential areas increasingly moved towards the suburbs. From the implementation of the reforms to 1990, more than forty-five million square meters of living area were built (the space per capita increased by 2.3 times compared to the previous 30 years),

[4] The content below on Shanghai's residential space planning is the result of fieldwork interviews and conversations as well as the analysis of the monograph: "Sun, Ping (ed.). 1999. *The history of Shanghai urban planning*. Shanghai Academy of Social Science Press".

and from 1990 to 2000, the size of the space increased by 3.5 times the size at the beginning of the reforms.

The center of the city, which has long been the residential heart of Shanghai and has one of the highest population densities in the world (fifty, sixty thousand people per square kilometer), has been subject to renovation and reorganization in favor of commercial areas and offices that make Shanghai, in all respects, the commercial hub and financial center of China. This and the consequential increase in rents have meant that inhabitants were relocated to other areas of Shanghai (in the first decade after the opening of the Pudong New Area, more than one million people were transferred there), to the outskirts immediately adjacent to the center, or even to more distant satellite-cities.

In May 2001, owing to the need to relocate millions of residents and to create more productive residential or commercial projects, a new plan was approved that will remain in force until 2020. The new guidelines for this plan include the stipulation that the peripheral areas follow the principle of the "three concentrations", meaning the concentration of population, infrastructure and industry. For this reason, the urban development model "1-9-6-6" was introduced: one center oriented towards services, nine towns that serve as administrative centers with a population that ranges from 300,000 to one million residents, sixty smaller towns of 50,000 to 150,000 people, and 6,000 villages with 2,000 residents each. Therefore, the development of residential space is characterized by a decentralization of the population. What is more, the construction of new residential areas is now more than ever dictated by market laws, which leads to a greater differentiation in housing types. In the peri-urban areas of the city, it is normal to find a coexistence of rural villages, residential areas for the inhabitants of the city center

relocated to more peripheral areas, migrant communities, and new luxury residential and commercial projects.

It is instructive to also examine the geographical distribution within Shanghai's districts. Since pre-revolutionary times, the city of Shanghai has been characterized by a differentiation in the spatial distribution of its citizens which cannot be found in other Chinese cities. In fact, as early as the period of Foreign Concessions, there were dozens of slums inhabited mainly by the lower class: rickshaw drivers, the unemployed and beggars. Such slums were built in the peripheral areas of the city that, following the outbreak of the war, became a shelter for thousands of Chinese fleeing famine in the countryside. Despite the fact that, with the advent of Maoism and the Communist ideology of egalitarianism, social differentiation and spatial segregation of certain social classes had become less evident, Shanghai was once again an "unequal city". The new political-economic ideology of Deng Xiaoping exerted further effects on the spatial structure of the city, which became increasingly diverse and started to express the contrast between new and old, rich and poor. While visiting the city, it is impossible not to realize how the members of different social groups coexist, which corresponds to the coexistence of different types of housing in a pattern that appears to segregate people from different walks of life into different spaces. In the same city, one can find modern skyscrapers, traditional 里弄 (*lǐlòng*), slums and new gated communities inhabited by the Chinese middle class.

The fact that cities in China have peculiar levels of heterogeneity in urban planning is due to the dual system of land ownership, which states that urban land is state-owned and rural land is owned by the rural farming community, and to the historical evolution of the management both of urban spaces and its inhabitants (P Ho 2016). The emergence of the system of land leasing

and the private housing market have disrupted the previous urban situation which, through the system of a planned economy and *dānwèi,* was strongly anchored to the work/accommodation binomial. In fact, until the end of the state-housing distribution system, each *dānwèi*, be it an institution (hospitals or schools) or a factory, gave its workers a place to reside, usually near the workplace. The room type did not necessarily meet the families' needs; on the contrary, the accommodation type was almost exclusively determined by the job. According to a 2003 report by UN Habitat, the United Nations Programme Human Settlements, this welfare system provided by the State is the main reason why China is the only country in the world which, despite the rapid process of urbanization, has not yet witnessed the emergence of large slums. As proof of the unique tendency of socialist economies to link workplace and residence, twenty years ago Shanghai's Hongkou and Yangpu districts showed a high concentration of residents with an above average educational level or occupational specialization due to their employment in the many universities and research institutes located in these districts (P Sun 1999).

Following this logic, with the start of industrial decentralization, many neighborhoods for workers were built in the suburbs alongside factories. Nowadays, after the abolition of the mechanisms of the socialist economy in favor of a new market economy, the socio-spatial differentiation is mainly an economic factor, to which the great obstacle of the *hùkǒu* system is to be added for migrants. The distribution of migrants is strongly influenced by the development of the city. Therefore, whereas during the 80s most of the migrants who arrived in Shanghai opted for the central areas of Puxi (at that time the fulcrum of industrial production), with the continuous expansion towards the suburbs and the restructuring of the city center, peri-urban areas are now the ones welcoming the most migrants. The restructuring of the areas in the heart of the city, the creation of the Central Business District (CBD), and the subsequent conversion

of the secondary industry sector into a service sector has meant that the distribution of migrants has followed the same process of industrial and residential decentralization (P Sun, 1999).

Only three of my participant families were able to purchase a house in Shanghai. Despite the fact they were part of the middle class and were labelled as "外地人" (*wàidìrén*) rather than "农民工" (*nóngmíngōng*), the families still had to face hard challenges in the real estate market compared to their local counterparts. In fact, there are two important factors to consider when analyzing migrant housing options and challenges in Shanghai. First, migrants cannot get bank loans because they do not possess a local urban *hùkǒu*. Secondly, the government has made a recent change in the regulations for purchasing housing (March, 2016), according to which migrants need to have worked in Shanghai for five years before they can purchase a house (it used to be two years).

Among the eleven families I interviewed, three were homeowners, three had started the house-hunting process having nearly saved up enough money with the aim of buying in the next two to five years (possibly before their child started school), while five families were not in the condition to consider the home owning option for the moment and despaired of ever being able to buy. However, during our interviews and informal conversations, these five families expressed their will to keep fighting to achieve homeownership nonetheless. Husband 9 explained:

> "At the moment, I don't see how we could even think of purchasing our own apartment in this city. However, the idea of possibly not being able to buy is really affecting my mental health. I constantly worry and try to think of solutions to make more money. I feel insecure and anxious all the time. Even my wife keeps complaining about me,

saying I'm always talking about the housing market. I can't help it. Only when I finally secure a house for my family will I feel safe and satisfied."

The words of Husband 9 illustrate that homeownership can affect middle-class members' identity: although the five families who are renters still talk about themselves as middle class, the feeling of precariousness regarding their condition expressed in their accounts is clear and overwhelming. "Yes, we are middle class now. But what if our homeownership dream goes wrong? What if this affects my family and my children? I don't know what to say, I'm just terribly worried," Husband 9 went on explaining. According to Husband 9 and the other families as well, the only means to achieve their homeownership dream was to save enough economic capital: in fact, the homeownership achievement by the three families who succeeded owed solely to specific family economic situations and was not expressly related to other characteristics other than economic capital.

Most of the families I visited, therefore, were still independently renting apartments or opting for accommodation solutions provided by the workplace (like Family 4). However, for independent renters, the location of the office was not a major factor taken into consideration when making housing decisions. Instead, what mainly influenced their housing decisions were economic factors and the facilities offered by the neighborhood. Furthermore, as I discuss in Chapter Three, the presence of quality schools in the neighborhood was an important consideration for purchasers, though not for renters.

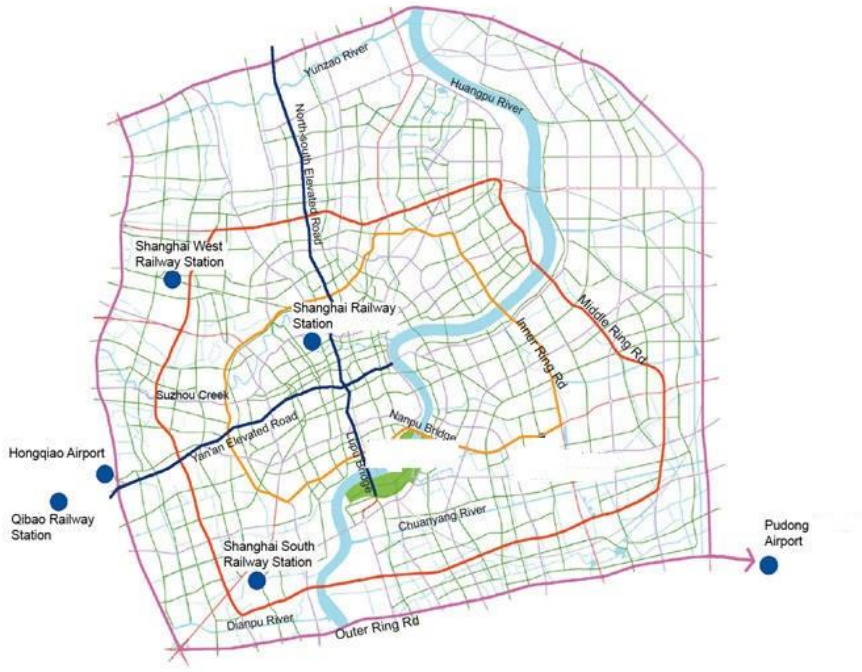
During my stay in Shanghai, I visited my research families in their apartments. Although most family members worked in central areas of Shanghai, they all resided outside the inner ring, namely, in the areas of Pudong, Loushanguan and Minhang. In terms of housing arrangements

and conditions, the square meter range for these middle-class migrants was 50 to 67 square meter for two to five family members.

The three families I visited who had succeeded in purchasing an apartment had selected two areas of the outer ring, Pudong and Minhang, mainly for economic reasons. All three of these families had decided to live in gated communities, which are the predominant choice among middle-class families. As for the renters, although they did not necessarily select gated communities as their temporary dwelling, they all expressed their intention to select such a community if and when they were able to purchase a family home in the future. This choice was for reasons of exclusiveness and middle-class belonging that gated communities provide, as will be analyzed in Chapter Three.

My interviews, as well as informal conversations, confirm that most migrant families who achieve homeownership are confined to Shanghai's outer ring. A map of the three rings is shown below:[5]

[5] Map created by the Expo group, 2010. https://www.area-arch.it/en/expo-2010-shanghai-better-city-better-life/



Class status and housing

All the families expressed a strong desire to purchase a family home in the city since owning a home means, among other things, gaining economic power, obtaining a prestigious social position and potentially securing middle-class reproduction for the family. A house in Chinese culture carries significant meaning: in the traditional culture, the need to own a family home, as well as the deep connection between house and marriage, is very strong (L Fincher 2014). Furthermore, the powerful symbolic meaning of the house directly reflects the family's status and social belonging. As for migrants, an owned home is also strongly connected with ideas of urbanization of the family's identity: the achievement of stability for middle-class reproduction, a potential place for one's children in a quality public school, a personal image of success and

respectability, a sense of security for the family, and important *hùkǒu*-related rights. Such rights include extra points on the residence permit (居住证, *jūzhù zhèng*), as well as the possibility of obtaining a Shanghai *hùkǒu* seven years after the purchase of the house. For all these reasons, a house is an even more desirable goal for migrant families than for local families.

The following three subsections correspond to the three key dimensions that show the importance of homeownership for middle-class belonging, as stated in the introduction. The first subsection shows how homeownership and a claim on property enables people to affirm their class identity. This section compares homeowners and renters to understand why property owning is so important in the quest for middle-class belonging. The second subsection analyzes how house purchasing, house-related décor and house-oriented consumption serve as vehicles for expressing class distinction and identity. The house and the neighborhood both carry powerful symbolic meaning which affects a family's social status. Furthermore, home decoration choices also indicate social status and distinction. The third subsection explores how class identity can be affirmed through social capital and networks. Home owning can affect household and family dynamics in a way that facilitates the nuclear family's quest to affirm middle-class belonging. Home owning encourages family reunification, which is valuable in achieving the middle-class reproduction of the family. Nuclear families generally feel more secure and can focus on their career, thereby increasing their family's economic capital. The prestige of the nuclear family is also enhanced on occasions of family reunions and celebrations, as an owned home attracts the extended family to reunite in the city instead of the village, which bestows pride and prestige on the nuclear family. All three dimensions center on the house, which is key to the process of migrants' social development and status acquisition.

The status of renters and homeowners

> "Purchasing a house in this city seems like an unreachable goal for many Chinese families, especially for those who do not possess a local *hùkǒu*. Non-local residents are cut off from the bank loan system and, although economic means can seem like a sensible solution to the problem, Shanghai's sky-high real estate prices are a huge obstacle for most migrant families like ours."

This observation by Wife 4 confirms that in order to succeed in the home owning middle-class urban dream migrant families must possess enough economic capital to afford such a costly investment. A small minority of my middle-class participants owned a house (three migrant households), and all of those who did not constantly complained about the prices of Shanghai's housing market, which also requires migrant purchasers to have worked in the city for a total of five years. Wife 4 went on to explain that:

> "The amount of pressure that this situation puts on the shoulders of migrant families is huge. Due to *hùkǒu*-related regulations, the only possible way for middle-class migrants to buy a house is by obtaining a salary increase, or by patiently waiting to have saved enough money to buy a family home."

In fact, a salary increase and/or a job promotion are a stepping-stone to a higher social status, which also implies the creation of new and more prestigious – and therefore powerful – networks, which can come in handy in the process of house purchasing. It goes without saying that for working-class, lower-status migrants it is nearly impossible to afford housing in Shanghai; therefore, middle-class families and individuals try to avoid falling back to a lower status at all costs.

An owned home can affect a family's class and social status in many ways. First, an owned home facilitates a family's urbanization process, as a house is a very important step in the quest to securing belonging to the Chinese middle class and to a fully urbanized life with strong social networks. Home owning is, therefore, closely connected not only with status and class but also with an individual's or a family's sense of belonging to the city by creating roots. A home is essential for the formation of a sense of belonging; however, as Wife 3 stated, "it is only after you introduce your own style and design that you can call a home your home". This feeling of freedom of making changes to a home so that it fully reflects a family's own style is often only possible for homeowners, as opposed to renters. Wife 3 shared her personal experience:

> "When I first moved to Shanghai with my future husband, I felt as if I was borrowing that home. This first house was rented, and we were not allowed to make too many changes to it. After a few years, we were finally able to purchase our own house, and it was only after we redecorated it that I really started to feel at home. You see, I think that in a new home the most important thing is to introduce your own design and ideas until it fits your own lifestyle. Only then can you say "那是我的家 (*nà shì wǒde jiā*)", that's my home".

An owned home also confers a sense of stability. In contemporary China, renting a house, as opposed to owning one, is generally felt to be a much less stable and desirable option. Furthermore, if it is true that the house is an external projection of the Self and, therefore, it reflects the individual's identity (D Miller 2001), a rented home reflects the image of a temporary resident. The concepts of temporariness and permanence, which are linked to renting and owning, respectively, are also closely connected to a family's class position, as well as to

social reproduction and advancement towards the desired standard of the middle class. For a migrant family, a permanent home is of great importance for the reproduction of its middle-class status, since owning an urban home can also affect the future of the family's children, mainly in terms of education and prestige, and provide a secure foothold in the city. Husband 4 explained:

> "In China, homeownership regulations are quite unique: there is, in fact, a seventy-year lease rule on property because the government still owns the land. This situation certainly affects Chinese families' sense of stability and security. Owning a home is very important for our family, especially for our son. Not only because of the connection between homeownership and schools in China, but also because when our son grows up, he can at least enjoy a sense of security with this home".

On the other hand, renters do not enjoy the same social stability as owners do: they live in a precarious present (let alone their future prospects or the social reproduction and advancement of the family) and are perceived as temporary residents, or even outsiders.

An owned house further affects a family's social status and networks as it allows families to be considered as "local", which is fundamental for the acquisition of social status and prestige: the local "Shanghainese", in fact, are perceived as being of a higher quality than non-local citizens. The label "外地人" (*wàidìrén*) can be associated with ideas of rootlessness, temporariness and out of placeness, unlike the "上海人" (*Shànghǎirén*), who are perceived as having a natural right to claim a sense of belonging to the city (W Sun 2009). Wife 11 explained:

> "As far as middle-class migrants are concerned, the difference between 外地人 (*wàidìrén*) and 当地人 (*dāngdìrén*), i.e. 'the local residents', is still present. However,

these two groups are not fixed and immutable. The *Shànghǎirén* group can be divided into at least three categories: *wàidìrén*, who have lived in Shanghai for years; second generation *Shànghǎirén* (born and raised in Shanghai, but born from *wàidì* parents); and 老上海人 (*lǎo Shànghǎirén)*, those who belong to ancient Shanghainese families."

Wife 11's description of the different social groups shows that the nature of social divisions is relational and that social and economic disparities translate into perceptions of diversity (relations, restrictions and laws). Diversity causes hierarchy because of value judgments and is not fixed but dynamic, as my fieldwork interviews confirmed (*wàidìrén* can become *Shànghǎirén*, and so on). Purchasing a house is a very important step towards being viewed as a Shanghai resident, as an individual or a family who belongs to the city of Shanghai. My interviewees belonged to the middle class and most of them were highly educated: "We are not any different from the local middle class in terms of quality. But until we show them we belong here, we will always be labeled as *wàidìrén,"* Husband 1 concluded.

It is clear that a shift of the home from one's rural hometown to Shanghai is beneficial to the families because it affects a family's sense of belonging and upward mobility, while temporariness is an enemy of social development and status. However, both individual/family identity and place identity are complex and dynamic concepts, multiple and unfixed, as well as relational (D Massey 2005; W Sun 2009). This is why integration and permanence are very important for the formation of a family's urban identity, since permanence facilitates the process of network creation. For temporary residents, not only is this process harder to achieve, but the networks around them are also a reflection of their own precarious lives, and therefore such networks contribute less to the social advancement of the family (A Kipnis 2010).

Apart from establishing a sense of belonging, owning property can also boost an individual's sense of confidence, not only because s/he can identify with a valuable asset, but also because such a purchase implies economic success and personal achievement. All these feelings are closely connected with concepts of face and respectability. By contrast, renters feel the constant pressure of not being able to purchase a family home and experience this pressure as a personal failure toward the family. This is especially the case among men since in Chinese families it is the male members who traditionally bear the responsibility of providing for a family home. Renters feel a huge amount of pressure, especially when they are thinking about starting a family or already have small kids, as house and education are closely connected in China. As Husband 8 admitted:

> "I'm still a renter and I don't know when and if I will ever be able to afford a house in Shanghai. I feel a lot of frustration because of this, even if I know it is not totally my fault. I think that renters share a lack of confidence and a feeling that they are not meeting the family's responsibilities. For sure, I feel this way towards my family. What is worse is that my parents and relatives see me as an unsuccessful man who is still struggling to secure a good social position in the city."

In China, the purchase of a house usually occurs during key transitional moments in life. In fact, individuals mainly buy houses concurrently with the following life events: marriage, birth of the first child, and a child starting school (in China, you can send your child only to the neighborhood school; therefore, it is a normal practice to move to a neighborhood that is known for having a good school). The social norm of buying a home shortly before or after marriage is so strong that a couple getting married without first buying a home is said to have a "naked marriage" (裸婚, *luòhūn*). Husband 5 clarified:

> "A naked marriage is still acceptable, but owning a home before having a child is nearly essential: without a home, there is no safeguard in case one gets sick or wants to travel or take a break from working."

As purchasing a house corresponds to certain life events, friends' and families' expectations are also an important element to consider when analyzing the issue from the perspective of social status. Not satisfying the expectation of having the means to purchase housing for one's family may cause an individual to lose face, while satisfying such expectations can lead to an increase in social status.

The story of one of the families (Family 6) I visited casts light on how expectations can affect an individual's reputation among the family.

> "My husband, originally from rural Anhui, was not able to meet my parents' expectations of purchasing a house after the wedding. Eventually, my parents 'solved the situation' by securing a house for us in Shanghai, while my husband put in a considerable amount of money for the complete renovation of the property. In spite of his financial efforts, my family never fully accepted the fact that he was not able to purchase a home for his new family, and he is seen by them as low in quality, 素质低 (*sùzhì dī*), and with no sense of 'face' and responsibility."

This event clearly affected Husband 6's relationship with his family and extended family.

Another important advantage that home owning provides relates to *hùkǒu*. Many consumers who do not have a *hùkǒu* household registration in the city wish to buy a home so they can obtain more *hùkǒu*-related rights, such as their child being allowed to attend a public school and

eventually take the university entrance exams locally, or to receive heavily subsidized healthcare.

Owning a house is even more important for migrants with rural origins who are struggling to secure middle-class belonging and are facing the fear of falling back into disadvantaged class groups: a house, in fact, confers many social and financial advantages, all of which contribute to gaining face, status and security. Therefore, renters have far more disadvantages than homeowners and feel all the pressure of not being able to secure a stable and prestigious future for their family.

Status, house and home

Homeownership and status

> "In contemporary China, greeting a friend with questions such as: 'Have you bought a house yet?' is not an uncommon practice, which also demonstrates how housing is nowadays considered one of the primary assets in judging an individual's well-being, especially that of Chinese men. Purchasing property is also closely connected with marriage, due to the principle that one of the main conditions for marriage is the man's wealth – the principal reflection of which is housing."

As the words of Husband 7 suggest, in Chinese culture the house carries great symbolic meaning. Home ownership is, first and foremost, a clear status indicator, and therefore non-homeowners are often perceived to be part of the lower class, as opposed to the aspired middle class.

The main reason for purchasing property may not be the same for everyone, but my fieldwork with migrant families in Shanghai clearly shows that Chinese people purchase housing to satisfy three main purposes: 必需品 (*bìxūpǐn*), necessity, 面子 (*miànzi*), face (symbolic), and 投资方式 (*tóuzī fāngshì*), investment (economic), with these purposes reflecting and producing class status.

In one of our conversations, Husband 3 told me:

> "Individuals who purchase housing for necessity are often referred to as 刚需族 (*gāngxū zú*) or 'group of people who buy a house for mere necessity'. This group sees home owning as a need: it is a way to secure one's foothold in the city and gain a 'feeling of safety', 安全感 (*ānquán gǎn*)."

As Wife 7 explained, face is a further purpose that purchasing a house can help to satisfy.

> "A saying in China goes: 'because one needs face in death one endures wrongs in life' (死要面子活受罪, *sǐ yào miànzi huó shòu zuì*). This means that Chinese people cannot let others look down on them up to the point of often lowering the quality of their own life. In Chinese culture, it is essential to gain others' respect, to have others say to you that 'you have face' (有面子, *yǒu miànzi*)".

Individual identity is often projected onto material objects and possessions: you are who you are because of what you have. The image created of oneself may be more important than the real Self.

As famous actor and director Feng Xiaogang once noted, in China many residential neighborhoods and buildings have foreign names, such as "California waterfront", or they use

words such as “exotic notable community”, “French garden” and “Mediterranean style”, but it is hard to imagine there would be a “Suzhou” neighborhood in Western countries[6]. He was pointing out that many Chinese real estate agents and developers use foreign names to appeal to Chinese consumers’ “face” psychology and give them face, “给面子” (*gěi miànzi*). The director’ s words depict a realistic image of the housing market in contemporary China, showing how ideas of status are strongly connected to ideas of home and house, which perfectly align with the popular saying: “No purchase of house, no purchase of face”, “买房子就是买面子” (*măi fángzi jiùshì măi miànzi*).

However, there is another important dimension that links face with socio-economic mobility: comparison, and competition, with other individuals. Without comparison, the idea of status and face does not exist. As Wife 10 explained, comparison and competition are two essential factors that affect every aspect in the life of a Chinese individual.

> “For middle-class migrants, the rising housing prices in Shanghai are a major problem, and although we enjoy decent salaries, we often live far from the office, and after mortgage repayments (if we are lucky enough to own a house), car and children’s education expenses, there is not much money left at the end of the month. Therefore, although members of the middle class are considered ‘rich’, we are actually under constant pressure, especially because of competition, which can be the cause of downward socio-economic mobility.”

Her Husband added an important insight to his wife’s thoughts on social competition:

[6] See, for example, https://www.guancha.cn/culture/2013_09_26_175045.shtml (Chinese)

> "In the last few years, comparison has been further enhanced by social media, especially WeChat, where individuals are exposed daily to the lives and successes of their group of friends and where wealth and prestige are constantly shown off. Such pressure is a major cause of a feeling of unhappiness for many Chinese middle-class individuals, who generally feel less happy than their parents who possessed much less, but enjoyed the benefits of a better welfare system and a higher social equality."

Migrants often have false expectations about urban conditions, urban aspirations and about themselves, due in part to the lack of the necessary information on what living in a city like Shanghai is really like. Furthermore, the nature of migration is insecurity, at least at the beginning, and the idea that it is necessary to sacrifice one's current happiness for a brighter family future often contributes to the sense of dissatisfaction that characterizes migrants in general (J Knight 2009).

As previously stated, there are certain possessions that confer more status on individuals than others. Clearly, in contemporary Chinese society the house is one of the most powerful, if not *the* most powerful, means for the creation of a respectable image of oneself. Nevertheless, the so-called "object of comparison", as Wife 4 explained, has changed throughout the years.

> "In the 70s, the most desired possession was a bicycle. It was all about who had a bicycle, who had the best bicycle and whose bicycle could attract the crowd's attention. In the 80s, the object of competition became the TV. Families would notice who had a TV, how many inches each family's TV was, who owned a color TV, and so on. In the 90s, people started to compare salaries: whose family obtained a place at the night market,

> which family made more money, which family had a general manager among its members. Lastly, the object of comparison became the car and then the house."

As mentioned above, in China a house carries a lot of meaning, so that Wife 4 added:

> "When looking for a wife, if future parents-in-law ask the man if he owns a house, if he answers yes or no the impression of him is not the same. When moving to the city, renting a house instead of owning it clearly affects other people's perception of that individual. When asked if one owns a house in the center or in the suburbs of the city, the answer will affect that individual's status and reflect on their 'face'."

Nowadays, housing prices are sky-high, but individuals and families still want to purchase a house, and they want a house that is "respectable", although they are already living in one.

Real estate is also a preferred channel of investment: whoever does not own a house wants to purchase one, and whoever owns one wants to purchase more. A house is a very powerful possession: the number of houses and the location of one's own property contribute to the individuals' social status. Furthermore, as Husband 4 explained: "Chinese consumers have very few places to invest their money, so most people invest in a house, which is the most valuable family asset and worth much more than income alone."

A house, therefore, can directly affect a family's economic and symbolic capital, both of which are elements that define middle-class identity and status. The acquisition of status is especially important for migrant families who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, as it is a means to secure a place in the urban middle class.

Home-décor and status

The analysis has focused until now on how owning property together with the location of the property can affect an individual's or a family's social image. However, the concept of face is also connected to interior decoration and to the choice of furniture, both of which contribute to a family's social status. If it is true that a house is the material projection of a family's image and status, this is also true for the objects that are inside the home: "When a guest walks into a home, what s/he sees is the image that the family wishes to convey to others," Wife 8 explained. Interior decoration is, in fact, a public display of personal belongings: it affects social relations and establishes relations with an ideal outside world. A home's decorative elements represent an important insight into a family's identity, indicating social aspiration, material comfort and lineage. Such elements also serve the important purpose of class consolidation, in that domestic objects are indicators of social distinction. Material identity is, in Chinese society, as important as personal identity.

The importance of interior decoration and its connection to status is a somewhat recent idea in Chinese society. It was only following Deng Xiaoping's privatization reforms that houses and homes started to provide an important insight into a Chinese family's status and social position (D Davis 2000). Families learned that housing and home decoration played a pivotal role in defining their social identity; however, the way they display their family prestige has changed widely over the years.

From the beginning of Deng Xiaoping's era through the 1980s, the general attitude towards home decoration was that of modesty. As Husband 7 confirmed:

> "The reason for this was the fear of judgment by neighbors, who would have thought ill of a family who spent money to enjoy more comfort compared to what existed in other homes in the neighborhood. This attitude was strongly influenced by the precarious political context of the time: during the class struggle activities of the Cultural Revolution, it was common to be asked by government officials to 'keep an eye' on one's immediate networks and neighbors to single out potentially 'dangerous' individuals, such as capitalists. In this context, families were used to keeping a low profile in terms of home decoration choices as well, a behavior that was in line with the ideology of the Mao years."

Home decoration details such as curtains or parquet floors were often avoided, considered as extravagant. However, by the 1990s men and women started to use their homes to display their social status, financial success and cultural sophistication. Furthermore, home decoration magazines started to circulate, bookstores devoted entire sections to interior decoration, and even the government devoted an evening show to home renovation. Great importance was given to good taste, which families had the chance to display in their homes (D Davis 2000).

In the light of all these changes, new landscapes of living emerged. If home buyers in the 1980s focused almost entirely on the house as a physical space, today urban residents look for more: a green neighborhood, cultural taste and new lifestyle aspirations. These new emerging concepts of living are another consequence of private home ownership: a domestic space, apart from displaying a family's social status and wealth, is also an indicator of cultural refinement and life orientation (D Davis 2002).

Within Chinese homes, more specifically those of my participants, it is possible to identify certain key decorative elements that are perceived as prestigious. These elements are usually either of high economic value or else they belong to traditional Chinese culture. In my many visits to migrants' homes, I had numerous opportunities to see their choices for decoration and their taste in ornamental objects. Chinese families often display their most precious belongings together with family portraits, in order to convey an idea of a well-off and happy family. Such objects include traditional Chinese artifacts or even renowned foreign brands. Wife 7 told me:

> "Nowadays, even furniture can 'have face' and may affect the image that the family conveys and how the family is perceived by others. It is common to find the label '有面子的家具' (*yǒu miànzi de jiājù*), or 'furniture which has face', for what Chinese see as 'respectable' furniture, and it is common to find virtual enquiries on Baidu along the lines of: 'Does this piece of furniture 'have face''?"

This question, though, is difficult to answer because the qualities of the items that are necessary for a product to have face are subject to change.

"In traditional Chinese homes, the most precious element was wood", explained Wife 4. In Chinese home decoration, the prevalent type of wood used is mahogany, 红木 (*hóngmù*) in Chinese, or other dark-colored types of wood. In contemporary homes, "实木家具" (*shímù jiājù*), real wood furniture, is still considered very precious and is often labeled as a premium kind of "furniture which has face".

The 1944 book "Domestic Chinese Furniture" by G. Ecke explored the simple lines and forms of hardwood furniture and started the trend of equating elevated Chinese taste with the "austere, dignified luxury" of wooden pieces, showing "a respect for organic substance" as found in the

"home of the ruling class" of the Ming dynasty. This book echoed the taste of a group of Westerners residing in China who equated Ming hardwood furniture with minimalist Bauhaus design. "We are not dealing with an ever-changing, inconstant fashion, but discreet and intelligent variation upon a single theme" (G Kates, 1948; RG Knapp, KY Lo 2005). Hence, such affirmation dismisses the furniture development trend of the past millennium and enforces the view that hardwood furniture *was* Chinese furniture.

In my participants' homes, wood was by far the most dominant furnishing. All homes had wooden floors and most pieces of furniture were made of dark wood. The best sofas are also made of dark brown leather to match the color of the furniture.

When entering the families' homes, in addition to furniture, three other items struck my attention as important face-giving items: crystal lamps, precious tea sets and huge flat-screen TVs. "Most homes have yellow or pink crystal lamps, colors that have auspicious meanings in the traditional *Feng Shui* philosophy", Wife 4 went on explaining. Furthermore, lighting is an important element in Chinese home decoration theories, as it is able to affect the mood of the family and even other aspects of the residents' lives, such as their careers (TK Collins 1999). According to the theory of the Five Elements, yellow is associated with the element of 土 (*tǔ*), soil, which produces gold. Therefore, yellow lamps are believed to irradiate the home with wealth and good fortune (TK Collins 1999). Pink and purple are also very popular due to the expression "招桃花" (*zhāo táohuā*), where "peach blossoms" refer to marriage (TK Collins 1999). Each family has its own style, classical or modern, but crystal was a favorite material for lamps because the glittering and sparkly nature of crystal brightens up the domestic space, irradiating it with light and good fortune. Crystal is also known as "*Feng Shui* stone": each type

of crystal represents a different frequency of energy and produces different magnetic fields. Therefore, in Chinese homes, lamps are often quite noticeable, and they are a piece of decoration that is usually proudly showed to the guests by whoever is in charge of the home tour.

Tea sets are a further important element in Chinese homes, as they refer to China's traditional culture and are a symbol of respect, 尊敬 (*zūnjìng*), of the country's ancient traditions. For five thousand years, tea culture has been the symbol of Oriental civilization, and it has always been deeply rooted in Chinese culture (L Xiusong 1993). During Chinese traditional festivals, tea is served to family and guests as a symbol of blessing, longevity and gratitude. Tea sets are the closest "partner" of tea and symbolize respect for traditional culture, family and harmony (L Xiusong 1993). The quality of tea and tea sets are also closely linked to perceptions of a family's status and respectability.

However, the most important item in an ideal Chinese living room is the television set: the bigger the set, the better it is for a family's "face". The TV is one of the forms of entertainment for visiting family and guests, and therefore it is often at the center of attention: as guests walk into the living room, the eyes go straight to the huge, flat-screen television. Therefore, choosing a fashionable and expensive TV is important for the image of the family, conveying the impression of wealth and economic power.

This new way of living, which combines families, culture and status, informs emerging ideas about lifestyle today in China and highlights the importance of the home in the process of upward mobility of both individuals and families. In short, home décor directly affects a family's identity, class and social status as well as its networks.

Extended family and homeownership: reunifications and reunions

The effects the migration processes have on the characteristics and dynamics of family structure, and on the family's class and status, are multiple and intertwined. Family becomes a central element within migratory networks and chains and plays a decisive role all the way from the start up to the integration of the family in the new context (P Bonizzoni 2009). Migrants are widely affected by what surrounds them, not only on a macro-social level (economic, political and social contexts), but even more on the household level and in migratory situations; the place of destination often acquires a predominant role compared to the place of origin. This is true for China's rural to urban migrants especially, because moving to the city is the only way for individuals and families to achieve middle-class belonging. This fact explains why my participants were so strongly oriented towards embracing an urban identity and arranging their lives according to middle-class scripts of family life. The new urban context represents a priceless source of social advancement opportunities, which the original rural setting, as well as migrants' original rural identity, cannot provide. However, the process of adaptation to the new urban social scripts implies challenges and adjustment, both of which can be better overcome with the aid of a strong and present kinship network.

Extended family, especially the parents of the couple, often plays a very important role in the nuclear family's dynamics. It is common for family reunification in the city to occur when the couple's first child is born. As Husband 4 explained:

> "Elderly parents are usually actively involved in the nuclear family life, from the wedding to the raising of the grandchildren. In Chinese families, it is common for grandparents to take care of the grandchildren while parents focus on work. When the

elderly parents do not live in the same house as the couple, the couple usually goes to their house for meals. This way, the couple can focus more on their work."

Therefore, a reunification and urbanization of the household is highly desirable as a way of providing accommodation for grandparents and the care for children that helps to secure the reproduction of the middle-class nuclear family. The fact that the whole family often plans to reside in the same house, or at least in a way that the parents live very close to the nuclear family's apartment, will often affect housing choices and the purchasing power of the nuclear family. If the house-hunting plan succeeds, the result will be an increase in the social status and in the family's social advancement in the long run.

Family 9, for example, is looking to purchase a house that would suit the whole household in view of the birth of the couple's first child. However, housing prices are impeding the realization of this goal in the short term. In such situations of family reunification, purchasing property is preferable to renting, not only in order to start climbing the property ladder for reasons of stability and a sense of belonging, but also for reasons of reputation. It can be argued that reunification is possible even in a rented home, but in China the perception of the nuclear family by the extended family is completely different with an owned home. Furthermore, as my interviews as well as informal conversations confirm, the "renting solution" is often criticized by the extended family and seen as a far from ideal solution, put into practice only because of the lack of a better alternative. Wife 9 stated:

"Achieving a full family urbanization by stably residing in an owned home in the city is a source of great pride and *miànzi* for the rural extended family, who views such an achievement as an important family accomplishment."

Another way owning a home in the city can affect a nuclear family's social status within an extended kinship network is by permitting the family to host extended family reunions, for example Chinese traditional festivals.

Many migrants return home infrequently, typically once a year during the Chinese New Year or Spring Festival. Processes of separation and reunion are pivotal to Chinese household and family dynamics, especially during calendrical festivals, such as the Chinese New Year (C Stafford 2000). Most times it is the migrant family that goes back to the village, but families with stable properties in the city often become hosts of New Year's celebrations, an event which is a great source of pride.

Such family dynamics occur because families encounter a fleeting solution to the constraints of separation in order to reunite in celebration with extended family members. As Wife 3 explained:

> "Along with face-to-face reunions are virtual or electronic reunions, mainly represented by WeChat family groups and the giving and receiving of virtual 红包 (*hóngbāo*). WeChat has changed family communication dynamics and allowed family members to keep in touch at any time."

Such processes of separation and reunion discursively construct identification with a certain place, which in this case means the formation of a sense of social belonging in the city of Shanghai (C Stafford, 2000). This is why such rituals and celebrations represent a very strong statement for the family, highlighting the fact that the nuclear family has successfully reached an urbanization of its identity and is on the right path for securing a social reproduction of the family status, and possibly of the extended family as well.

The frequency of family reunions depends on multiple factors, among which are social class and economic conditions. Being able to host extended family members in one's own home is also a way to facilitate family reunions and reinforce the family network, as confirmed by Wife 6:

> "This year, we finally achieved our family's homeownership goals and purchased an apartment in the Minhang district. This achievement means a lot to our family and extended family, not only because it has brought us a great sense of security, but also because it has brought our family closer. My husband's parents and relatives live in a village in Anhui province, while my parents moved to Shanghai with us many years ago. The fact that our extended families live in two different places makes things a little complicated during Chinese traditional festivals, when families are expected to be together and celebrate under the same roof. Up to this year, we have always alternated, spending one Spring Festival in Shanghai and one in Anhui. However, my mother has been having health issues for many years and it is not ideal for her to be away from home for long periods of time. Therefore, when we go to Anhui, my parents are alone in Shanghai. My husband and I have been thinking of having his family over to stay at our place during New Year's celebrations, but they never seemed to take our rented home too seriously and preferred to celebrate in their family home in the village. But now that we are homeowners, they have suddenly decided to spend the holidays in Shanghai. I was really happy and so were my parents: for the first time our families were reunited, and we spent one of the best Spring Festivals I can remember."

What emerges from Wife 6's story is that homeownership can have the power of making a family stronger and closer: her husband's family finally acknowledged her and her husband's

status in the city, as well as their new urban identity and belonging. Furthermore, as seen in the previous chapter, migration can lead to an increase in social status and create a gap in *miànzi* with the left-behind family. An owned property in the city allows migrants to make a stronger statement in terms of difference in status and personal success, and it represents a stepping-stone to possible social advancement for the entire household.

These interviews confirm that we are facing a different generation of migration: today, migration is an accepted path to a better life. It seems that many migrants are driven less by poverty and more by opportunity. Migrants also have looser ties to home and come and go according to personal schedule, not according to farming or lunar calendars. They are more ambitious and less content and there is a much stronger focus on career. *Hùkǒu* still remains important, especially once children are born, but many migrants agree today that there are other means to obtaining a better status, for example, by earning more money and purchasing a house. Increasing status, belonging to a strong middle class and achieving a stable life in the city are some of the main goals for these migrant families, and home owning is a very important step in achieving these goals.

Conclusion

For middle-class migrants, homeownership is key to securing urban belonging. Individuals and families with rural backgrounds I met in Shanghai believe that purchasing a house is the principal way of gaining a sense of security in the city, both personal and in terms of social class, and of laying the foundations for a middle-class reproduction of the family.

Middle-class membership is based on multiple factors, not on income alone: economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital all contribute to determine middle-class belonging (P Bourdieu 1984). The strongest asset that encompasses all of these species of capital is housing, which is why migrants use housing strategies to secure an urban middle-class identity. Homeownership brings together status, social class and networks, affecting middle-class migrants' urban experiences.

My analysis of class and status enhancement strategies suggest that access to housing has become a major discriminant between social actors and that it often determines social status more than income alone does. Housing is, therefore, a crucial element in class reproduction, and homeownership is a very powerful means of achieving social distinction, thus explaining the decision to place housing at the center of class reproduction analysis in contemporary Chinese society.

This chapter has specifically investigated how middle-class identity can be affirmed through property, consumption and networks, which correspond to the essential components of a dwelling: house, home and family.

An owned home can benefit a family's class and social status because it facilitates the urbanization of its identity and conveys an idea of permanence and stability to the Self and others, thereby benefiting the family's middle-class reproduction. A house also allows the family to be perceived by other Shanghai residents as "local" as opposed to outsiders, thereby strengthening its urban networks. An owned home provides the family, especially its male members, with a sense of security and achievement in fulfilling their responsibilities towards the family. A house also provides many *hùkǒu*-related rights. All these advantages that

homeownership bring are evidently even more meaningful for *wàidìrén* with rural origins, who are struggling to secure a place in the city and in the new Chinese middle class. The significance of home owning is also particularly relevant for the members of this specific social group: they are educated and relatively well off, but they struggle because of social and institutional dynamics which cause them to worry about losing their newly acquired social status.

The brand of the home and the home décor are also an important part of a family's statement about its social status. Consumption and lifestyle are seen by families as a means of enjoying and securing middle-class identity and social distinction. When speaking of décor in China, the most prestigious elements are those which demonstrate the possession of high economic or cultural capital, important elements in the status discourse and in middle-class belonging. Therefore, home décor can affect the sense of Self and the social relationships which are formed or cultivated starting from the home.

Class identity can also be negotiated and affirmed through social networks. An owned home can benefit the nuclear family's ability to negotiate and build social relationships in ways that help it sustain and build a middle-class identity. Many times, processes of migration involve the extended family, especially the nuclear family's parents, who represent a very valuable asset within a household's inter-generational dynamics. Furthermore, residing in a family-owned property in the city is perceived by kin and by social interlocutors as an important family achievement. Owing to ideas about status and personal realization, an owned home is able to attract the extended family to the city, instead of the nuclear family to the village. Being able to host celebratory dinners during traditional Chinese festivals further reinforces the family statement that it belongs to the urban middle class, which brings pride to the entire household while enabling it to elide village contacts and concentrate on urban ones instead.

In short, house, home and class status are closely connected and play an essential role in the strategies and experiences of middle-class migrant families, who perceive homeownership as the principal way of securing urban and middle-class belonging. Furthermore, owning a home plays a pivotal role in the process of adaptation to the city, shaping both the individual's and family's class identity and strategies for middle-class reproduction of the family in the long run. The house is the most powerful and crucial asset that encompasses all four species of capital; therefore, it is a key element in securing middle-class membership, especially in the eyes of *wàidìrén*.

CHAPTER III

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND CULTURAL CAPITAL IN MIDDLE-CLASS MIGRANT FAMILIES' HOUSING STRATEGIES

Introduction

In summer 2017, an article entitled "A Monthly Salary of 30,000 RMB is Not Enough for My Child's Summer Vacation"[7] went viral on WeChat Moments. This article was written by a middle-class entrepreneur mother, who tells the story of her struggles in attempting to grant her child the best education opportunities. In the article, she specifically addresses the topic of overseas summer programs. However, her post generated a hot debate about education in China and about what middle-class families are willing to sacrifice in order to achieve their top education dreams. Educators, parents and scholars (XL Yu 2016) have argued that in today's China the latest "luxury status symbol" of Chinese parents is not the latest bag by Vuitton or Gucci, but rather their children. It is increasingly evident that middle-class parents are willing to spend a small fortune on their children's education in order to obtain distinction and social status, or to use a Chinese term, 镀金 (*dùjīn*), which literally means gilding: this common and very visual expression refers to the power of education to increase the value and worth of individuals.

[7] 《月薪三万，还是撑不起孩子的一个暑假》

In fact, the members of the Chinese middle class aim for social distinction, which in the Chinese context can be identified with the search for *sùzhì*. *Sùzhì*, or "quality", is what gives value to human capital and, therefore, allows Chinese individuals to secure a place in the middle-class category. The "*sùzhì* discourse", which has been promoted by the Chinese government since the 1980s and which encourages the Chinese population to focus on their quality as individuals, largely revolves around the acquisition of cultural capital. Economic, social and symbolic capital do not create *sùzhì*, but cultural capital does (A Anagnost 2004). The implication that *sùzhì* can secure middle-class belonging and reproduction is the reason why Chinese middle-class parents strongly encourage their children to pursue quality education and often organize their lives around quality school enrolment opportunities. Quality education is, therefore, the fulcrum around which middle-class family lives and dynamics revolve.

The Chinese educational system is actually the largest state-run educational system in the world: in 2015, it had over 200 million full-time students (Ministry of Education, 2016). Traditionally, Chinese people strongly believe in the importance of education in the development of the nation and of individuals, and this tradition was further strengthened by the introduction of the One-Child Policy, implemented in 1979 (A Veek 2003; V Fong 2004). Since then, Chinese parents have started to nurture huge expectations towards their only child and have been willing to sacrifice their own economic and personal wellbeing in order to grant their children the best chances to achieve educational success (A Veek 2003; V Fong 2004). In fact, educational expenses make up a large proportion of income expenditure for households: statistics show that the per capita expenditure of Chinese private households on education has tripled over the past decade, rising from 670 RMB in 2000 to 2,637 RMB in 2016 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). These data also comprise those cultural and recreational activities that are school-related

expenditures, such as after-school extra curriculum activities: math and English lessons, music or dancing classes also represent a proportion of private household educational expenditure.

The present chapter advances a new framework for analyzing the housing strategies and necessities of Chinese middle-class migrant families, focusing on the city of Shanghai. The core argument of this chapter is that children's education, which implies the accumulation of cultural capital, and therefore of *sùzhì,* is the strongest driving force affecting middle-class migrant families' housing strategies. Furthermore, cultural capital is the primary resource that can generate the other three forms of capital, since it can be converted into economic, symbolic and social capital. Therefore, cultural capital is key to securing *sùzhì* and middle-class reproduction, and in China the access to quality education is strongly connected to housing strategies.

I have identified three core dimensions through which education and schools directly affect middle class migrant families' housing choices in Shanghai. I have, furthermore, linked these three dimensions to the four types of capital described by Bourdieu in his analysis of class (P Bourdieu 1984): economic, symbolic, social and cultural capital.

The first dimension is entitlement to property, closely connected to economic capital: homeownership is extremely important when considering a child's education for a number of reasons, which can be summarized in the Renter Discrimination Policy. Owing to the advantages that home owning brings to the families and their children, schools and education clearly affect migrant families' ownership goals. The second dimension is status by association, which is closely connected to symbolic capital. This second section analyses how school and education can affect a family's class status through the selected house and neighbourhood. In Shanghai, certain neighbourhoods are perceived to be more prestigious than others according

to the reputation of the schools belonging to those neighbourhoods, which can lead to educational and residential segregation as well as the capitalization of school quality in terms of housing prices. Being perceived as belonging to a "high-quality" neighbourhood corresponds to being perceived as belonging to a certain class status group, a desirable goal for any middle-class migrant family. The third dimension is cultural status, closely connected to a family's cultural and social capital. This last section investigates how school and education can affect a family's social status though its housing choices. In order to ensure the acquisition of cultural capital, Chinese families often rely on social capital, i.e. networks, which can represent the determining factor that decides whether one's child can attend a key school or merely a regular school.

This chapter examines the above-described three ways in which schooling and education can affect middle-class migrant families' housing choices. First, however, I review the existing literature on migrants' housing strategies and priorities when making housing-related decisions.

Migrants, housing strategies and education in contemporary China

Much of the literature on migrants and housing strategies in contemporary China deals with the struggles that migrants face compared to urban individuals and families. Many of the studies on housing strategies focus on the *hùkǒu* system and its inequalities (T Cheng, M Selden1994; KW Chan, L Zhang 1999; S Zhan 2001; S Jiang, M Lu, Z Liu 2005; CC Fan 2008; H Sato 2008; KW Chan 2010). Related studies have dealt with housing policies for migrants (Y Huang, WAV Clark 2002; W Wu 2004; L Shi, S Li, H Sato, J Chen, F Guo, Y Wu 2011; T. Sicular 2013),

with migrants' accommodation issues, housing preferences and consumption patterns, and with the channels used by migrants to find a house (L Zhang 2001, 2010; W Wu 2002).

Other studies have looked at the Chinese middle class in relation to housing (Y Man 2010). L. Tomba (2010) has analyzed Chinese neighborhood planning as a way for the Chinese government to achieve social clustering and social engineering, thereby applying the concept of *sùzhì* to neighborhoods and residential areas. The ideas of *sùzhì* and social distinction, also in relation to the Chinese middle class, have been dealt with extensively (A Anagnost 1997; V. Fong 2004; A Kipnis 2006; A Hanser 2008; W Sun 2009; T Kuan 2015; R Zavoretti 2017). Further studies have looked at Shanghai's gated communities as a form of moral geographical exclusion between "insiders" and "outsiders" (CP Pow 2006).

Separate studies have dealt with education in China. S Zheng, W Hu and R Wang (2015) have analyzed the relationship between housing and good schools in Beijing, investigating how schools can affect housing prices. H Feng and L Ming (2010) and M Zhang and J Chen (2017) have instead looked at the relationship between good schools and housing prices in Shanghai. Other studies have looked at educational inequality among Chinese urban schools, analyzing the ethics of private schools as well (J Wang and W Jang 2016). Further studies have analyzed the inequality in terms of educational opportunities between owners and tenants in Shanghai (M Zhang and J Chen 2016) and between urban citizens and migrants (H Qian and A Walker 2015). Lastly, Xiang Biao and Wei Shen have analyzed the relationship between international student migration and social stratification, identifying the convertibility of different forms of Bourdieusian capital as the central dynamic underpinning the social stratification process.

However, no studies have yet examined the interconnection between schooling and middle-class migrant families' housing strategies centered on cultural capital as the driving force that deeply affects family dynamics. I intend to address this lacuna below.

Education system and housing market in Shanghai

Children's education is paramount in the eyes of Chinese parents, who are willing to do anything in their power to grant their child the best education opportunities.[8] The importance of education in China has in many ways been encouraged by government policy. During the initial stages of economic reform, Deng Xiaoping thought of education as the foundation for the "Four Modernizations": agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology. This theory was followed in 1983 by the theory of the "Three Orientations", which, according to Deng, meant that the education system "must be oriented to modernization, to the world and to the future" (H Feng, L Ming 2010). That year, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council presented the Outline of Education Reform and Development in China, stating that "a strong nation lies in its education and a strong education system lies in its teachers". Fourteen years later, in 1997, the 15th National Congress of the Communist Party established that the core development strategy of the country would be the promotion of science and education. In 2004, a five-year plan (2003-2007) entitled "The Action Plan for Invigorating Education" was promulgated by the State Council, with education placed as the top priority for

[8] For the following three sections of the introduction I use both existing literature on housing and education and original Chinese language documentary sources from my fieldwork interviews and observations, especially for the city of Shanghai.

the development of a modern China (H Feng, L Ming 2010). Such a system, however, is not unique to China; similar systems exist in Western societies as well, e.g. the United Kingdom.

According to preliminary statistics released by the Ministry of Education of China in 2017, China spent nearly 3.9 trillion RMB on education in 2016, an increase of 7.57 percent from 2015. As a final example of the government's policy commitment to education, in 2010, the Ministry of Education issued the Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), with the aim of making China a country based on knowledge and technology. This plan was enacted with the specific goal of tackling the deficits of an educational system which is strongly test-focused, such as a lack of critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills (H. Feng, L. Ming 2010).

In the city of Shanghai, the education system and the housing market have both drastically changed since the 1990s. A crucial year was 1997, when entrance examinations for junior high school were substituted for by the neighborhood school policy, leading to a neighborhood-based school admission system (H Feng, L Ming 2010). The neighborhood school policy and its strict enrolment regulations have the purpose of maintaining public schools (公立学校, *gōnglì xuéxiào*) in Shanghai potentially free, with no explicit tuition fees to be charged. This new policy has thus created a close link between the housing market and good schools, which allows Chinese children to pursue quality education. During these years of education and market reforms, private schools started to flourish, and some of the best primary and secondary schools were partially privatized (H Feng, L Ming 2010). Private schools are known in China as "民办学校" (*mínbàn xuéxiào*), or "schools run by the people". Parallel to the educational system reforms, the public housing system gradually transformed into a private system: in today's

China, housing is less frequently included in companies' welfare benefits, and the majority of Chinese individuals purchase and sell their homes on the market. Therefore, starting from the 1990s, people have been potentially able to choose their child's school by purchasing an apartment located in the neighborhood of that school.

Since 2003, the Chinese government has started to reconsider such a market-structured education system, which is a cause of inequality in educational opportunity, and has attempted to strengthen the "neighborhood school" system in order to try to promote educational equality. Since 2005, academic competitions at the primary school level, an important tool for selecting students based on ability, have been forbidden in every province. In 2006, the Shanghai Municipal Commission on Education (SMCE) disallowed public schools from enrolling students based on tests and prohibited private schools from meeting students prior to enrolment. In 2007, the Shanghai government further regulated the private schools' attempt to enroll students across districts (H Feng, L Ming 2010). Despite the attempts made by the Chinese government to reinforce the neighborhood school policy, school choice through housing cannot be controlled and is still a widespread phenomenon. This is because parents are in effect able to choose a school for their children by choosing their neighborhood of residence. Therefore, a reinforcement of the "neighborhood school" system has, consequently, strengthened the relationship between housing prices, educational access and school quality.

The Chinese education system follows the 6–3–3–3/4 model (6-year primary school, 3-year junior middle school, 3-year senior middle school/vocational school, and either 2- or 3-year college or 4-year university). Attending 9 years of schooling (6-year primary school and 3-year junior middle school) is obligatory for all children under the Compulsory Education Law (1986, 2006). The key stage for Chinese students is junior middle school, in the final year of which

students find themselves sitting the "中考" (*zhōngkǎo)*, or "high school entrance examination" and competing for limited places in senior middle schools, one of the few possible routes to entering a key university. As of 2018, the percentage of students in Shanghai admitted to senior middle schools is around 60% (this datum does not include vocational schools, but only considers academic education and qualifications), with a privileged track for students of public schools as opposed to private schools in cases of equal test scores (Ministry of Education, Shanghai, 2018).

The traditional education system in China is "exclusive", mainly due to the existence of the so-called "key" schools at different geographical levels. Key schools enjoy the best educational resources and admit students based on entrance examinations. The key school system was suspended during the Cultural Revolution, only to reappear in the late 1970s (H Feng and L Ming 2010). Owing to a lack of educational resources and teachers, selected "key" schools were prioritized in the assignment of teachers, equipment and funds. Key schools are far fewer than regular schools and allow the best students to be admitted to the best secondary schools based on entrance scores. The Chinese educational model is hierarchical, with priority in resource allocation given to key schools, which are intended for talent training and have a demonstrative as well as an experimental role (S. Pepper 1996).

The city of Shanghai selected its first key schools in the 1950s and followed the key school system until 1994, when the neighborhood policy was introduced (W Cheng 2011). However, after that year, the key school system was only formally abolished, since the list of key schools is still well impressed in Shanghai parents' minds (W Cheng 2011; W Wu 2008). Therefore, distinction among schools is still present, and the term "key school" is still commonly used to

identify high-quality schools, proving that a hierarchy of schools still exists. What are considered as top schools in Shanghai are either expensive – such as international private schools – or elite public schools (the former key schools). Following in the ranking are the former regular schools, which enroll a large number of migrant children and working-class family local children; at the very bottom are migrant schools. Nevertheless, since 2010, many migrant schools have been gradually improving their facilities thanks to government funding (Shanghai Education Commission, 2012).

Furthermore, between 2005 and 2007, fifty quality schools were designated in Shanghai as "Shanghai Experimental Model Senior High Schools" (H Feng, L Ming 2010). However, since there was no official disclosure of schools' quality rankings in the past, information regarding school quality is still imperfect in Shanghai. The designation of schools as Experimental Model Senior High Schools, which occurred in several waves, has disclosed information on school quality distinction, which has increased enrolment competition for these top schools and caused a disequilibrium in terms of housing prices in districts where the best schools are located.

Hùkǒu and education

As described above, admission to schools in China is largely governed by the neighborhood school policy, which is based on the parents' *hùkǒu.* In fact, if parents do not possess a local urban *hùkǒu*, their children can attend nearby quality public schools only until junior middle school, and therefore are only left with the option of a migrant school or a private school for high school education. Therefore, the *hùkǒu* system still acts as an obstacle to the admission of migrant children in Shanghai's public school system, despite the various initiatives that have

been implemented since the 2000s to improve educational opportunities for these children. In fact, before the year 2000, all migrant children had to pay high extra fees (借读费, *jièdú fèi*) in order to be able to attend a public school (a nearly prohibitive choice for poorer migrants) or else enroll their children in migrant schools（民工学校, míngōng xuéxiào）where the quality of education is low and facilities are very basic (C Goodburn 2009; W Luo 2011).

However, in 2001 the State Council issued a notice which urged local governments to provide public school education for all children, local and migrant (W Cheng 2011). This notice was based on two claims (两为主, *liǎng wéi zhǔ*): "the education of migrant children is mainly the responsibility of the recipient city" and "migrant children should be educated mainly in public schools". Subsequent to this notice, many cities responded by taking action to deal with the struggles of migrant children, including Shanghai. Shanghai enacted three main actions to confront the obstacles originating in the *hùkǒu* system and to include migrant children in the public education system (H Qian, A Walker 2015).

In 2004, Shanghai's local government issued a policy entitled "Suggestions on Enrolment of Primary and Junior Secondary Schools" (Shanghai Education Commission, 2004), which encouraged public schools to expand their capacity to enroll migrant children, for example, by expanding class size in order to offer more places to migrant children. The 2007 version of the directive directly encourages local districts to expand the ratio of migrant children admitted in public schools.

The second action occurred in 2008, when a new initiative entitled the "Three-Year Action Plan" (2008–2010) for the Compulsory Education of Migrant Children was put forward by the Shanghai government (Shanghai Education Commission, 2008a). During this period, the local

government invested a large sum to build 144 new schools, which consequently increased school places for children (L. Zhang 2013). Furthermore, the Action Plan encouraged schools located in migrant communities to expand class size from 40 to 50 places (Shanghai Education Commission, 2008a). In addition, a new policy was enacted in the same year to reduce the paperwork (a total of eight documents: identification card, temporary residence permit, employment permit, health certificate of the parent, population planning certificate, social insurance certificate, guardianship certificate or birth certificate, and the health certificate of the child) and financial requirements for migrant children wanting to attend a public school (C Goodburn 2009). The documentation was reduced to two certificates: the parents' rural ID certificate and the temporary residence permit, and the extra fee was eliminated.

The third action involved district governments signing contracts with migrant schools to enroll migrant children in districts where public schools had limited places (Shanghai Education Commission, 2004, 2008a). The government would offer sufficient funds to provide free education in migrant schools as well as in public schools. By 2010, 162 migrant schools had received public funds and provided free education for migrant children (Y Lu 2013).

Data shows that these policies have been successful (CC Fan and L Zhong, 2011; L Zhang 2009). According to the latest official data, in 2012, 74.72% of migrant children receiving compulsory education in Shanghai were enrolled in public schools, with 25.28% attending government-authorized migrant schools (Shanghai Education Commission, 2012).

Furthermore, a new credit-based residence system was introduced in 2013 in Shanghai (Shanghai Municipal Government, 2013). This system allows migrants who have long-term residences and stable jobs to gain points towards their applications for a Shanghai hùkǒu (HX

Song 2013). The first district to implement this new policy was Fengxian. Following the new regulations, migrant children need six certificates to gain basic credits (up to 100 points): the parents' employment certificate, a temporary residence permit that has been effective for at least one year, the child's residence permit, a vaccination certification, a birth certificate, and a household register that proves the parenting relationships. Parents get extra credits (up to 80 points) if they can provide additional documents such as the only child certificate or formal degree certificates. Students are enrolled based on the credits each of them receive; those who cannot submit the six documents are not offered a place (H Qian, A Walker 2015).

School types and district distribution of key schools

As seen above, there are potentially a few school types to choose from when a child comes of school age. In the eyes of very demanding Chinese parents, the differences in quality among these schools are evident: as already described, there is still a strong hierarchical conception of schools, in terms of both quality and prestige, especially in metropolitan cities like Shanghai. The majority of Chinese families opt for public schools, which offer a traditional curriculum fully oriented towards a high performance in the national university entry examination, or 高考 (*gāokǎo*). Nevertheless, public schools are not all the same, and the former "key" schools are still perceived to have higher prestige and quality: key schools have a more student-focused educational system (针对性, *zhēnduìxìng*), better teaching and educational resources, and usually offer international exchange programs: for example, summer schools in English-speaking countries. In Shanghai especially, the term "key school" is still widely used, and families often do anything it takes to enroll their child in a key school, mainly by using their

guānxì. Currently, Shanghai has a total of 108 former key schools, distributed among its districts as I have represented in the map below:[9]



[9] http://www.360doc.com/content/17/0909/18/11668206_685797266.shtml (Chinese)

Owing to the neighborhood school policy, neighborhoods with key schools tend to be more expensive, and purchasing a house in these neighborhoods is a very desirable goal for Chinese families.

Although the most popular option remains public schools, private schools are gaining ground, especially those schools which offer an alternative and a more "international" curriculum: in 2004, 3.2 million students studied at private primary schools in China, representing 2.9% of all Chinese primary students. By 2012, those numbers had grown to 5.9 million and 6.2%, respectively (Ministry of Education, 2016). Similarly, the number of students studying at private high schools and middle schools grew by 27% and 43%, respectively, during the same time period (Ministry of Education, 2016). Even though private schools are not the most popular choice for Chinese parents, owing to their quality and reputation, they are nevertheless steadily improving: current private schools are generally well run and attract top teachers and principals, due to the fact that they educate the urban elite.

Furthermore, private schools with international curricula are becoming increasingly popular with urban parents due to their Western-style educational system, which sacrifices rote-memorization in favor of critical thinking and creativity (Y Zhao 2014). A common opinion among Chinese educators is that students coming from middle- or upper-class families opt for private or international schools to avoid the pressures on their children from the *gāokǎo* examination (R Shi, Y Li 2016). However, an increasing number of wealthy-background students with strong academic performance are also applying to enroll in private schools with international curricula, which is potentially a stepping-stone to enter a prestigious foreign university (Center for China and Globalization, 2016). Educated, middle-class parents value cultural capital as a means for their children to achieve middle-class reproduction of the family.

Therefore, middle class parents' ambitions are not limited to having children who are good at taking exams; they instead aim at giving their children a well-rounded education that develops their critical and creative thinking skills, as well as their English language skills, all of which are essential in order to become a learned, well-traveled and independent individual (R Shi and Y Li 2016). Owing to high tuition fees, which are over 100,000 RMB/year, private schools are not accessible to every family, and those who can afford them often opt for the "safer" and familiar option of public schools, with the idea of giving their children a well-rounded education through travel and studying-abroad programs later on, as my fieldwork interviews confirmed.

As for parents who wish to enroll their children in a Chinese traditional curriculum, choosing a private school is not always the best option: although their reputation is improving, private schools still occupy a disadvantaged position in terms of the *zhōngkǎo* (the high-school entrance examination) and *gāokǎo.* In fact, Wife 6 told me:

> *"*According to the latest regulations for the city of Shanghai, in case of an equal score, students from public schools are ranked higher than those from private schools. Therefore, parents who intend to give their children a more 'traditional' Chinese education aimed at achieving the best performance on the *gāokǎo* tend to prefer public schools".

As in the case of private schools, international curricula are, of course, offered by private international schools. After thorough research on the international schools located in the city, I found that Shanghai has one of the largest concentrations of international schools in China, most of which follow the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum or the curriculum taught in their respective home countries. The range of international schools in Shanghai is diverse, with

students from different backgrounds attending them. As with local private schools, tuition fees for international schools are very high (over 200,000 RMB/year) and are tailored to elite wealthy families. International schools claim they have very high educational standards, and they practice strict admissions policies, with some international schools only accepting children with foreign passports.

At the bottom of the school option ranking are migrant schools: although, as mentioned, their education quality and facilities have been improving thanks to local government funds, migrant schools still represent the least desirable option for migrant families. It is common in poorer schools for classes to be very big and to lack facilities and qualified teachers. Apart from regular migrant schools, there are also recreational migrant schools, which offer classes in music, dance, sports and other extra-school activities for migrant children.

In short, the discussion above demonstrates that middle-class migrant families can be divided into two core categories in terms of their schooling choices. On the one hand, there are the more traditional families who wish for a Chinese education for their children and who ideally aim for public key schools. On the other hand, there are more internationally-oriented families, who want to give their children an international and English language-oriented education, and therefore opt for international curricula in local or international private schools.

Education opportunity inequality: renters and homeowners

In one of our conversations, Wife 5 explained:

> "In contemporary Chinese society, owning a home is a key way for families to secure the best education for one's child. Although it is not easy, my husband and I are determined to do anything we can to purchase a house before our child comes of school age. Renters have many disadvantages when it comes to accessing public schools, and we want to give our child the best education opportunities."

Regulations within the Chinese educational system are, in fact, quite strict: not only is a neighborhood school policy enforced (H Feng and M Lu 2013), which basically assigns a list of school options to each family according to the neighborhood of residence, but a policy that favors homeowners over renters in the access to public schools is also strictly enforced. In the city of Shanghai, a strict regulation commonly known as the "renter discrimination policy" is applied that strongly discourages Chinese families from settling for renting options (H Feng and M Lu 2013). In Chinese cities, the renter discrimination policy arose because the supply of places in local public schools exceeds demand, thus making it necessary to try to moderate access to the school enrolment process. The tenant discrimination policy ensures that children from families that own a house have enrolment priority by ranking them first on admissions lists, whereas children coming from tenant families are ranked after them (M Zhang, J Chen 2017). This "homeowner first and renter second" regulation, along with other government policies and initiatives, has fueled the Chinese housing market, causing the negative label of "naked marriage", or "裸婚" (*luòhūn),* to be assigned to couples who get married without first having purchased a family home.

Wife 5 further explained that:

> "It goes without saying that in such a competitive environment, where Chinese families are fighting for a place in a high-quality neighborhood school, this advantage that owners have over renters is extremely valuable and desirable. Consequently, middle-class migrant families, as well as urban families, have a strong motivation to purchase a family home, although it is far from an easy goal to achieve given the skyrocketing prices in the Shanghai housing market."

Such concerns about the pressure to buy a house to enable children to attend a good school were expressed by my male research participants, though with an emphasis on their roles as providers for their families. For instance, when I met Husband 9 he was living in a rented apartment in the suburbs of Shanghai. However, he was very excited because he had just moved into a bigger and better apartment of 60 sqm, where he lived with his pregnant wife. His parents were about to move in as well to take care of their child. Every time we met during my fieldwork in Shanghai, he would express his concern about the housing market and its prices in this city. He often spoke about the responsibility men have for their family and his feeling of letting his family down in case of failure to achieve their housing goal. He explained:

> "A family home is central. With an owned home you can potentially have everything: security, a good education for your children, 'face' in the eyes of family and friends, and even a Shanghai *hùkǒu*. Without a house, everything is many times more difficult and you have no privileges."

Now that his child was due, his pressure to purchase a family home had become stronger and stronger: he repeatedly stated the importance of achieving this goal before their child is admitted to kindergarten.

> "This is because, in China, there is path dependency in the quality of the schools a child attends: a good primary school leads to a good middle school, a good middle school leads to a good high school, and so on. Therefore, families like ours feel both the pressure and the urgency of purchasing a house as soon as possible."

All the men I interviewed during my fieldwork expressed concerns similar to those articulated by Husband 9. Moreover, Husband 5 added:

> "Of course we know how difficult it is to purchase a house in this city, and if we cannot afford it there is not much we can do but settle for other options. As for my family, we would move back to our hometown, Baoding in Hebei province, and purchase a house there where prices are lower."

However, some families were determined to stay in Shanghai even if they could not afford an apartment, hoping for the best. For instance, Husband 7 explained:

> "I see my family in Shanghai in the future because there are great opportunities for professional and personal growth here. I do not intend to go back to Jiangsu. Therefore, if our housing goals don't come true, I would still send my child to a Shanghai private school: we have enough money to pay the tuition fee of a good school and I would focus on money and career to bring my family a comfortable lifestyle and status."

Nevertheless, not every family can achieve their home owning goal, and many families remain "renters for life". What are the most common options in this case? My respondents fell into two

main categories: either opting for a private school or sending their child to a public school and then hoping for a *hùkǒu* conversion as well as relying on *guānxì* to obtain admission to a good school afterwards. For instance, Wife 1 said:

> "There are two major obstacles for us to give our children a good education: house and *hùkǒu*. My family wants to send our child to a public school, but if we don't buy a house, we most likely will only be admitted to an average school, if we are lucky. But if that is the case, we would accept it and work on our *hùkǒu* conversion in the meantime, so that our child can go on with his or her studies in Shanghai. Another strategy is *guānxì*. *Guānxì* is key, and you never know when and if you can find useful *guānxì*: most families rely on networks to get into good schools and maybe we could do the same."

Other families, such as Family 7, were happy to send their child to a private school in case their home owning and *hùkǒu* conversion dreams went awry: "Of course there are always private schools and, to be honest, their quality is improving, so the choice of a private school wouldn't be a disaster."

What emerges is that low-income families and migrant families are subject to indirect discrimination because these two categories of families are especially struggling to pursue the goal of purchasing a house in a good school neighborhood, adapting their housing strategies to the potential educational scenarios of their children. In fact, the tenant discrimination policy and the struggles to buy a house are closely connected, not only because owning a house is extremely beneficial to the enrolment of one's child in a local public school, but also because the renter discrimination policy creates a housing market with extremely high selling and reselling prices

(M Zhang, J Chen 2017), which contributes negatively to the real-estate bubble that has hit Chinese cities over the last several years.

However, gaining advantages in terms of admission ranking in public schools is not the only school-related privilege granted to homeowners. In fact, owning a home in Shanghai contributes to gaining points within the local *hùkǒu* application process: this process is composed of a total of 120 points, and after reaching this number one can try and apply for a Shanghai *hùkǒu*. How are *hùkǒu* and public schools connected? Possessing a Shanghai *hùkǒu* is extremely important when aiming to give one's child a public education. Migrant families who do not possess a Shanghai *hùkǒu* can temporarily apply for a Shanghai residence permit, or "**上海市居住**证" (*Shànghǎishì jūzhùzhèng*), which allows migrant children to attend a public school; however, there are limitations to elementary schools and middle schools (Ministry of Education, 2017). Therefore, migrant parents should aim to convert their children's *hùkǒu* into a Shanghai *hùkǒu* in time for high school admission: only after reaching 120 points can a child be allowed to enroll in a public high school. Within the Shanghai *hùkǒu* application process, an owned home not only enables its owner to accrue points towards a *hùkǒu* conversion but also automatically grants migrants a Shanghai *hùkǒu* seven years after the purchase of the property.

Perceptions on the importance of house and *hùkǒu* in obtaining cultural capital were well expressed by Husband 4 during my fieldwork interviews:

> "Purchasing a house in Shanghai is extremely important for our child's education also because of the *hùkǒu* issue. I didn't consider changing my *hùkǒu* until my child came along: I always thought that I could use money and career to improve my status. With kids it's different, and my wife and I would prefer to send our child to a public school.

> For families like us, who prefer public education, it is very important to obtain a *hùkǒu* conversion. This is also for stability reasons: we wouldn't want to send our child to a public school in Shanghai until middle school and then have him change because of our *hùkǒu* situation. Gaining stability through house and career can secure a local *hùkǒu*, and we will do what we can to achieve this goal for our family."

However, in some situations, economic capital alone can represent a solution for securing a child a place in a good school, be it public or private. For public schools, there are cases where the neighborhood school policy is not rigorously applied and where ways exist to get around the regulation. There exists, in fact, a semi-official market for those children who are not eligible to attend a public school: families can sometimes be granted admission for their child by paying a high yearly fee, which in Shanghai is around 130,000 RMB. A report published in 2011 by the Institute for 21st Century Education states that despite the neighborhood school policy, a small number of exceptions still exist, due to those out-of-zone parents who pay a high extra admission fee to send their children to a key primary school. Therefore, although it is not always possible to access this informal market, Shanghai families know that economic capital can potentially be a way to secure a place for their children in their ideal school. As for expensive private local or international schools, it goes without saying that income can ensure admission without the need to satisfy other conditions.

An ideal solution to overcome such discrimination against tenants has not yet been found. What this situation seems to indicate is that if renters were allowed to enjoy the same privileges as homeowners, migrant families especially would see their credit constraints improved; furthermore, real-estate prices in neighborhoods with good quality schools would also be reduced in favor of a more balanced housing market.

Middle-class migrant families are struggling because of this policy, due to their realization of how important an owned home is for the future of their family and children.

Class status and belonging: the effects of school and neighborhood

The most valuable private property of an urban Chinese household is their home. An owned home is the most desired asset for middle-class migrant families, not only because of the home's intrinsic economic value, but also because of the symbolic value that owning a house entails: a house can increase the perceptions of one's social status and social class and allow for the creation and development of "high-quality" networks. However, the house and all the symbolic meaning it carries are not placed in a social vacuum but surrounded by other houses and other families that together constitute a neighborhood. Social class and social status are, in fact, socially determined and generated by the continuous and constructive interaction with the social context in which the family is living: families are, therefore, placed in a social and geographical context which is perceived as a projection of their ideas of class, status and lifestyle. Consequently, families' social context of belonging, the basic unit of which is the neighborhood of residency, interactively affects a family's status and social class perceptions. In Shanghai, there are some neighborhoods as well as residential types (e.g. gated communities) that are perceived as being of a higher quality, or "素质高" (*sùzhì gāo*), and more prestigious than others, and therefore preferred by middle-class migrant families who are striving to secure *sùzhì* and a high social status. Furthermore, the best neighborhoods are, in the eyes of Shanghai families, those which contain a high-quality key school.

School and education can thus directly affect families' perception of social status and social class through the acquisition of cultural capital from the best schools in Shanghai. However, the renowned difference in school quality and the existence of key schools have also had important indirect effects on the perceived prestige of neighborhoods: in fact, when the quality of school education and other public services a family receives depends on the district the family resides in, this is naturally capitalized into the home value. Consequently, apartments located in good school neighborhoods are inevitably more expensive than average school neighborhoods. For the city of Shanghai, one key school per square kilometer raises average housing prices by approximately 19%, and one Shanghai Experimental Model Senior High School per square kilometer increases housing prices by 21% (M Zhang, J Chen 2017). Being able to afford a house in a top neighborhood significantly affects families' share of symbolic capital.

However, this phenomenon of capitalization of school quality is not unique to China: it can be observed in Western societies as well, for example, in the United Kingdom. Parents in the UK are also willing to use any means in their power to secure their children a place at a top performing state school (D Clapham, P Mackie and S Orford 2014): in order to move into a good school neighborhood, many families are paying the premium for a home near an esteemed school, not unlike the situation in China.

When looking at capitalization of school quality, it is important to notice how families' efforts to accumulate cultural, economic, social and symbolic capital are embedded simultaneously in their housing strategy, as all of the types of capital are involved and contribute to the capitalization of school quality. Such an interrelation between different types of capital occurs because the value of capital is determined by its convertibility (P Bourdieu 1984). In this specific case of the connection between children's education and housing strategies, the value

of economic capital is that it can be converted into symbolic and cultural capital, which is key for middle-class families in securing high shares of other types of capital. Simultaneously, cultural capital allows for the acquisition of *sùzhì*, a key element for middle-class families in securing social distinction.

Unfortunately, however, purchasing a house in a key school district and successfully enrolling one's child in the desired key school has become increasingly difficult. This is not only because of the increasing housing prices and competition in key neighborhoods, but also because of the increasing regulations enforced by the Shanghai local government which attempt to limit the turnover of apartments in order to ease the existing congestion in key school enrolment. For example, in April 2014, the government announced a new policy for the Jing'an district, one of Shanghai's central districts, with the aim of curbing the problem of excess demand for Shanghai's key school enrolment. According to this policy, only children from one family per apartment can enjoy the privilege of priority admission to enter a key primary school every five consecutive years (M Zhang, J Chen 2017). This means that if a family sells their apartment right after their child enters school, the new purchaser of the apartment must wait for another five years before the child can be granted the same privilege.

The definition of school attendance zones, which are published by schools in enrolment brochures, is also very specific: eligible areas are not drawn as a spatially closed boundary; instead, exact residential buildings and building complexes are named. This increases the congestion issue within key neighborhoods, which are subject to increasingly selective housing-school regulations. If, on the one hand, the strict rule has helped to prevent corruption in school enrolment, on the other it has worsened social inequality in terms of intergenerational mobility, thereby posing a potential threat to the vitality of the city (M Zhang, J Chen 2017).

Another consequence of the school neighborhood policy, and a way in which school can affect perceptions of class and symbolic capital, is the phenomenon of residential segregation, caused by the tendency of higher income families to reside in expensive neighborhoods known for good schools. Residential enclaves are the units that constitute neighborhoods and districts, and they are in many respects enclosed societies. The core value of these residential communities is distinction, or the idea that residents of such communities are entitled to a sort of exclusiveness that distinguishes families living in these residential oases from the "outsiders". The biggest fear of gated community residents is that of "contamination" by the world outside the gates, which can potentially cause a loss of exclusiveness, a decrease in housing prices and the destruction of such a high-end and immaculate community (CP Pow 2007). This distinction is based on the idea that "outsiders" are low quality individuals whose "contamination" would not only potentially disrupt the peace and order of the community, but most of all would negatively affect the image of the neighborhood. To promote an image of a high-quality life, the entrances to these estates are often marked by magnificent gates, sometimes in the style of elaborate baroque facades (CP Pow 2007). Because residents have been filtered through housing affordability, the estate is created as an "enclave" for those with similar socioeconomic status (W Wu 2005).

This generates a phenomenon of moral geographical segregation, where the morality of places is defined based on the exclusion of individuals of inferior quality living outside the community (L Tomba 2014). The label "quality", or 素质 (*sùzhì*), is the main factor that sets apart insiders and outsiders; however, another recurring label, mentioned many times during my interviews in Shanghai, is "civilized", 文明 (*wénmíng*): both of these labels define the Chinese middle

class, differentiating it from the lower working class and poorer migrant workers. Husband 1 stated:

> "We want to live in gated communities in good neighborhoods, because they are a high-quality and civilized environment. Residents in these neighborhoods are also high-quality and civilized, and I think it is the best environment to raise my family in."

His wife went on: "Good school neighborhoods are the best option for our family; it's like killing two birds with one stone: good schools bring good education and good neighborhoods." In Shanghai, the importance of maintaining a civilized modern living environment is underscored by an annual campaign whereby residential estates are awarded the official title of "Civilized Residential Quarter" (文明小区，*wénmíng xiǎoqū*) by local district governments. However, this award is basically given by default, as nearly all gated communities in the city have this plaque displayed at the entrance gate.

With an increasing number of migrant workers coming into the city to search for job opportunities and earn money for their families, the necessity for middle-class families to secure strong boundaries between them and the lower classes is felt very strongly. Distinction is, in fact, the principal means to secure a strong middle-class belonging and middle-class reproduction of the family. This is especially true for middle-class migrant families, who have experienced hardship in the city and who come from a rural background.

Husband 10 was very proud of his achievements so far, especially of his career and of what getting a good job has meant for his family. However, during our conversations he could not stop stressing the fragility of his family's condition:

> "I am very happy and very proud of what I have done so far. It is not easy for rural families who want a future in the city, you know, especially in a competitive city like Shanghai. We have come a long way, my girlfriend and I, and we want to keep moving forward for our kids and family. But our situation, although we are better off than other migrants, is really precarious, and I fear every day that I may lose everything and go back to where I started. That would be the biggest failure for me and my family. This is why I keep striving to get more and more: this way, if I lose a little, we can still be okay, right?"

His girlfriend added a different perspective:

> "I also think that migrant families like ours have a stronger urge, compared to our urban counterparts, to keep up our families' 'face' and status. Most families are not happy when their children migrate: of course, they know about all the opportunities that there are in a city like Shanghai, but elder generations who were born and raised in the countryside still have preconceptions about life in the city. Our parents are always saying it's dirty, unsafe and that urban families are different. So I think migrant families need and want to prove their rural families wrong; we cannot conduct an average life here in Shanghai. We need to show them that we have reached a strong status for the family and that we are able to secure a bright future for our children. And this is all because of our decision to move here and leave the countryside behind."

To sum up, a common feeling among the middle-class migrant families I met was that belonging to a high-end, high-quality neighborhood identifies them with a high-quality and exclusive environment, benefiting the families' status and social class perception in the eyes of family

and networks. This resonates with observations by several scholars that the affluent middle-class people in Shanghai buy into gated communities to try to establish themselves as refined residents living in civilized enclaves (CP Pow 2007). Moreover, the new Chinese middle class demands housing that meets the standards of their new acquired sensibilities, i.e. gated communities combined with excellent transport facilities and key schools, in order to enjoy the privileges that owe to what M Chen and D Goodman (2013) call "housing status-groups" membership: according to the authors, private housing in high-status gated communities has at all effects created a new privileged social group, an affirmation which fully resonates with the findings of this dissertation. Belonging to an exclusive community implies belonging to a high social class in the eyes of family and networks; therefore, exclusive, quality school neighborhoods represent a strong means for securing symbolic capital.

The effects of school choices on status (through homeownership)

In September 2018, Wife 6 contacted me to discuss a story that had gone viral on WeChat and Weibo in a matter of days. An elementary school in Suzhou had been divided into two areas by a fence: the rich children on one side and the migrant children on the other. Wife 6 explained the situation, which profoundly shocked her:

> "It's unbelievable, the campus has been divided in two: on one side are 800 migrant students and on the other 400 students from local rich families who own expensive apartments near the school. The complaint obviously came from the rich parents who don't want their children sharing exclusive education resources with migrant students with no local *hùkǒu.* I read that the migrant students are all between 8 and 12 years old

> and were previously enrolled in a migrant school, Lixin. After the school closed, the 800 students were transferred to the nearest school that was able to receive such a high number of students: the exclusive experimental elementary school of Qixi. At the end of August, the rich parents who had spent nearly 28,000 RMB/sqm to purchase an apartment in that neighborhood started to feel threatened because their children's academic success was now in danger due to the presence of unqualified students. Not only this, these parents also said the situation was unfair: after all, they had invested a lot in order to grant their children such an exclusive education. I believe it is a question of exclusiveness: middle-class families invest in order to be above their peers and do not want to share their exclusive territory with the working class or the migrants. Look at these parents: what they fear is contamination and loss of exclusiveness."[10]

The exclusiveness that high-end neighborhood communities bring are attracting the ambitions of Shanghai's middle- and upper-class families, who view high-quality and exclusive districts as a means of securing middle-class status and being associated with a high-quality lifestyle.

In the previous section, the core of the analysis was the indirect effect that key schools have on neighborhood quality and exclusiveness: therefore, schools can indirectly affect a neighborhood's and a community's symbolic capital, thereby increasing a family's status and social class. However, high-quality schools can also affect status and social class through the supply of cultural capital, which can be obtained and enhanced by receiving education in Shanghai's best schools.

[10] See the interview with Ma Li on The Sixth Tone for the full story at http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1002855/why-chinas-migrants-cant-just-leave-poverty-behind

Middle-class families can afford expensive housing in high-end neighborhoods, and they are also the social class that shares a strong inclination towards human capital investment. Such an inclination makes wealthier families willing to pay for a high-quality education and all that is required in order to achieve it.

As well as being the primary source of *sùzhì*, cultural capital can also be converted into economic, symbolic and social capital. Therefore, middle-class families in China are willing to spend a small fortune on their children's cultural capital: in China, this "education fever" is a phenomenon widely present among members of the middle class, reflecting one of the renowned characteristics of this social class group: pragmatism. As Wife 3 stated: "I'm not really interested in luxury goods. I would rather spend my money on my child's education because it has a higher return on investment than any other luxury good." Education and cultural capital, in fact, are one of the strongest means of ensuring distinction to a family, as Wife 4 explained:

> "If I can give my child the best education possible and he can attend Shanghai's best schools, he will stand out among his peers and have the best opportunities when he grows up. Today, the idea of comparing luxury goods to show off social status is outdated; Chinese parents prefer comparing their children's education level".

What emerges is that education is paramount for middle-class migrant families; however, education is only one aspect of cultural capital, which consists of a wide set of a person's social assets (education, intellect, style of speech and dress, etc.), which promote social mobility in a stratified society (Distinction, 1984) and confer social status and power.

As stated by Husband 5, only after he moved to the city did he deeply understand the "practical" value of education, which creates well-rounded and strongly-opinioned individuals:

> "I think that education is the most important thing, even more important than money. You know, there are many rich people in China who have a lot of money but little education, and I do not want to become one of them. Education makes us better people and opens up a lot of opportunities: without education, I would still be in my village, I wouldn't have got this job as a software engineer in a good international company, and I wouldn't understand the world the way I do today. Without education, I would still be the same as many years ago. Education brings development, and I wish to share all the things I've learned with my kids."

The possession of cultural capital is also important because it affects how the middle-class migrants can distinguish themselves from the working class and from poorer migrant workers.

My research participants often made comments about what Bourdieu would refer to as the "habitus" of people from lower social classes. These comments elucidated what they saw to be the important elements of distinction between the upper and lower classes. As one example, when I asked him to elaborate on his statement about the importance of language and style, Husband 5 told me:

> "I know that we shouldn't be judging the quality of people based on assumptions made by looking at their clothes, or by noticing their accent when they speak. But often we do not have the opportunity to deepen our acquaintance with every person we meet, and first impressions are taken very seriously here in Shanghai."

He went on to explain, supported by his wife, that poorer migrant workers are characterized by a strong Mandarin accent and by "unstylish" clothing, features which single them out immediately as belonging to a lower social class. Wife 8 also explained that poorer migrant

children prefer to socialize within their community, since within their community of belonging kids all share the same socio-economic background, whereas they struggle to conform to urban communities mostly because of language and aesthetic preconceptions. Although migrant workers look increasingly like urban workers, middle- class migrant families still feel that these language and clothing distinctions are extremely important in setting them apart from the lower classes, and so they strive hard to conform to the government-promoted standards of Mandarin skills and lifestyle.

Closely connected to the idea of *sùzhì* is that of *wénmíng*, or the ideal of being a civilized individual. These two concepts are often used by the Chinese government in its propaganda, in an attempt to promote ideas of social distinction. This propaganda is also used by the government in residential planning: as discussed in the previous subchapter, gated communities and residential enclaves are used for the purpose of social clustering and engineering: the 文明小区 (*wénmíng xiǎoqū*) award serves just the purpose of example setting. Therefore, being "civilized" sets apart middle-class migrants and working-class migrants, who are considered rude in their manners. *Sùzhì* and *wénmíng* are extremely important for middle-class migrant families: going back to Bourdieu, a high economic capital alone does not make an individual a member of the middle class. While reaching a middle-class status, in Chinese 中产阶层 (*zhōngchǎn jiēcéng*), is seen as an ideal goal, terms such as "new rich" or "second generation new rich" have increasingly been used as derogatory terms to indicate individuals who have accumulated wealth but are still low quality and largely uncivilized.

My middle-class respondents all tended to talk about the "new rich", in Chinese 暴发户 (*bàofāhù*), as though they incorporated all of the moral and social problems of China's rapid and unequal economic and social development. For instance, Wife 7 stated:

> "The impression of the new rich category is very similar to that of poorer migrant workers, minus the stigma of poverty. The new rich, as well as their children, are seen as rude, uncivilized and even capable of vandalistic acts, and therefore, together with the migrant workers, they are not perceived as welcome inside exclusive gated communities."

During my fieldwork, I spent time with a family (Family 6) where the husband was considered a "new rich". He lacked cultural capital, but he had good shares of economic capital, which he frequently bragged about both directly and indirectly: in fact, he mostly spent his money on extravagant and branded purchases, which he viewed as a material projection of his personal success. However, he and his original family felt extremely insecure about their status, which was based on economic capital alone, and he often behaved rudely towards his wife and her family, who were educated middle-class people. His wife told me that his family would often criticize her physical appearance, openly calling her "fat" and "ugly" during family reunions. She believes that this behavior is due to insecurity. While she felt hurt at first, she later learned to accept it as a result of "feeling inferior". Her family often complained about the husband's lack of cultural capital, even their teenage son, who refers to his father as a person with no culture, "他没有文化" (*tā méiyǒu wénhuà*), and therefore will not let him attend his parent-teacher meetings for fear of losing face. This specific situation, which is not uncommon in China,

shows that the possession of economic capital alone does not secure middle-class status without cultural capital.

A degree and a good job allow middle-class individuals of rural origins to increase all four types of capital, but what really sets them apart from the lower classes is the acquisition of cultural capital, from which the other three types derive. Husband 9, for example, obtained a degree in engineering at the University of Anhui and then moved to Shanghai to work for a very prestigious international high-tech company. Because of his degree and his job, he increased his shares of cultural and economic capital, from which derived an increase in symbolic and social capital. During his accounts of family meetings in his home village, in particular during the Chinese New Year holidays, he shared this thought: "For higher status migrants, going back home is desirable only for a short period of time, and this is mostly due to the educational gap between us and the left-behind relatives". In other interviews, most middle-class migrants used the word "rude", 不文明 (*bù wénmíng*), when describing their relatives, as well as "of lower quality", 素质低 (*sùzhì dī*). Therefore, they often engaged in leisure activities together, such as cards or *májiàng*, in an attempt to create an environment of similar socio-cultural conditions.

Clearly, middle-class families are willing to invest in housing as well as to adapt their housing strategies with the final goal of guaranteeing the best education possible for their children. The achievement of a middle-class status, in fact, potentially implies the creation of new and powerful middle- or upper-class networks, which often play a central role in schooling options: *guānxì*, or social relationships, can represent the determining factor that decides whether one's child can attend a key school or merely a regular school. A situation in one of my interviewed families reflects a wider experience among my research participants. Wife 6 shared her son's

situation. He attended a regular elementary school and, in his final year, his grandmother started to worry about his future education opportunities. His scores were average, and it appeared that good opportunities would not open up without help. After some time, one of the wife's colleagues came to know an English teacher who was working in a key school in their district, Minhang, and offered to use this *guānxì* to secure her son a place in that school. He got in without too many difficulties and attended his first year in that key middle school. However, because her son got admitted to this school based on who he knew and not because of his academic abilities, he struggled in this new environment and his scores were not up to standard. The family was upset about the child's study habits and worried he would not do well in his *zhōngkǎo* exam. But they were happy that he was in a good school and hoped for the best.

Indeed, networks often reflect one's place in society and are thus often made up of individuals who share a similar socio-economic background. Therefore, middle-class families have high shares not only of social capital but also of social capital that can be converted into other forms of capital, such as cultural capital, which is key for middle-class reproduction.

Conclusion

The present chapter has attempted to answer the research question: "How does children's education affect middle class migrant families' housing strategies in Shanghai?" by considering three key dimensions of analysis, along with Bourdieu's four types of capital. The main argument of this chapter is that children's education is the strongest driving force affecting middle-class migrant families' housing strategies because cultural capital is key to securing middle-class reproduction. Cultural capital has a high convertibility and its value lies both in its

inherent value and in its convertibility into high shares of other forms of capital. My respondents especially valued cultural capital for its convertibility into symbolic capital, whereby the families were better able to secure status and middle-class belonging.

Education was very closely connected to housing and affected my respondents' housing strategies in several respects. Firstly, the option of a good school for one's child strongly drove the families I visited to want to purchase rather than rent a family home. Because housing strategies gravitate around school options, a two-way dependency was created between school and education, on the one hand, and class, status and housing on the other. This correlation also implies that the four types of capital that make up the middle class (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) are closely connected within migrant families' housing and education strategies. The middle-class migrant families I knew were willing to sacrifice their economic capital in order to secure symbolic capital: living in a high-end neighborhood benefitted perceptions of status and social class. It also benefitted opportunities for accruing social capital because living in high-end communities implied sharing a living environment with high-class networks. Symbolic and social capital could, in turn, help families obtain the best education possible for their children, thereby ensuring further middle-class status and belonging.

Conclusion

Building on previous work that focuses on rural to urban migration and class formation among urban Chinese youth, this project has explored ideas of middle-class consolidation dynamics centered on the house, as well as on changes in perceptions of home that come with the migration experience. My research shows that, in contemporary China, the house stands at the center of a hierarchy of privileges in the middle-class consolidation processes, especially for the middle-class rural migrant group. This dissertation has contributed to research that studies rural to urban migration in China by looking at a widely-overlooked social group: middle-class migrants with rural origins employed in high-end industries in the service sector, and to research that examines class distinction by placing homeownership at the center of class-related hierarchies of privilege. I argue that house, as well as ideas of home, is key in middle-class consolidation and reproduction processes, as it is the principal asset that confers class-related legitimation and power and can provide both inter-class and intra-class distinction. As a theoretical basis to support my argument, I have availed myself of the Bourdieusian approach, which provided an effective categorization model based on the relational aspects of class membership as well as the concepts of distinction and class symbolic boundaries, both of which are key to understanding class-related dynamics in contemporary China.

As seen in the preceding chapters, leaving the original home and embarking on a migration journey brought challenges and changes to the lives of the migrant families I met in Shanghai. Separation from their home, however difficult at first, led to a process of upward mobility for them, particularly in terms of status and social class (C Stafford 2000). It was only after

separation from the rural hometowns that opportunities for personal and professional development arose, allowing them to secure middle-class belonging. Throughout this migration journey, which is simultaneously geographical, temporal (D Massey 1994) and connected to social advancement, house and home played a pivotal role in shaping their ideas about status, class and personal relationships.

The journey started with the original home and a separation from it, a process which caused change in terms of individual identity: during the first stages of migration and adaptation to the urban context, the migrant individual defined him or herself as an individual composed of multiple identities (L Zhang 2002; W Sun 2008), which included that of rural and urban. In the context of China, the categories "rural" and "urban" are extremely complex and can affect multiple aspects of an individual's personality, ideas, beliefs and ambitions, as demonstrated throughout the chapters of this dissertation. Simultaneously, all four types of capital that compose social class membership are also affected by rural or urban belonging.

However, for these middle-class migrant families, rural identity and sense of belonging faded in favor of the urban context and lifestyle, which helped them to become new urban individuals with new beliefs, aspirations and "habitus". Migrants started to view and think of their original home and rural roots from a fresh perspective: with an increase or change in quality of the four types of capital that they possessed came a shift in the location and conceptualization of the home. Migrants' process of upward mobility and of securing a middle-class belonging is parallel to the process of them "gaining a sense of home" in the destination city, and in this process the more recent place of abode starts to acquire more importance for them than the home in the place of origin (P Bonizzoni 2009). The new urban lifestyle means development and the

opportunity for a middle-class reproduction of the family; therefore, middle-class migrants want to belong to this modern, stimulating and dynamic environment.

At the end of the migration journey, middle-class rural migrants feel the need to secure strong urban middle-class membership in the city. My analysis of the experiences of the eleven families who took part in this project showed how the Chinese middle class is perceived to be profoundly heterogeneous and, consequently, the sense of belonging to the middle-class social group is felt as extremely precarious. In this peculiar context of deep insecurity and anxiety (E Tsang, 2014; Y Miao 2016), the only way to secure strong middle-class belonging is by demarcating strong symbolic boundaries with the working class as well as with the weaker members of the middle class. By all accounts, the one asset that is key to assessing social privileges and that grants middle-class families distinction in such an uncertain social context is homeownership.

Answering the research question: the significance of housing for middle-class migrants

"What is the significance of house and home for middle-class migrant families?" was the main research question behind this dissertation. The answer is that housing stands at the center of contemporary Chinese society's hierarchy of privileges, representing the nucleus around which middle-class consolidation and reproduction processes revolve. In the words of the families who took part in this project, the purchase of a family home brings class-related legitimation and power, which secures homeowners a strong place within the widely heterogeneous Chinese middle class.

As described in the introductory section of this dissertation, the subjects of this research all belong to the first generation of a new middle class in China, a situation which makes both their collective and individual identities extremely uncertain: their identity, in fact, is not firmly rooted in a long, ongoing process of class continuity passed on from generation to generation (TE Woronow 2012).

The heterogeneity of the Chinese middle class (D Goodman 2014; Y Miao 2016), as well as the precariousness of middle-class membership, is cause for the need to create strong symbolic boundaries to demarcate both intra-class and inter-class differences (P Bourdieu 1984). My analysis of the heterogeneity of the middle class, as evident also among my participant families, suggests that homeownership is a crucial factor in the production of class distinction. In fact, the two major categories of "homeowners" and "renters" among the Chinese middle class, which were described during my fieldwork interviews by Husband 5 as respectively "exclusive" and "common", seem to interact in an interdependent symbolic relationship that contributes to determining meanings of class identity (P Bourdieu 1984). The result of this interaction is that homeownership is primary within processes of middle-class consolidation and reproduction owing to the fact that homeowners are entitled to invaluable social privileges to which renters do not have access, as shown in the preceding chapters. Furthermore, what allows middle-class individuals to secure distinction within such a precarious class group is the possibility of enjoying inclusions and exclusions that can limit or promote social mobility (L Tomba 2005). For the Chinese middle class, I argue that the strongest asset that allows for the most significant inclusions is the house. Indeed, as I have demonstrated throughout the dissertation, the distinction and privileges that come with homeownership are narrow and exclusive (D Davis 2006).

This approach to understanding class membership and identity, which centers on the symbolic construction of inter-class and intra-class boundaries, provides insight into the relational aspects of class, as class is "something that in fact happens" (EP Thompson 1966). Using Bourdieu's words, "class is not something given but something to be done". This is why middle-class migrant families work so hard day by day to build their future and to secure their place within the uncertain world of the Chinese middle class.

A new theoretical approach

A theoretical model that effectively categorizes class membership while considering the relational aspect of class is, in fact, the one hypothesized by Bourdieu.

Different relevant studies on class and class identity have been based on various theoretical approaches, the most common being Weber's theoretical framework that explains social strata (e.g. A Anagnost 2008; TE Woronow 2011) and Marx's definitions of class as well as class conflict (e.g. N Pun, C Smith 2007; N Pun, HL Lu 2010). However, for this project, and for the purpose of elaborating a comprehensive definition of middle class in China, I have personally selected and used Bourdieu's theoretical approach. Whereas most relevant studies tend to apply a Weberian approach to explain social class in China (e.g. L Tomba 2004; A Anagnost 2008; TE Woronow 2011; YJ Guo 2012), I believe that Bourdieu's interpretation of the four species of capital is a framework that better allows us to define and identify middle-class membership requirements and characteristics. In fact, the Bourdieusian approach clearly distinguishes between four types of capital that are necessary to draw the symbolic boundaries that discern

different types of social groups, e.g. the new rich (who merely possess economic capital) and the middle class (which mainly possesses cultural capital).

Existing studies have applied Bourdieu's theoretical tools to class analysis. Among relevant studies, X Biao (2003) analyzed the role of capital convertibility in class consolidation processes centered on the acquisition of cultural capital through foreign education and A Hanser (2006) adopted the Bourdieusian approach to explore service interactions and the pursuit of distinction by Chinese working-class clerks.

However, this project is unique in using a Bourdieusian approach to attempt to provide a complete and exhaustive definition of "class" and "middle class" in China, by identifying middle-class membership requirements and enumerating and classifying these according to the four species of capital. Furthermore, Bourdieu's model and his theory of capital conversion has provided a strong basis for the argument of this dissertation, which places the house at the center of contemporary Chinese society's system of privileges, in part due to the high capital convertibility of homeownership. Lastly, his approach provided the concepts of distinction and inter-class as well as intra-class symbolic boundaries, which are key to understanding processes of class consolidation and reproduction in the Chinese middle class. For all these reasons, the utilization of a Bourdieusian approach in this research has provided multiple new insights to the literature on class formation and distinction in China.

"House" at the center of middle-class reproduction and distinction

In this dissertation, I have placed homeownership at the center of processes of middle-class identity consolidation: as noted above, the house is key within contemporary Chinese society's system of privileges, representing the most valuable asset in creating strong inter-class and intra-class boundaries that bring distinction.

Ideas of home are central in middle-class migrant families' upward mobility processes, as is the physical dimension of the home, i.e. the house. Homeownership, in fact, is the main goal and concern of middle-class families, although it is not easy to achieve in a city like Shanghai. Homeownership is key not only because it allows families to introduce their own style and design in the house and thereby turn it into a home (D Miller 2001), but also because it serves as a primary means for securing cultural, symbolic and social status. The migrants pursue a middle-class reproduction of their family, and an owned-home presents multiple key features that can aid in achieving this goal.

My interviews showed that middle-class families invest much time and money in their house and home, which has the power to reflect a family's identity, lifestyle and achievements (S Boym 2001), whether economic, cultural or symbolic. Therefore, a home can affect a family's status and identity formation and consolidation. The home is the place where individual and class identity are stated and reinforced, but it is also the place where networks, i.e. social capital, are created or developed (C Stafford 2000). Middle-class belonging has, in fact, generated opportunities for strong network creation, with relationships based on people sharing similar socio-economic conditions, and these networks often revolve around the home and are affected

by it: what is in the home reflects economic, cultural and symbolic ideas of the family residing in that home.

As analyzed in Chapter Two, an owned home represents a foothold in the city and is connected to the urbanization of the family's identity (L Zhang 2002). It reflects the idea of stability and permanence and, therefore, is essential for obtaining other resources valuable for consolidating the family's middle-class status; for instance, children's education. An owned home also affects the family's status, as the family is perceived as belonging to the city, and this directly affects the *sùzhì* of that family and its networks (W Sun 2009). Additionally, it enhances migrants' sense of security, as they no longer need to worry about housing. An owned home heightens Chinese men's (in particular) sense of respectability and "face" towards their family, since a house carries a lot of meaning about personal attributes and desirability, especially in marriage (L Zhang 2010). Migrants also feel more self-confident, because purchasing property is seen as a huge personal achievement.

Therefore, house is central in securing middle-class belonging and reproduction due to the fact that the processes of social mobility and urbanization of migrants are parallel to the processes of home owning and of house becoming home (through decoration, for example). Furthermore, homeownership allows the nuclear family to embark on processes of family reunification (C Stafford 2000), which usually occur along with the birth of the first child, and to host family celebrations of traditional festivals in the city, thus increasing the nuclear family's status.

As alluded to above, homeownership is able to secure advantages for families in terms of access to other resources, notably education. In fact, Chapter Three showed that, owing to the connection between schools and housing in China, children's education is the strongest driving

force affecting middle-class migrant families' housing strategies. All middle-class migrant families aim at securing a house at least before their child starts school and, even better, in a good school neighborhood. The reason why schooling is such a strong driver in terms of families' housing strategies is not only the fact that education brings cultural capital, which allows for a middle-class reproduction of the family, but also the fact that cultural capital can convert into economic, social and symbolic capital (P Bourdieu 1984).

Hence, the high convertibility of cultural capital, which derives especially from education in key schools, makes homeownership such a strong ambition for middle-class families, since high shares of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital secure social distinction.

For these reasons, homeownership legitimates middle-class membership and brings power and privileges to the families who can achieve this dream. House and home, therefore, are key to accessing the privileges that promote social mobility and advancement and are central to middle-class identity consolidation and reproduction processes.

Therefore, this dissertation has provided a new framework for analyzing distinction and middle-class reproduction, while also contributing to a second body of literature that studies migration and urbanization dynamics in China.

The "middle-class rural migrants" social group: heterogeneity and individuality

This dissertation contributes to the literature on rural to urban migration in China by giving voice to a social group that has until now been widely overlooked: middle-class migrants with rural origins.

China's contemporary social and economic relations have produced new social groups that are struggling to determine their identity (TE Woronow 2012). As the accounts and experiences presented throughout this project have illustrated, processes of class formation and the securing of middle-class membership are collective as much as they are individual, since each social class is deeply heterogeneous. Most times, securing class belonging and securing a bright future for oneself or one's family relies heavily on individual or family-specific situations and decisions. For example, the stories and concerns regarding homeownership aspirations narrated by the members of the eleven families have shown that succeeding in achieving the homeownership dream is largely a matter of individual or family life paths, confirming how class groups are not monolithic, but extremely varied and individualized.

The data collected from my fieldwork, as well as the personal relationships established with the participant families, allowed for this class heterogeneity to emerge very well in context, providing insight into the different shades that coexist within the Chinese middle-class spectrum.

Nevertheless, in spite of the limits encountered when attempting to find collective meanings of "class" and "middle class" in contemporary China, due to the presence of such a heterogeneity among each social group, many studies on China have dealt with specific class groups, from the working class to the "new rich" (e.g. D N Pun and C Smith 2007; CK Lee 2007; Goodman and XW Zang 2008; L Tomba 2004, 2009; L Zhang 2010; N Pun and HL Liu 2010; YJ Guo 2012).

However, the majority of relevant studies on rural to urban migration have focused their research on working-class migrants (农民工, *nóngmíngōng*), for the most part excluding middle-class migrants from the mosaic of the internal migration literature (e.g. L Zhang 2002; A Hanser 2008; W Sun 2009; N Pun 2009; CC Fan 2011; TE Woronow 2012). This evident gap

in the China-related ethnographic literature on rural to urban migration has caused an elision of two important topics: housing aspirations among migrants and the higher-end industries of the service sector.

As for the first topic, relevant studies that have dealt with working-class migrants have merely looked at accommodation strategies and challenges (e.g. W Wu 2002, 2004, 2006; JR Logan, Y Fang, Z Zhang 2009) due to the precarious economic conditions of the subjects. Therefore, the only literature that has investigated housing aspirations in contemporary Chinese society is the one that examines the Chinese urban middle class. It goes without saying that, although similarities exist between the urban middle class and the middle class with rural origins, homeownership for middle-class migrants with rural origins acquires different shades of meaning due to their disadvantaged background, as extensively described in the preceding chapters. Nevertheless, relevant literature on the Chinese middle class has associated ideas of class identity with middle class consumption patterns. As Tomba (2009) clearly explained, although there are factors of individuality in class identity and formation processes, the middle class in China "appears to shape their status around a new set of collective interests", especially in relation to consumption and knowledge resources. When looking at the Chinese middle class, Zhang Li (2010) also placed the focus of her analysis on consumption, dealing extensively with the interests of the middle class as homeowners. Further studies, such as those by D Davis (2000), D Goodman (2014) and Y Miao (2016), have also provided exhaustive analyses on the Chinese middle class by attempting categorizations and definitions as well as by analyzing middle class consumption and homeownership patterns.

The present study has integrated the two bodies of literature (rural to urban migration and middle-class studies) in order to share the perspectives of the social group comprised of middle-class migrants with rural origins within middle-class reproduction dynamics.

Furthermore, my research has focused on subjects who were employed as white-collar workers in the service sector industry, which until now has been examined and analyzed mainly from the perspective of working-class migrants. Relevant studies (e.g. A Hanser 2008; TE Woronov 2012; MH Ling 2015) have presented the emerging service sector as the main occupational goal for working-class and unskilled migrants by exploring the low-end and poorly paid jobs in the service industry. In relation to this, MH Ling (2015) explains that the state is directly involved in reproducing a social hierarchy where rural migrants provide cheap labor for manufacturing and low-skilled service industries. However, the service sector is a heterogeneous industry, and this project has focused on the high-end jobs (e.g. the high-tech industry) that are able to produce shares of economic, symbolic and potentially social capital, which are important in securing middle-class membership since they allow people to establish strong symbolic boundaries with the working class. In fact, for middle-class rural migrants, their higher-end service-industry occupations are a source of distinction, and the data collected during fieldwork research enabled me to explore people employed in the kinds of jobs that have been mostly overlooked in studies on migration in China.

Revisiting the fieldwork site and further considerations

In 2017, a year after the completion of my fieldwork, I was back in Shanghai for a shorter visit to the participant families. Although we had kept in touch regularly during my year of absence

from China, it was indeed very different to be able to meet up in person with the eleven families once again. On this occasion, I was able to see for the first time the new apartment purchased by Family 11, one of the three families who had managed to achieve their homeownership dream during the last few weeks of my fieldwork months. However, at that time the family still had not been able to move into the new place due to renovation work, which only ended in October 2016. When I revisited Shanghai a year later, I finally had the occasion to be invited as a guest to the family's new apartment. Husband 11 seemed very happy and serene:

> "It is not a big apartment, as I anticipated to you last year, but it's all ours! My family and I are really excited. You know, after our 'naked marriage', I find that finally becoming homeowners is a great achievement, although the place is quite small and quite far from more central areas of the city. But it's located in a good neighborhood and it's also very close to my workplace, which is always a plus, for me at least."

The family was very happy to share such an achievement with me, and they joked about the fact that I was basically a part of it all, as they had shared nearly every detail of the process during my fieldwork months. The joy and celebratory mood related to their family success was naturally followed by musings about the situations of some of their peers, including other participant families. On this occasion, Wife 11 expressed her thoughts on the meaning of middle-class families' housing aspirations:

> "We feel so happy and relieved after buying this house. I'm sure you may find this a bit strange. To tell you the truth, we also do at times. I mean, buying a house is a great achievement, but we as a family can feel a huge difference compared to our previous lives as renters. We feel much more secure and we are not as anxious about our future,

especially my husband. It's hard to explain, but the moment we signed the homeownership contract I suddenly felt like everything was going to be okay from that moment on. Maybe it won't and we will be facing more hardship, but what I'm trying to say is that this is a milestone for us."

Wife 11 went on describing her feelings about middle-class membership in China and explaining the importance of homeownership in achieving middle-class reproduction:

"We are also happy because we know how hard it is to afford housing, and many of our peers envy us somehow. I believe that a fundamental aspect of homeownership is that it allows middle-class members to distinguish themselves from the lower classes, but actually also from other members of the middle class. We are all white collar and educated individuals, but we as a family are homeowners, which means we potentially have a more secure future and that our children will also probably be successful and educated middle-class individuals as well".

Furthermore, the data and personal experiences presented in the preceding chapters also suggest that class belonging as well as class formation is not only a matter of recognition of what individuals possess; it is also a matter of what they do not possess. Husband 11 explained this point very clearly:

"Now that we are homeowners, society looks at us in a different way. Now we have every right to be in this city, probably because we are viewed as individuals who can produce value. However, when we were renters, we were judged all the time because of what we didn't have. That is a family home, of course. When we got married, people criticized our 'naked marriage' and even I was criticized: 'If you don't have a sense of

> security (referring to our renter status), how can you give your family a sense of security?' And then after we got married, everybody made sure to tell us that without a house our children's education and future were at stake."

Therefore, what emerges is that not owning a house is perceived as lacking security, status, or even *sùzhì*, whereas homeownership brings admiration by family and peers. Owing to the heterogeneity of class groups in China, both intra-class and inter-class boundaries are profoundly relational in nature, which explains the need to "distinguish oneself and one's family", as clearly expressed by Wife 11.

Although three families have managed to achieve their homeownership dream, the remaining families have not, showing how individual characteristics and identities are present along with more collective characteristics when pursuing middle-class belonging. The remaining eight families, despite being middle-class members, have not yet been able to escape the economic boundaries that are marking them and placing them in a more precarious middle-class social group.

In spite of the fact that homeownership is, as I have argued, the most central asset producing distinction for the Chinese middle class, these symbolic class boundaries are, in fact, changing along with the institutional, economic and social changes occurring in contemporary China. Therefore, a question that arises at this point is whether homeownership will still be key in producing class distinction in the future. Although other studies of Western societies have also attempted an analysis of housing in relation to distinction, for example, in the UK (C Hammett 1995; CM Gurney 1999; T Butler 2003; E Silva, D Wright 2009), this question is empirical in nature and could point to interesting directions for future research.

The data analyzed in this research shows that the connection between distinction, class entitlements and homeownership explains how the struggles and aspirations of the Chinese middle class relate to the larger context of social transformation and inequality in contemporary China. The data also shows that inter-class and intra-class hierarchies are creating new structures of privileges and entitlement in Chinese cities.

As Wife 11 concluded:

> "In contemporary China, middle-class homeowners stand at the center of society's system of privileges. Homeownership gave us power, as now we feel legitimized to distinguish ourselves from our middle-class renter peers and to pass on the privileges we have gained to our children. We are now homeowners and are new life is about to begin."

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