Being-with Others: an existential anthropology of recent Chinese migration in Tokyo, Japan

James Henry Coates

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National University

September 2012
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Andrew Ng for his guidance and for being a part of my supervisory panel. I would also like to extend my thanks to the other members of my supervisory panel, Dr. Karen Y and Dr. Richard. Despite the challenges we faced, they were always there to offer support and encouragement.

Besides, I would like to thank my colleagues, family, and friends at the Australian National University who were always there to offer support and encouragement. I would also like to thank my mentor and the most supportive and understanding people I have ever met, who have been a source of inspiration and encouragement throughout my research process.

This PhD was funded under the Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) and the Japanese Government Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) Scholarship. I owe much gratitude to the generosity of my supervisors and friends in Tokyo, who took time to share their knowledge with me. Their support was compensated for their help, and yet they understood my condition with warmth and understanding. For this, I am ever grateful.

Unless otherwise acknowledged by citations in the text, this thesis represents the original research of the author, James Henry Coates.
Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to express my gratitude to Dr Andrew Kipnis, the chair of my supervisory panel, for his guidance, patience and encouragement. I would also like to extend my thanks to the other members of my supervisory panel, Dr Ashley Carruthers and Prof. Tessa Morris-Suzuki for their kind comments and support. A special thanks goes to Prof. David Wank at Sophia University, whose sponsorship made fieldwork in Japan possible, and to Prof. David Slater and Dr. Simone Dennis for their friendship and mentorship. I must also thank all my colleagues, mentors and friends at the Australian National University, who have provided me with the richest and most supportive environment imaginable. Finally, I must thank my family for their encouragement and support, and my wife Jennifer who has been my biggest inspiration throughout the research process.

This PhD was funded under the Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) and the Japanese Government Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Training (MEXT) Scholarship. It was made possible through the generosity of my interlocutors and friends in Tokyo, who took time to share their lives with me. None of them were compensated for their help, and yet they approached my questions with warmth and enthusiasm. For this I am ever grateful.
Abstract

This ethnography explores the disjunctures, tensions and convivialities experienced by Chinese migrants in Japan. Chinese migrants now constitute the largest group of registered “foreigners” in Japan, with over 600,000 documented in 2009. The size of this group is the result of a Chinese government-sponsored drive for educational and economic success, and Japan’s flexible student visa cum proxy labour migration system. The migrants are situated in a complex world of conflicting imperatives and confusing mobility regimes. Based on 20 months fieldwork in Tokyo’s unofficial Chinatown, Ikebukuro, this dissertation demonstrates the value of an existential focus in the Anthropology of migration. I do not represent migrants as harbingers of a new epoch of transnational flexibility nor as mere subjects of global capital and the nation-state. Rather, I present them as an example of how we all negotiate complex social worlds amplified by disjunctures and mobility. I situate my existential focus with reference to the work of Jean Luc Nancy, particularly his use of the term “being-with.” I also take inspiration from Michael Jackson’s work, showing how relational materialities, affects and events shape migrant lives.
The chapters of this dissertation consider existential dilemmas as they manifest themselves across a number of spatial scales. I examine everyday practice in the small spaces of conviviality found in Ikebukuro, the dilemmas of living in the large metropolis of Tokyo and how Ikebukuro is situated within the broader field of international Chinese migration. I explore the ways Chinese migrants struggle to define themselves at these multiple levels, often leading to a sense of ambivalence in their lives. As much as this struggle creates a sense of ambivalence however, the place of kinship in their transnational imaginaries gives a particular shape to their sense of “being-with.” I conclude by showing how events such as the Tohoku earthquake create new imperatives for Chinese migrants, suggesting potential sources of hope for the relationship between Ikebukuro Chinese and Japanese locals.
Being-with Others: an existential anthropology of recent Chinese migration in Japan

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Introduction

Chinese migrant “Others” in Japan

Situation myself

“Being-with”

Chapter outline

Chapter One- Setting the Scene

The proposal

Exploring the Ikebukuro Chinatown proposal and its aftermath

Chinese community?

Beyond Chinatowns

Chapter Two- Everyday Mobility

Agency and Mobility

Student visas as migratory channel

Visas and passports as flexible agents

Chapter Three- Being mobile: disjuncture and difficulties

Disjuncture

Chapter Four- Being in Tokyo: Space, Capital and the Sensory

Introducing Tokyo: capital and its consequences

 vi
Being a migrant in the City 129
Walking in Ikebukuro and an incident of governance 133
"Receptacle living" 145

Chapter Five- Plateaus and hairdressers 152
A few hours in MingYang (MY) Hairdressers 159
Renao and Cultural performances within MY hairdresser 162
Language games, "Chinese-ness" and Code-switching 168

Chapter Six- Constructing selves 176
Hair and Trans-Asian identities 180
Individualization, Emotional labour, passing 190

Chapter Seven- Gendered friendship and play 201
It's for fun: Wei le wanr ba! 217
Other games 227

Chapter Eight- From friendship to elsewhere 239
The championship 251
The role of "banquet buddies" 257

Chapter Nine- Family and Being a migrant 263
Being and Materialities 275
Kinship and diaspora 278

Conclusion 284

Bibliography 293


Introduction

The electric lights are already shining,

But why is there gloom in my heart?

I pace, a lone figure, in the city...

(Guo Moruo)

When Guo Moruo wrote the above lines to his famous poem "By the Electric Lights" he was working and studying in Japan. Guo was a significant Chinese historical and political figure in the May-fourth movement, and later became a member of the communist party. He married a Japanese woman and started a family in Japan, before leaving to join the anti-Japanese resistance back in his homeland in 1937. Like so many young Chinese men at the beginning of the twentieth century, he was torn between a desire for a cosmopolitan life and the concerns of his country. Mobility was the vehicle for his desires, although the experience of moving and being out of place proved more disruptive for him than he had imagined. He expresses this experience within many of his poems, exploring concepts such as loneliness, frustration and confusion which in many ways transcend the historical period he was born into.
Movements between China and Japan have often marked historically significant periods. For Guo’s generation, the flow of people between Japan and China marked a desperate struggle to make sense of Japan’s successes in modernising under the Meiji government in the second half of the nineteenth century. Guo and his contemporaries, such as Lu Xun and Sun Yat-Sen, moved to Japan with an eagerness to learn about the modern nation-state, with hopes of taking this knowledge back to China. Others merely moved to trade, work and study, and never made it into the dominant national histories of either country. The movements of these people, both common and famous, left their mark on the terrain of Japan’s cities, with historical “Chinatowns” found in Yokohama, Nagasaki and Kobe. Considering both the historically significant figures generated from Chinese migration to Japan and the communities formed by those flows it is evident that movements between China and Japan have always been important; shaping both countries in various ways.

Flows between China and Japan however, have not always been constant, which adds to the significance of Guo’s generation’s movements. After the second world war and the rise of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1949, the flow of people between China and Japan slowed to a mere trickle, and eventually stopped altogether. The heavy regulation of movement within China, a drive for self-sufficiency, and the spectre of the cold war meant that it was nearly impossible to leave China. Chinese communities which had opted to remain in Japan gradually lost contact with the
mainland, bolstering allegiances and ties both within Japan, and with neighbouring culturally ‘Chinese’ zones, such as Taiwan and the colonial Hong Kong administration.

Since the 1980s, however, a new wave of migrants from China has begun moving between the two countries with greater intensity than ever before. They now make up the largest group of non-national residents, with over 600,000 Chinese nationals recorded in Japan since 2006. It would be unwise to draw direct parallels between this new flow of people and that of the early twentieth century. Guo’s generation contended with colonial regimes, a collapsing empire and the search for a modern Chinese state in the face of an ascending Japanese nation. In contrast, contemporary Chinese migrants to Tokyo are caught in a global economy in which China is rapidly gaining economic and financial power over Japan. The new wave of Chinese migrants are caught in a world with accelerated travel and communications, and come from a country now admired and feared due to its rapid development.

Depending on which strata of society they are from, Chinese migrants can also be potentially wealthy builders of transnational ties between Japan and China, earning more status and wealth than their compatriots in China. For others however, Japan’s rapidly ageing workforce and distaste for certain kinds of work has positioned them as an alternative labour force. In this way, a diverse milieu has formed out of the flow of people from China to Japan.
Despite the economic and historical differences between Guo’s time and the current period, much of Guo’s writing reflects similar existential themes to those I found while conducting fieldwork amongst Chinese migrants in Tokyo from late 2008 to early 2011. I observed that the Chinese people I met exhibited frustrations, desires and anxieties comparable to those found in Guo Moruo’s poetry. Although Guo moved to Japan with patriotic aspirations, his poetry focuses on the everyday struggles he faced during his time as an overseas student. The tensions between cosmopolitan desires and love of homeland; between individual success and responsibility to family; between a desire for recognition in a foreign land and the capacity to simply live one’s life unbothered, were all themes in Guo Moruo’s early material. Many of my interlocutors expressed similar sentiments to Guo, demonstrating the persistence of certain existential themes, despite markedly different historical situations. My interlocutors still articulated the sentiments of Guo’s “lone figure” surrounded by the “lights” of Tokyo; a metaphor for the tension between capitalist modernity, economic wealth and its effect on urban people. Much like Guo’s poem, this ethnography explores the disjunctions, tensions and convivialities experienced by Chinese migrants in Japan from both a singular and collective view.

Chinese society, both in China and elsewhere, is undergoing rapid changes akin in terms of magnitude to the societal upheavals of modernisation in the nineteenth century, although the socio-cultural context of the current era differs significantly. Nonetheless, what is highlighted by the juxtaposition of these two eras is the
significant consequences periods of rapid change have for people's sense of place in
the world, and how movements between China and Japan are a useful empirical ground
to explore the relationship between change, movement and subjectivity; both
historically and currently.

Guo's poem demonstrates that rapid changes and movement are not simply a
matter of concern on the macro level; they are also a concern on the personal level
where feelings of being a "lone figure" emerge. Such loneliness was equally apparent
among Chinese migrants in Japan today. The image of the "lone figure" caught in the
throes of modernity has not only been a concern for poets, but has been a central
theme in the social sciences since their advent (Durkheim 1997; Simmel 2002 [1903]).

The dichotomy of the individual versus society or structure versus agency has plagued
the minds of scholars since at least the 19th century. The continuation of this
dichotomy suggests it is in many ways an unsolvable tension within the social sciences
and humanities. What is more, this tension has proven less interesting in the abstract
than in its specific socio-cultural forms. Chinese subjects and their position in the
world are an excellent site to explore the specifics of this dichotomy while also
invigorating contemporary theoretical critiques of it.

Many China studies scholars have attempted to understand the contemporary
modernisation's effect on people in the People's Republic of China (PRC) through the
lens of "individualisation" (Yan 2010 a; Yan 2010 b; Kleinman et al 2011).
While this scholarship represents a reignited interest in Chinese selfhood and its relationship to broader forces, the chosen lens of “individualisation” wrongly suggests that China’s historical changes are roughly equivalent to Europe, with the implication that it is merely at a different stage in a uni-linear process of modernisation. An ‘individualisation’ approach denies China’s unique socialist past as well as its continuing formally socialist reformist agenda.

As Andrew Kipnis argues there are multiple modernities fought over within China, with the ways ‘modernity’ is invoked being a political tool rather than a useful etic category for analysis (2013). While in agreement with Kipnis, this ethnography attempts to move beyond macro-level debates on this subject. Whether it is individualisation or not is less interesting than the ways in which the self is experienced and constructed as a project. From an existential anthropology

---

1 Originally theorised by scholars such as Giddens and Beck, “individualisation” is described as a phenomena where ties that embed people within their social lives are institutionally dissolved (Beck 1992; Giddens 1992). Yan Yunxiang, following Beck, suggests individualisation has occurred through 20th and 21st century China (2010 a). Firstly people were disembedded from kin relations, and re-embedded within state organized structures through Maoist processes of collectivisation. Later, they were individuated during the post-1979 reform era through government discourse which encouraged Chinese subjects to take responsibility for their economic well-being and become desiring and entrepreneurial (2010 a: 505-506). This disembedding and re-embedding, according to Yan, has positioned the “individual” at the centre of political and institutional changes in contemporary China and is “characterized by the relatively weak influence of public forces on the family, the greater control of the individual over her or his life, the centrality of companionate and conjugal relationships, and an emphasis on personal well-being and affective ties” (Yan 2010 a: 1).
perspective it is possible to recognize the practices and themes explored by subscribers to the “individualization” hypothesis without seeing them as solely the product of institutions and wider forces. As Kipnis suggests “modernity” and the “individual” can be invoked by everyday people as much as higher powers, which could be interpreted, using an existential perspective, as an attempt to negotiate the vicissitudes of everyday life; rife with various tensions, exclusions and convivialities.

**Chinese migrant “Others” in Japan**

Chinese migrants in Japan are influenced by discourses surrounding modernity and the decline of social ties in China, but they also contend with other forces which alienate them in ways unique to their migrant experience. Georg Simmel classically describes the process of becoming other in terms of the figure of the “stranger.” He describes the stranger as one “who comes today and stays tomorrow” and is the synthesis of “wandering, considered as a state of detachment from every given point in space” and the conceptual fixing of personhood (1908:184). The stranger’s condition is thus a paradoxical one where they are simultaneously of the group and not of the group.

“He is fixed within a certain spatial circle— or within a group whose boundaries are analogous to spatial boundaries—but his position within it is fundamentally affected by the fact that he does not belong in it initially and that he brings qualities into it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it” (1908:185)
East Asian migrants represent a group of "strangers" that has often been of particular concern in Japan. This concern is in many ways due to the situation which Simmel articulates as being "near and far at the same time" (1908:188). They share distinctively entwined histories, which come from a shared geographic region. These cultural similarities are not merely a source of commonality however, as divergent interpretations of the same symbolic and linguistic forms cause anxieties. Such anxieties are further exacerbated for migrants in Tokyo as their co-presence within the everyday spaces of the city are affected by Tokyo’s unique dynamics. Within Tokyo, migrants are simultaneously made visible and invisible, becoming both a subject of desire and concern. This contradiction results in a process where “…consciousness of having only the absolutely general in common has exactly the effect of putting a special emphasis on that which is not common” where neighbours are “not really perceived as individuals, but as strangers of a certain type” (1908:188).

Chinese migrants are paradoxically the most desirable and least desirable “type” of “Others” in the contemporary Japanese context. This perspective has historical precedent, although its contemporary manifestation is particular to current Sino-Japanese relations. China has historically been both desirable and undesirable in the eyes of Japanese nationalists. Japanese nationalist scholarship during the nineteenth and early twentieth century heavily critiqued China’s historic position as a major cultural influence in Japan (Tanaka 1995; Morris-Suzuki 1998). As Tessa Morris-Suzuki notes, figures such as the philosopher Motoori Norinaga created a lexicon of
cultural concepts in the nineteenth century intended to distinguish Japanese culture from its neighbours (1998:47). Similarly, later figures in Japan contrasted China’s undesirable historical influence over Japan with that of the ‘West.’ For example, Nitobe Inazo, the author of the English translation of *Bushido*, once praised the “liberating power of Western thought” which saved Japan from China’s “celestial didactism” (Morris-Suzuki 1998: 69).

Japan’s distaste for East Asian others was not limited to scholarly debate. Indeed, it often held tragic consequences for migrants in Japan. After the great Kanto earthquake of 1923, fears of civil unrest after the devastating effects of the earthquake drove the police and locals to target anyone seen as a potential threat to stability. The Korean independence movement at that time positioned Koreans as a perceived major threat, with rumours that ‘foreign’ groups such as the Koreans were poisoning local wells in Tokyo, Chiba and Yokohama. Tragically, many Koreans were killed as a result of this perception, with estimates of over 2500 Koreans, as well as 700 Chinese migrants.

The perceived threat of East Asian others often contrasted with the explicitly inclusive imperialist goals of Japanese expansionism in the early twentieth century. During the peak of Japan’s imperialist expansion, movements between Japan and its colonies (such as Taiwan and Korea) and various occupied territories (such as China) were administered at the local level, with port to port regulation rather than a national
boundary (Morris-Suzuki 2010). Colonial subjects, such as the Taiwanese, were granted Japanese nationality and allowed to travel freely, although they did not enjoy the same civic rights as ethnic Japanese. This system, as well as indentured labour schemes during Japan’s expansion, ensured that transnational mobility within East Asia was common, with large groups of Koreans and culturally Chinese people living in Japan. After Japan’s surrender in 1945, efforts were made to repatriate former Japanese nationals from Japan’s colonies and occupied territories. At that time, a greater number of ethnic Chinese repatriated to the mainland than other East Asians. After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, even fewer Chinese nationals remained in Japan as more people returned to China and the PRC’s borders solidified.

During the post-war period, Koreans’ relatively large population situated them as central figures in debates about ‘foreigners’ in Japan, with the term *zainichi* (JPN: literally, ‘in Japan’), a shorthand term for ethnic non-Japanese groups who live in Japan, becoming synonymous with Koreans. During the Cold-war period the *zainichi* Koreans occupied the difficult position of being ethnically associated with both “liberated” South Korea and the more threatening presence of communist North Korea. This association created fissures amongst the Korean *zainichi* themselves, where some decided to become naturalised citizens, whilst others continued to identify strongly with their ethno-political ties, forming schools and institutions exclusively for Korean *zainichi*. Until 2006 they were the largest group of non-ethnic Japanese and were
subject to a wide range of discriminatory practices and crises of ethnicity, often being associated with criminal groups or political spies.

In contrast, smaller ethnic Chinese and Taiwanese groups received less attention during this period, and in some instances were credited for their commercial efforts. For example, Yokohama, Nagasaki and Kobe became recognized as historical Chinatowns and featured as major attractions for newly affluent Japanese people desiring a 'taste' of the Other. Consequently, this group of overseas Chinese (JPN: kakyou) became championed as the historic middlemen between Japan and the outside world. Tsu Yun Hui documents how the Chinese community was celebrated as major contributors to the clean-up following the devastating Kobe Hanshin earthquake in 1995 (Tsu 2009). In this sense, Chinese migrants served as an example of minority-majority cooperation in Japan prior to the early 2000s (Tsu 2009).

In recent years efforts by non-profit organisations, rising scholarly interest in zainichi Koreans and their increasing naturalization, have all positioned zainichi Koreans in more favourable terms than previously (Shipper 2008). Perceptions of Korean culture have pluralised, with a wide range of perspectives on zainichi as well as a clearer distinction between those with South Korean and North Korean ties. Negative perceptions still exist among vocal conservative groups in Japan, but several modes of acceptance have also emerged. A symptom of the pluralised and changing perception of Korean culture in Japan is Japan's recent "Korean wave," (JPN: Kanryu).
Arguably triggered by the popularity of the Korean television melodrama “Winter Sonata” (*Fuyu no Sonata*), the “Korean wave” has seen a shift in the way Korean language, food and pop culture is appreciated among Japanese people, particularly middle aged housewives (Ho 2011). Changing perspectives are also apparent in the celebration of individual examples of Korean *zainichi* contributions to Japan, as in the case of Masayoshi Son, the owner of one of Japan’s major telecommunications companies “Softbank.”

Recent Chinese movements from the PRC have been far less appreciated than either earlier generations of Chinese migrants or current *zainichi* Koreans. One current image of recent Chinese migrants is as dangerous criminals. Chinese nationals were calculated to have been responsible for 41% of all “crimes committed by foreigners” in 1996, despite only constituting 16% of the foreign population. Similarly, in 2003 Chinese people made up the largest group (45%) of foreign residents arrested by Japanese law enforcement (Zha 2003:120). Some of these crimes have received much media attention, such as an incident in 1996 when five men stormed a night club in the Ginza district, cut the telephone lines and used short swords and fake guns to steal US$100,000 in jewellery, watches and cash (Wudunn 1997). Despite the fact that much of the illegality recorded in these statistics is technical or visa-related (such as visa overstays or minor offences), the media portrays Chinese crime as violent. What is more the image of Chinese crime is inflated in magnitude, seen as a significant
criminal problem in Japan despite the fact that these crimes represent a small fraction of all crimes committed in Japan (3%).

In a September 2002 *Asahi Shinbun* opinion poll, only 19% of the Japanese respondents had positive feelings about China and Chinese people (Zha 2003:129). Similar studies have shown similar results, such as Daojiang Zha’s mixed method study in Niigata Prefecture (Zha 2005). Using a questionnaire survey and a small number of semi-structured interviews, Zha investigated how Japanese residents react to the presence of Chinese labourers. Zha found the majority of respondents expressed negative sentiments about foreign Chinese students and workers. This study is congruent with a broader international study conducted by the PEW Global Attitudes Project, which found that 69% of Japanese people polled in 2010 had an unfavourable view of China, ranking them first amongst all nationalities with a low opinion of the PRC (PewResearchCentre 2010).

At the same time, however, Japan’s national Diet has been legislating to encourage the flow of Chinese people into Japan (on a temporary basis). In July 2010 the required amount of savings which Chinese tourists needed to be granted a visa was reduced to 24% of its previous amount (RMB 240,000 to RMB 60,000). Chinese tourists now constitute the largest national group of visitors, with 390,000 PRC tourists visiting Japan in 2010. Chinese students are similarly encouraged to come; in 2008, Prime Minister Fukuda declared a new target of 300,000 international students
by 2020. Chinese students currently constitute over 60% of the foreign student body, and show no trend of decline.

Discursively then, Chinese migrants in Tokyo are situated within a complex bind of forces. The institutional factors that shape their everyday lives and right to remain in Japan are also fraught with contradiction. The Japanese visa system has ensured that Chinese people enter and continue to live in Japan in increasingly legal and unproblematic ways. Gracia Liu-Farrer has shown how student visas are increasingly easy to obtain in Japan, resulting in a proxy labour migration scheme whereby many students spend more time working in undesirable jobs than studying (2011). At the same time, migrants on these temporary visas have few symbolic or political rights.

Similarly, permanent and long term resident visa holders have no right to engage in local politics and find it extremely difficult to gain nationality due to Japan’s requirement of descent for citizenship (ius sanguinius). Japan has had the lowest rate of granting nationality to migrants amongst OECD countries over the past 20 years (Castles and Miller 2003: 271). Amongst the Chinese people living in Tokyo, I rarely came across naturalized citizens, even amongst those who have lived there for the past 25 years. According to my interlocutors, naturalization is difficult because you must change your name to a Japanese one, give up Chinese citizenship and register permanently with a municipal government in order to gain Japanese citizenship. These
perceptions technically contradict Japanese regulations on citizenship, which have not required non-nationals to change their names to Japanese since 1985 (Morris-Suzuki 2010). However, the persistence of conventions within local municipal governments makes it an unofficial requirement for registration in many parts of Japan and perpetuates the perception of the necessity to change your name among many migrants.

Beyond issues of citizenship and permanent residency, Chinese migrants also face everyday forms of discrimination. Housing availability for example, is notoriously “anti-foreigner” with particular concerns about disturbances caused by Chinese and South-East Asian tenants’ cultural practices. Similarly, the image of ‘Asians’ as unclean has ensured that young Chinese on student and trainee visas have become a common source of labour for “undesirable jobs” (JPN: 3k: kitanai, kiken, kitsui) such as factory work, cleaning and late hour service work. The majority of Japanese companies explicitly avoid hiring young Chinese graduates, though this is changing in some technology companies such as Sony and Panasonic.

The difficulties migrants face is symptomatic of what Tessa Morris-Suzuki has called Japan’s “cosmetic multi-culturalism”, whereby diversity is only celebrated on a superficial, consumable level (Morris-Suzuki 2002). Despite historic evidence of Japan’s heterogeneous background and the common presence of others within its cities, the image of Japan as a uniquely homogenous culture with the right to decide
who belongs is still popular amongst many people. Harumi Befu has made a compelling argument that this view has connections to Japan’s modernising project over the twentieth century, and in particular is the product of anxieties surrounding Japanese identity after the nation’s defeat in the World War II (Befu 2001). In his analysis of “nihonjinron” (JPN), a genre of popular non-fiction discussing Japanese-ness, Befu argues that the popularity of discourses which emphasized the cultural specificity and homogeneity of Japan filled a void left by the collapse of previous Japanese national symbols (such as the flag and the emperor). Ethnicity created a sense of belonging detached from Japan’s military past and allowed Japanese people to engage in international markets with a sense of “uniqueness” that outlasted the influences of America’s occupation of Japan after the war. However, this sense of wholeness excluded many, such as zainichi Koreans, Brazilian-Japanese, and historically excluded categories of people in Japan (burakumin and hibakusha).

In the contemporary era, the position of Chinese migrants in discourses on the Other is one of the most volatile in many ways. They are the largest and most recent migratory flows into Japan, and they constitute a flow of people whose origin nationality currently poses one of the largest perceived threats to Japan. These problems inhabit Chinese migrant’s sense of everyday life in Tokyo and structure the multitudinous sense of opportunism, anomie and lack of community that was so common among my interlocutors.
**Situating myself**

The act of moving for fieldwork has its own disruptions and tensions that divide the self, and which influenced my sense of migrant experiences in Japan. The difficulties I encountered in applying ethnographic methods to one of the world’s largest “global cities” (Sassen 1991) demonstrated to me the way mobilities, space, discursive forms and the effects of global capital problematise everyday social life. It also showed me how tenuous selfhood can be. Dorinne Kondo has described how her experience of fieldwork, as a Japanese American woman researching in Japan, was a “threat” to her “coherent selfhood” (Kondo 1990: 23). It was this insight, as much as her interviews and observations, which guided her interest. As a Chinese speaking Anglo-Celtic Australian studying Japanese and conducting fieldwork in Japan, I had difficulty placing myself in the webs of Chinese migrant social life at first. This initial difficulty led me to question how Chinese migrants envision their own relationships with one another; their own emplacement and being. Consequently, I turned to increasingly small spaces of conviviality. Because of the scale of Tokyo and the busy lives of the people I intended to study, my entry into the field was an on-going process of multiple entries into many small dynamic spaces of everyday practice. Initially I had intended to focus on a category of migrants that scholars have come to call student-workers (Liu-Farrer 2011). As a sampling strategy I enrolled myself in Japanese language education programs in the hope of befriending my classmates with the intention of following them into the rest of their lives. However, this strategy proved
only a partially fruitful exercise and so I found myself constantly chasing new sites over
my two years of fieldwork.

I had intended to focus on networks rather than locality, taking inspiration from
Theodore Bestor’s classic ethnography “Neighbourhood Tokyo” in which he resolved
to “choose a network, not a neighbourhood” (Bestor 1989). I participated in a wide
variety of activities such as attending a private language school, a government
university (Tokyo Gaidai) language training program, and a small language corner held
on weekends for Japanese people interested in talking to Chinese students. I also lived
in a student dormitory owned by the Japanese government where 40% of the residents
were from the PRC. Through these activities I made many friendships, observed the
process of learning Japanese as a Chinese new-comer and witnessed interesting
examples of Chinese student sociality on important occasions such as the moon
festival and Chinese New Year. However, I also found my experiences not conducive
to the process of “thick description.” The Chinese students I met usually worked more
than 20 hours a week and rarely frequented spaces for shared interaction outside of
the classroom. They focused on their studies and tried to make up for the economic
gap between the support they might receive from China and the costs of living in Japan.
Accommodation for those single, young, or on a low salary in Tokyo is notoriously
small. Further, spaces like cafes where interaction between friends and classmates
might occur requires money; public space for the poor being quite limited. Hence,
outside the classroom there was often little to observe other than the personal, one on
one interactions between an interlocutor and myself within their small living spaces. I felt such interactions did not make for great ethnography as they did not directly reveal shared social contexts in which meaning emerged. Nonetheless, this experience served to contextualize part of what it means to live in Tokyo and how the Tokyo environment shapes the possibility for social interaction amongst relatively poor Chinese migrants.

In many ways, in preparing and starting research in one of the world’s “global” capitals, I had become too excited about network metaphors and had not considered the limits of participant-observation as an embodied practice. Participant-observation requires attention to the limits on the amount of data which one person can collect. Bestor not only focused on networks but also used networks to find a suitable locale to research, a fact that I had overlooked in my excitement about network theory. He had very specific criteria for the kind of spatially defined field-sites he desired, and utilized the pre-existing networks he had formed living in Tokyo for several years to find something that fit his ethnographic imaginary. Through this method he was able to investigate the relationship between the neighbourhood he chose to study and the networks that flowed through it.

My fieldwork could be seen as an accelerated version of Bestor’s method. It also faced difficulties that Bestor may not have. Even though I had been to Japan several times before, the population I hoped to study was more recent, transient and
mobile than that studied by Bestor. I realised the kind of ethnography I wanted to create was more spatially defined than I had originally thought, and so I set out to gain access to such a space two-thirds of the way through my first year.

From my initial attempts at fieldwork, I learned that along the western half of Tokyo, Chinese people are everywhere and nowhere in particular, predominating in most of the service industry spaces along the Japan Rail (JR) central ring line (the Yamanote line), that mirrors the old limits of historic Tokyo (known as Edo). Chinese people are most frequently found close to the major stations on this line such as Shinjuku, Shibuya and Ikebukuro, but are common in any bustling centre of nightlife Tokyo.

I managed to befriend a group of Chinese hairdressers who ran their business in Ikebukuro. The shop was located in a massive apartment block which was no longer used for residential purposes but was now full of small Chinese–owned and run businesses. I explained what was involved in anthropological research and the
hairdresser invited me to come to his tiny store. From this position I was able to befriend many of the other business owners in the building and their customers, follow the owner into his circle of friends, who played billiards frequently, and find accommodation in a Chinese-only student dorm located in the north of Ikebukuro. Through the constant drinking associated with getting to know the business owners I also became close friends with several of the local restaurant owners. Later in my second year of fieldwork a local Chinese newspaper also wrote an article about me, which resulted in some interesting impromptu on the street interviews. As in many ethnographer’s accounts, through the introductions of a few key people I managed to position myself amongst Chinese people in Ikebukuro in a way that was eventually tolerated, and welcomed by many if not all. Thus I came to know a particular space personally, conducting fieldwork with over 200 people directly and collecting a series of interviews composed of life narratives and social mapping exercises.

The people I conducted my fieldwork with were a unique slice of contemporary Chinese migration to Japan. Tokyo holds the largest concentration of Chinese migrants in Japan, making up one third of the approximately 690,000 Chinese living in Japan. Consequently, Ikebukuro Chinese are an interesting case study to explore wider trends within Tokyo’s Chinese population, as well as Japan’s Chinese population. The majority of my interlocutors, aged between 18 and 35, were either on student visas or had originally come to Japan on student visas before finding work sponsorship. Student visas have accounted for over a quarter of the total Chinese
population in Japan (Liu-Farrer 2011: 24). However, even this significant figure masks the importance and magnitude of educationally channelled migration. Of the total registered “Chinese” population in Japan only 5 per cent are descendants of the pre-1945 overseas Chinese who decided to remain in Japan after Japan’s defeat in World War Two (Japanese Statistics Bureau 2008; Duan 2010). Among the remaining “new comers,” over 60 per cent originally came to Japan on student visas. Consequently, although only a quarter of Chinese nationals in Japan are on student visas at a given time, student visas represent a common experience for the majority of Chinese migrants in Tokyo.

My interlocutors reflect the majority of early experiences for Chinese migrants in Tokyo in many ways. None of those I met in Ikebukuro studied at Tokyo’s famous universities such as Tokyo, Waseda or Keio University. These universities averaged 800 Chinese students per campus from 2009–2010, which although significant, constitute a minority among Tokyo’s 15,000 Chinese “exchange students” (JPN: ryugakusei) and 22,000 Chinese “pre-college students” (JPN: shugakusei) who are predominantly in Tokyo. One person was the grandson of a Japanese orphan left in Harbin after World War Two (JPN: zanryuu ko), however, he too opted to use a student visa to travel to Japan rather than the special visa status often given to the descendants of Japanese war orphans. In short my sampling strategy left me conducting my fieldwork with a group of people experiencing a stage in migration similar to a significant proportion of most Chinese migrants.
My sample however did exhibit significant gender bias. Unfortunately, due to my reliance on personal networks, rapport and introductions, I only interacted closely with a few Chinese women in Ikebukuro. Although I refer to my interlocutors more generally as “Chinese migrants” I am aware that my research reflects a male majority. I try to take this disparity into account in my analyses by focusing on the homosocial and gendered qualities of Chinese masculine networks. When available, I have also attempted to give greater discursive space to the women I interviewed.

"Being-with"

My entry into the field profoundly shaped my imagination of the possibility for ethnography on my topic and how I imagined the lives of the people I hoped to write about. Spatial disaggregation, loneliness and mistrust were common themes in my experiences of Chinese migrant’s interactions with one another, alongside a pragmatism and optimism that left me confused about how Ikebukuro Chinese felt about their life projects. I had neither a disenfranchised subaltern to represent, nor a happy and active community. Discovering this tension taught me that the ways in which Chinese migrants to Japan situated themselves in the world is full of ambiguities, and that their experiences as migrants serves as a rich example to explore how “being” is constituted by tensions and multiple subject positions, which are created between themselves both intersubjectively and under the influence of powerful, seemingly anonymous, social forces. Michael Jackson’s recent work has called for the reinvigoration of notions of “being” and “the existential” as topics of anthropological
enquiry. Like Kondo, he describes his own fieldwork experiences as a path from “anxiety to method;” paraphrasing Georges Devereux (Jackson 2010). He suggests that:

…the justification of anthropology lay not in its potential to explain social phenomena on the basis of antecedent causes or underlying laws – evolutionary, structural or psychological – but in its capacity to explore … the ways in which people struggle, with whatever inward or worldly resources they possess, to manage the immediate imperatives of existence (2010:47)

Jackson describes these “struggles” in a wide variety of situations. He explicitly discusses his own struggles in research and his relationships with those he studies (Jackson 2007) and explores the struggle for “well-being” in Sierra-Leone (Jackson 2011). Jackson’s “existential anthropology” focuses on the tensions people find in their everyday lives and their attempts to resolve them.

…I have always seen human existence as a struggle between contending forces and imperatives.

At times this ‘sheer and reeling need to be’ (Delillo 2003:209) takes the form of a search for oneself, at other times as a search for belonging. At times it consists in working to transform the world into which one is thrown into a world one has a hand in making—to strike a
balance between being an actor and being acted upon. At times it entails a struggle to go on living in the face of adversity and loss. At times it is a struggle for being against nothingness—for whatever will make life worth living rather than hopeless, profitless and pointless.

(Jackson 2005: x)

Along with Jackson, I wish to focus on “Being” in a manner that acknowledges symbols, culture and political discourse but which does not reduce Being to these phenomena alone.

Though being and wellbeing are abstract concepts, their value for anthropology lies in their power to translate an infinite number of vernacular and concrete terms, including culture, mana, life, individuality, mind and nature. The existential anthropology I want to develop here refuses, however, to reduce existence to any one such category term, or ground it in either subjective or objective realities.

Constantly referring human life to culture is no more edifying, in my view, than reducing it to nature or personhood. My argument is not against the meaning people find in having a cultural or national identity, or in being themselves, or in doing their duty— for such notions are what life is ostensively about for many people. Rather, my argument is against our tendency to ontologise such notions, and
make them foundational to a *theory* of human being. (Jackson 2005: xii)

In my thesis title I have chosen the phrase “Being-with Others” to imply that being human is always a co-formative process that is inter-subjective, inter-connected, or as Jean Luc Nancy who also uses this term has called it “Singular-Plural” (Nancy 2000). I borrow the term “Being-with” from Nancy who originally took it from Heidegger's notion of *Mitsein*. Jean Luc Nancy makes the ontological claim that our “sense” of being is “being-with,” because from inception we are thrust into a world that is in constant relation to itself. In other words, there is no being before being-with. From this starting point Nancy extrapolates powerful conclusions and nomenclature, such as “being-in-common” rather than “community,” which I use to understand the complexities of the Chinatown proposal in Ikebukuro.

Jackson shows similar interest in the ways in which our being is relational, but uses the term intersubjectivity. I believe the term “being-with” implies this intersubjective tone, but has a stronger connotation of the embodied and co-constitutive ontological foundation of this intersubjectivity, and thus prefer Nancy/Heidegger’s term. Through his focus on “being-with” Nancy has also added nuance to the phenomenology of embodiment by focusing on the act of touching rather than vision (as is the case with other phenomenologists; see Merleau Ponty 1962). He expands this initial focus to discuss the notion of “sense” (FR: sens) as a foundation to
his ontological investigations, or in his words, what “creates the world.” An emphasis on *sens* collapses the distinction between human/non-human, subject/object and singular/plural, and emphasizes a co-formative process where one cannot exist without the other. This notion of *sens* is not limited to the corporeal and sensory, but is also linked directly to “meaning,” which is a term he also uses interchangeably with “sense.” According to Nancy, the world comes into being as something formless, articulated only by the interactions that make it sensible.

Being cannot be anything but being–with–one–another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singularly plural coexistence.

If one can put it like this, there is no other meaning than the meaning of circulation. But this circulation goes in all directions at once, in all the directions of all the space–times [*les espace–temps*] opened by presence to presence: all things, all beings, all entities, everything past and future, alive, dead, inanimate, stones, plants, nails, gods—and “humans,” that is, those who expose sharing and circulation as such by saying “we,” by *saying we to ourselves* in all possible senses of that expression, and by saying we for the totality of all being.

(Nancy 2000: 3)

In this sense, Nancy’s work sees “being–with” as a proliferation of being which problematizes simplistic distinctions between the human and non–human, self and the
other. This starting point shares similarities with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s “rhizomatic” thinking and Bruno Latour’s metaphysics of “actor-networks” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Latour 2005). But I believe Nancy goes beyond their ontological claims to consider the political consequences of such an interactional and interconnected world. In this way, Nancy claims it is not merely that things are interconnected but that these interconnections and the sens it distributes have political consequences; it is an ontology of possibilities without resorting to nihilism or idealism.

*But* this means *neither* that we have to orient ourselves in a state of complete blindness, *nor* that it is a matter of indifference that we are disoriented, and that there is no difference between the best and the worst. On the contrary, it means that there is no sense given anywhere that could make us tolerate the intolerable, *no more than* there is non-sense in virtue of which we could disqualify or annul existence. In other words, this means that ‘nihilism’ dissolves every bit as much as any ‘idealism’ (or ‘metaphysics’ in this sense) because it, too, remains in the final analysis submitted to the regime of supposition. It dissolves at the touch of the absolute point of existence. (Nancy 1998: 79)
Nancy portrays the possibility of flat, network-like ontologies to take on hierarchical forms and sees the acknowledgement of this possibility as a particular kind of anti-totalitarian politics. For example, he argues that the distribution of certain kinds of *sens* can actually be their own undoing, such as the *sens* of community, or the *sens* of the world under global capitalism. In the “Inoperative community” Nancy claims that a community whose *sens* is communicated as a totalising whole (ie. “a community,” and most communities as they are described today) can actually result in the death of a meaningful being-in-common because it totalises this commonality (Nancy 1991). He does not refute the existence of such communities, nor say that our understanding of them is wrong (as Deleuze may) but rather states that we must acknowledge what we mean by seeing community as such. Similarly, Nancy describes the dissemination of *sens* across the globe as both “globalization” and “*mondialisation*” or “world-forming” (Nancy 2007). Globalization is seen as a kind of “death of the world” by Nancy. He argues that it is not merely homogenization due to the spread of global capital under neoliberal economic policies but is also a result of the failure of communist economics. This “death” according to Nancy is thus the failure of the utopian promises of both communism and neoliberal economics. At the same time these ways of understanding the world dominate political discourse. This failure, argues Nancy, leaves the world bare to its existence as *sens* and *mondialisation*. “World-forming” on the other hand is globalization’s antithesis, paradoxically enabled
by such an interconnected political economy but simultaneously signaling the possibility of an alternative.

Nancy is wary of the utopian claims made by other philosophers, hoping to emphasize the potential for non-reductive thinking that emphasises our condition of “being-with” and its consequences. Whilst it holds ontological similarities to theories posited by Deleuze and Latour, Nancy’s work is far more solemn in its consideration of power and effects. As Stella Gaon states, his use of “being-with” “exceeds ontology in the direction of ethics and exceeds ethics in the direction of ontology” (Gaon 2005: 390). In this thesis I take inspiration from this notion of a co-formative ontology of “being-with” that is not merely flat but is rather made up of the politically significant interactions of the human, non-human and other assemblages.

Chapter outline

My thesis is designed to explore what it is to “be” a Chinese migrant “Other” from an anthropological perspective. In Michael Jackson’s outline for an “existential anthropology” he depicts a variety of strategies for exploring people’s being in the world without reducing them to generalisations (2005). One means is through the exploration of an “event” which “broaches this question of being as a relationship between the forces that act upon us and our capacity for bringing the new into being…” (2005: xi). These events can be political and highly publicized occasions or “the kinds
of events in which the struggle for being is all but absent, yet in which our being often seems most completely consummated” (2005: xi).

Another strategy which Jackson uses is that of focusing on spaces as the products of everyday relationship that are “sensible, corporeal and imaginative” (2005: 17). Jackson emphasizes how events and spaces are co-formative in actuality, and how the effects of this interaction shape our condition of “being-with.” The spaces provided in this thesis vary in size and form, from the transnational scale to the microscopic. Sometimes I frame a space by an event that made me take note of it, whilst at other times I simply depict a space where many small observational events occur.

In Chapter One I describe the events surrounding the proposal for an Ikebukuro Chinatown. This event led to my focus on Ikebukuro as a field site. I contrast the media representation of this event with my own experience starting fieldwork in the aftermath of the proposal’s rejection, discovering that the event was of less interest to many people in the area than I had assumed, and that, in many ways, it was a “not so imagined community” (Hage 2005).

In Chapter Two, I explore the space of transnational Chinese migration to Japan showing how “mobility” is not exceptional. I do this through an analysis of the various discursive forms and non-human agents that normalize Chinese regimes of mobility to the point where they were not considered a particularly significant event
for many of my informants. In Chapter Three I continue the discussion of mobility through a focus on the mixed emotions and opportunities that constitute Chinese migrants’ experiences. I borrow the trope of “a floating life” from Vanessa Fong to explore the tensions and ambiguities that Chinese migrants shared with me (2011).

In Chapter Four I look at the space of Tokyo and Ikebukuro more specifically, analysing the effects it has on migrant experiences. I argue that a wide variety of affects that residents of Tokyo are subject to take on specific meanings for Chinese migrants. In particular, their reliance on cheap housing articulates with the careful attention paid to migrant behaviour in Tokyo’s streets, which at times atomizes their capacity for social interaction. As a result of this atomization, their spaces of play become hidden away, resulting in an ambivalent sense of Chinese migrants as “hidden” (JPN: miezaru) “Others.”

In Chapter Five I look at a Chinese hair salon as one of these hidden spaces that acts as a “rhizomatic” “plateau” of conviviality. This space is constructed by a wide range of human and non-human agents that create a distinctly “Chinese” sense of conviviality. I focus on linguistic performance as a kind of liminal agent between the human and non-human. In Chapter Six I discuss this space as one where Chinese selves are performed and created. The performance of self is subject to the dynamics of distinction, where Chinese migrants use fashion to craft a cosmopolitan pan-Asian self. It also becomes a site of play for gender hierarchies as women who work as
hostesses in nearby bars boast about their ability to “pass” as Japanese women. The truth of these claims are questioned by the predominantly male hairdressing staff, but at the same time these games leave the men feeling like they themselves have become “hosts” to the women.

In Chapter Seven and Eight I follow these men into other parts of their lives, looking at a series of spaces and events that showed how they make their “floating lives” liveable. I look at masculine friendship as a form of “being-in-common;” focusing on a group of billiards players and drinking buddies who meet in Ikebukuro. This friendship however, takes on new meanings in the migrant context and signals the tensions produced by the “individualisation” that scholars such as Yan Yunxiang have claimed are evident in Mainland China today (Yan 2009; Yan 2010a; Yan 2010b; Yan 2010c). Following an existential approach that emphasizes the negotiation of tensions, I show how the desire to avoid the regimes of obligation often idealised in classic representations of friendship contends with the desire to trust one another.

In Chapter Nine, through interviews and various social mapping exercises, I explore the persistence of kinship as the most important relationship form in people’s lives. I note how kinship imaginaries shape their diasporic imaginaries, and their hopes and desires for the future. I raise a broader question about the meaningful aspects of materialities, their affects and their implications for migrants’ “being-with.” I argue that it is materialities that shape the existential imperatives and hopes of Chinese
migrants. Spaces and events, as the agglomeration of these materialities, similarly make the future "thinkable", which holds implications for how we imagine the continued presence Chinese people have in Japan and their relationship to broader Japanese society.
Chapter One- Setting the Scene

Ikebukuro and nearby areas along the north west corner of the Yamanote line have been popular with the new wave of Chinese migrants over the past 20 years. After Japan’s asset-inflated bubble economy burst in 1991, rents in the shopping and entertainment area north of Ikebukuro station, Tokyo, dropped dramatically, allowing Chinese migrants to open restaurants, grocery stores, bookshops and travel agencies, all aimed at recent Chinese arrivals. Exiting the north gate of Ikebukuro station, one immediately comes upon a smattering of shops owned and run by Chinese people. Within 50 metres of the gate you can buy a wide selection of Chinese language DVDs and books, a variety of Chinese foodstuffs, and will quite likely be offered a free copy of the many Chinese language newspapers printed in the area. If you are a Chinese speaker you can organize travel, receive discounts and even become a Chinese teacher in a small language school for non-native speakers. While this area is recognised as a thriving hub of economic activity and sociality, I found out quickly that many of its inhabitants are reluctant to identify with it strongly; making it uncertain as to whether it really is a “community.” This uncertainty is despite several small groups and networks’ efforts to promote the area.

I initially took a short two-month trip to Ikebukuro in November 2008, attracted to the area because of reports about a thriving Chinese community which had culminated in the proposal of a Chinatown. I had hoped to catch some early
responses to the proposal, while learning more about the place, and undertaking further Japanese language training. I stayed in a small Japanese style inn (JPN: Ryokan), and was delighted to discover that the majority of staff were young Chinese students. One of the people I became close with during my stay was an aspiring businessman who had several ventures on the go but relied on the more stable wages of his evening work at the inn. He introduced himself with the English name "Kevan", proudly writing down his name on a piece of paper while talking to me in a cosmopolitan mix of Mandarin Chinese sprinkled with English and Japanese. When I asked Kevan about the Chinatown proposal he claimed the proposal was rejected because of pressure from Japanese mafia popularly called Yakuza.

"Yeah, I went to the meeting for that [the Chinatown proposal], a lot of good people trying to get decent businesses started up. But there were several people who opposed this notion" I asked him to give me some examples.

"Well, you know this place is run by mafia right? The local council were used to dealing with them, and indeed many of them are mafia themselves. I think they don't want to deal with another organisation, nor give us any kind of legal recognition."

My discussion with Kevan sparked my imagination and caused me to become excited about the prospect of researching a community that was somehow being suppressed. Whether it was by "yakuza" or conservative local organisations, the thrill of representing a group of people with a political project inspired my romantic
anthropological sentiments and influenced the way I saw the area. A day after my
discussion with Kevan I wrote:

The next day, as I walked through Ikebukuro to get to my class, I passed the north gate district. I
decided to take my time walking around, considering Kevan’s comments carefully. This time, not
only did I notice the prevalence of Chinese stores and people speaking Chinese, but I also saw
small posters with China-related paraphernalia, such as a message of thanks to all Japanese and
Chinese friends who had donated to the Wenchuan earthquake disaster fund. I also noticed
people handing out newspapers on the street. I had previously taken these newspapers, but I
think I saw their distributors in a different light this time; I really got a sense of them desperately
trying to connect the Chinese presence in Ikebukuro to some kind of community identity. I am
increasingly thinking that something about the "struggle" for community may be an interesting
topic of research here. As I continued on, I walked through a small passageway called "W.E.
road," an underpass where you are expected to get off your bike. I noticed public announcements
in Chinese asking riders to do so. As I continued further, I noticed a Chinese woman meticulously
cleaning the areas surrounding her shop front, calling her staff inside to come out and help. These
last things seemed to me to be efforts at performing responsible district membership, something
that could be also interpreted as efforts to legitimate the community.

That evening, as I walked back from class, I noticed a changed presence on the street, as young
men with earrings, outlandish hairstyles and black suits stood on every street corner and
pedestrian crossing. I wondered whether these people were bar staff trying to attract customers,
or the underlings of the Yakuza that Kevan had mentioned. That night they had a more
domineering presence than I had remembered, opting to stand in people’s way when crossing the
road.
Despite my efforts to look into the issue of mafia in Ikebukuro, I could not confirm Kevan’s suspicions. Other migrants I spoke to said there was definitely a Yakuza presence in Ikebukuro, but that they had never been particularly aggressive towards Chinese people living there. Japanese friends contradictorily told me tales of Chinese mafia in Ikebukuro, and I was often warned against my fieldwork plans. My interest was piqued, but I was yet to understand even the basic details of the proposal or its aftermath.

The proposal

On August 8, 2008 the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony commenced. At the same time as this display of national solidarity and pride, a humbler event was taking place in a restaurant in Ikebukuro. A group of Chinese business owners and supporters met to raise their glasses in honour of the Beijing Olympics and also to announce a proposal to call a 500 square metre area on the north western side of Ikebukuro ‘Tokyo Chinatown’ (JPN: Tokyo Chuukagai). As the group’s founder, a businessman Hu Yifei stated, the event was intended to “promote the brand” of “Tokyo Chinatown,” celebrate the Beijing Olympics and show support for Tokyo’s then current bid for the 2016 Olympics. Despite this performance of good intentions however, many in the local Japanese community met the proposal with ambivalence and even hostility.
While it had in many ways come to a conclusion by the time I had begun my field work, the debate around whether Ikebukuro should be recognised as a Tokyo Chinatown was what had initially piqued my interest in the status and experience of Chinese people living in Japan. I was not witness to many of the events and discussions around the Ikebukuro Chinatown, but I followed them carefully in the media in preparation for my research. Once I began my research there however, I found that most of my interlocutors were either uninterested in or even entirely uninformed about this saga. In talking to a cross section of Chinese people who live in or frequent Ikebukuro, I encountered a set of perceptions about this place that did not accord with the business leaders’ hopeful dreams of the neighbourhood being recognised as a Chinese cultural and economic ‘community’.

The geographer Yamashita Kiyomi was the first to write extensively about the issue of Tokyo’s ‘Chinatown’ (Yamashita 2010). He recounts how the concept behind the ‘Tokyo Chinatown’ was initially to create a united network among the managers of the restaurants surrounding the northern gate area of Ikebukuro. According to both Yamashita and the group’s founders, while the idea was to create a ‘Chinatown,’ Ikebukuro was intended to differ from classic Chinatowns such as Yokohama because it was not merely a place where Chinese restaurants had clustered. It was supposed to be ‘network-like’ (CHN: wanglingxing) and include Chinese business owners of all sorts, although the proposal’s primary focus still seemed to favour service based industries.
The founder of this movement, Hu Yifei, was a Shanghainese man, born in 1962, who surprisingly was not the manager of a restaurant, but rather a veteran of the Japanese advertising industry. He travelled regularly back and forth between Tokyo and Shanghai, living the life of a transnational advertisement producer. His idea to create an Ikebukuro ‘Chinatown’ was however not a longstanding plan, having only been conceived in 2007.

Hu came to Japan in 1988 and is representative of the first wave of overseas Chinese in the reform period. At the time he came, he lived in the Akabane apartments, north of Ikebukuro, and attended a Japanese language school in Mejiro, to Ikebukuro’s south. He worked part time as a dishwasher between these two locations in a restaurant in Ikebukuro. After graduating and finding a job in a marketing firm he left the area, only returning after a long absence. On his return, he noted he was amazed to find how quickly the Chinese businesses in the area had grown."

"After doing some research I realised the wide variety of over 200 businesses in Ikebukuro. It was really interesting, it was the first time I thought that anything was possible in Ikebukuro" (Hu quoted in Yamashita 143 translation my own).

In November 2007 Hu gathered a small group of “new overseas Chinese” (CHN/JPN: Shinhuaqiao/shinkakyo) restaurant and store managers in Ikebukuro and founded the planning committee for the ‘Tokyo Chinatown’ (JPN: Tokyou Chuukagai). The name ‘Tokyo Chinatown’ rather than ‘Ikebukuro Chinatown’ was intentional, as
it would mimic the success of Yokohama’s Chinatown whilst exploiting Tokyo’s current lack of an official Chinatown. Previously, the concept of an ‘Ikebukuro Chinatown’ had taken form through the promotions of the Chinese grocer and bookstore called ‘Zhiyin’ in 1991, but after 15 years it had come to nothing.

As Yamashita argues, Hu’s approach was a savvy branding strategy which showed a careful understanding of the place of “streets” in Japan. The use of the term ‘gai/jie’ (JPN/CHN) is an important part of the way spaces of consumption are labelled, with terms such as ‘Shopping Street’ (JPN: Shoutengai) a common part of many famous places in Japan, such as the Yokohama Chinatown (JPN: chuuka “gai”).

There are many parallels between Yokohama and Ikebukuro’s place in Japanese consumption. Both were spaces positioned on the periphery of Tokyo prior to World War Two, seen as distinct from the city at that time, although today they are merely punctuations in Tokyo’s urban expanse. Yokohama was a port city where Chinese traders were one of the larger groups of foreign nationals permitted to run stores. During the Tokugawa period and up until the mid-19th century international trade with countries outside of Japan was severe restricted. Yokohama and Kobe were among the first treaty ports opened to western powers in the second half of the 19th century, and at that time quite substantial numbers of Chinese settled in both Yokohama and Kobe, forming the nucleus of the modern Chinese communities in both cities.
During the shortages in the early post-war period, Yokohama served as a vital site for black-market trade (JPN: yamiichi) with a wide range of groups such as Occupied forces and Koreans moving in to the area to engage in this informal economy. Due to their historic position in the area, a large expatriated community of ethnic Chinese from Taiwan, Guangdong and Fujian influenced much of Yokohama’s affairs. Ikebukuro was similarly positioned during this time as a peripheral space in Tokyo with black-market trade, although it was a gateway to the agricultural produce in the areas west of Tokyo rather than a port of trade. Similar to Yokohama, it had a vibrant informal economy run by smaller groups of Taiwanese, Korean and rural Japanese farmers with produce from the Saitama region (Toshima Ku History Association 1993). In this sense, Yokohama and Ikebukuro’s relationship to central Tokyo has historically been similar, with consequences for how the spaces are imagined.

Hu’s ambitions first took him to volunteer at events designed to bring Chinese and Japanese people together, such as language corners and small business dinners. In preparation for his proposal, he also conducted a survey amongst Chinese business owners in the area, finding that 86% of the respondents were positive about the proposal. From this experience Hu planned to “stimulate the entire shopping area” (JPN: machi zentai no kasseika).

*Although currently most of the shops run by new overseas Chinese are patronised by Chinese customers, in the future we’d like to see more Japanese customers. If only for the reason that, if you have Chinese restaurants, you’ll be able to hold events such as cooking schools. And, because*
of the variety of businesses collected together, it could become a place for Chinese culture to be shared. Our idea behind the Chinatown is not merely based on nationality and business, it is not simply to bring only Chinese people together” (Yamashita 2010:147 translation my own)

Having put his plan together, Hu approached three other Chinese business owners to endorse his idea and form a core group of planners. Amongst them was Wang Meilin the president of the hugely successful ‘Xiaoweiyang Japan co,’ a famous hotpot and barbeque restaurant chain, and the president of the Sunshine group, a naturalised Chinese migrant named Yoshida Gorou. After these four people had signed up, another 10 members joined the committee. Their group was finalised at a banquet in November 2007 with an announcement in January 2008 in a variety of Chinese language media sources. Despite the rhetoric of a united front however the connection between the members of this group were loose and relatively infrequent, and the group’s relationship to most other Chinese migrants in Ikebukuro was tangential at best. Indeed, Hu admitted that for every person who knew his face and his goals, two others would know nothing.

Hu and his associates organised a meeting with the executives of the Local Shopkeepers Association (JPN: Shoutenka) prior to the media release to explain the proposal for a Chinatown. The local shopkeepers association rejected the proposal. An idea originally intended to unite the local residents and the new overseas Chinese thus ended up creating a divide between them. Mitsuru Miyake, a member of the Local
Shopkeepers Association and president of the Ikebukuro Western Gate Business Federation, responded to the proposal in disbelief.

"In some ways, I was astonished. I had an 'Eeh?' feeling...I mean it's true. Before proposing such a thing, you must first enter the business association, and sweat together with us... A relationship of trust can't start on nothing. Also, the foreigners in Ikebukuro aren't just Chinese you know. What are they thinking of being so reckless as to lump it all together as a Chinatown." (Yamashita 2010: 146, translation my own)

In many ways, Mitsuru Miyake's comments were not unwarranted. Although Chinese migrants are the largest ethnic minority in the area, they are by no means the only ones. There are a significant number of Nepalese and Turkish people, as well as 'old overseas Chinese' (CHN: laohuajiao) who identify as Taiwanese. Moreover, Ikebukuro's diversity is not merely defined by ethnicity, but also occupation, class and the general entanglements of the area's history.

Saiki Katsuyoshi (1938-), as the Chairman of the Toshima Tourism Association and a lifetime resident of Ikebukuro, was particularly vocal in his concerns about the Chinatown proposal. He was much quoted in local media sources, and soon became a hero amongst conservative groups in Tokyo.

"From here forth we believe we cannot avoid cooperating with the Chinese [Saiki used the honorific term for 'Chinese' here]. However, in Ikebukuro, this thing called "Ikebukuro's history" is still with us today. We will ignore/overlook this abrupt assertion that you want to make an
According to Mr Saiki the difference between Ikebukuro and other areas such as Shinjuku or Shibuya is the intermixing of commercial and residential zoning. He claims this mixing had only been possible because the Local Business Association had for many years coordinated the cleaning up of Ikebukuro’s streets. In particular, he repeatedly talked about their efforts to keep the adult industry and their touts off the streets children frequent.

"Children returning home from cram schools on these same streets would inevitably be exposed to such things [as adult industry touting]. They [the Local Business Association] maintained regular night patrols in cooperation with police. The effect of this was that touting was eliminated, and afterwards the association undertook a fight against gangs. It’s no joke; the movement to clean up the area surrounding the station was 10 years ago. If you organise something like that with an alliance between the police and the administration, and some bloodletting labour, you can return the shopping areas of Ikebukuro to peace. The Chinese don’t even know of our efforts, and yet they suddenly say they want to turn all our hard work into a Chinatown...?" (Yamashita 2010: 145-146, translation my own)

The official response of the Local Shopkeepers Association was "from cooperation first" (JPN: mazu kouryuu kara), as was reported in an Asahi Shinbun news article (left) on the 28th of August (Kyuumatsu 2008). As pictured, this rejection triggered volunteer groups of Chinese business owners and residents to go out and engage in their own efforts to "clean up Ikebukuro." However, at the same time there were
complaints that the achievements Mr Saiki claimed on behalf of the Local Business Association were perhaps overstated.

Ikebukuro, particularly on the side of northern and western gates, is incredibly diverse, being predominantly an entertainment district with various ‘ethnic cuisines’ (JPN: Esumiku ryouru) and adult stores, but also featuring the Tokyo performing arts centre. Regardless of the night, you will see drunken customers clustering together near the myriad bars and restaurants, with groups of ‘salary men’ and ‘office ladies’ coaxing their colleagues on to another location. Not far from the station, the Rikkyo University campus is situated amongst more secluded love hotels and smaller hostess bars which open all night. This area is also filled with the small ‘normal’ residential streets that Mr Saiki referred to. Whilst the efforts of the Local Business Association were important in ensuring that it is generally a safe area, it by no means tried to keep practices such as touting and various adult services out of sight from children, nor was it explicitly an anti-mafia style organisation. For one thing, paying protection money to local Japanese mafia-like organisations, ‘Yakuza,’ was a common practice amongst restaurants and entertainment venues, according to Chinese businessmen I knew.
Exploring the Ikebukuro Chinatown proposal and its aftermath

After returning to Australia from my short trip to Ikebukuro, a series of events unfolded that made me feel even more certain of the struggle for community amongst Chinese migrants. After the Local Shopkeepers Association rejected the proposal for a Chinatown in Ikebukuro, the issue started to attract more media attention.

Sensationalist titles such as The Local Shopkeepers Association versus Chinese restaurant owners: Ikebukuro’s Chinese chaos (JPN: jimoto shoutenkai VS chuugokukei inshokuten Ikebukuro chuuka no ran) in the Japanese evening daily newspapers, and similar portrayals in other media forums caused ‘anti-Ikebukuro-Chinatown-proposal’ groups to form. Conservative organisations with a large online blog presence, such as the Zaitokkai, began posting prolifically on the subject.

Inflammatory titles such as ‘Ikebukuro Chinatown = Chinese (Derogatory) Mafia zone’ (JPN: Ikebukuro chainataun= Shina Mafia Chiku) and ‘The Tokyo Chinatown will be a nest for Chinese Criminals’ (Tokyo Chuukagai ‘ikebukuro’ ha shinajin hanzaiosha no soukutsu he) proliferated, with some bloggers claiming that the deceitful plans of this new Chinatown were like another “Nanking massacre lie!”

The inflammatory ‘shina’ (JPN) used in these titles and statements are significant. A racist slur, it is generally associated with the Japanese expansion into China during the Twentieth Century (Fogel 1995). It was popularised during the Meiji modernisation period as an alternative to the more common name for China, ‘Middle Kingdom’ (JPN: Chuugoku), which implied that Japan was on the periphery of an
empire. ‘Shina’ was used because of its etymology in Tang dynasty poetry and its phonic resemblance to European terms for China. However, the Chinese republican government (CHN: Guomindang) at the time saw it as derogatory due to its use of the character for tree branch, which implied China’s inferior or subsidiary status amongst world civilisations (CHN/JPN: zhi/shi 支). More generally, however, the use of the term ‘Shina’ in Japan’s wartime propaganda is why it has negative connotations. Today it is almost exclusively used by right wing organisations in Japan.

Soon after the conservative outcry against the Chinatown proposal the Non-Profit Organisation for the Motion to Expel Foreigner Crime (JPN: NPO Gaikokujin Hanzai Tsuihou Undou; henceforth GHTU) started holding protests around the shops near the north gate of Ikebukuro. Every time such protests were held large numbers of police and guards were mobilised in defence of the Chinese community, while old ‘rising sun’ (JPN: hi no maru) imperial Japanese flags were brandished and slogans such as “Overthrow the plan to build a Chinatown! Expel the Chinese (derogatory Shina) from Ikebukuro!” were yelled and waved on placards.
The most significant protest was perhaps that of September 29, 2009. On that day the GHTU staged a march through the western side of Ikebukuro station. They had registered this march with the local police station marking each of the points they would stop at. When the police saw that the ‘Sunshine city grocer’ (CHN: Yangguang cheng) was on the list they warned the Sunshine group’s owner, suggesting that perhaps they close for the day. However, the owner, one of the Chinatown organising committee’s chief members, refused.

"With so many people screaming at our gates, of course it will affect business. However, I told the police I couldn’t close because we have a duty to our customers. If we shut every time there’s a protest march then we may as well not do business. So, we’ll persist in staying open for business."

(quoted in Tang 2010, translation my own)

On that day, around 100 protesters stopped at the front of the grocer, shouting slogans against the Tokyo Chinatown proposal and implying that the ‘Sunshine city’ grocer was mafia-affiliated. They proceeded to pull over stock that had been displayed on the pavement and harassed one of the young staff members, who tried to intervene. At this point, the police stepped in and ensured the protesters moved on. Even though there was no significant damage and the young staff member was not hurt, this event
was seen as an embarrassment for the local police station.

Superintendent Oosaki Katsuyuki apologized officially in an interview for the New Overseas Chinese News (CHN: Xinhuaqiaobao) a bilingual newspaper publication (2009).

"I would like to apologize for the Japanese participants' improper behaviour that day. The kind of behaviour they exhibited does not reflect more than a minority view. Please kindly understand."

(JPN: Nihonjin no seide moshiwake ga arimasen. Kare no ano te no yarikata ha goku shousuu no kangae wo hanei shiteiru ni sugimasen. Nanitozo, go rikai kudasai) (Xinhuaqiaobao 2009, translation my own)
Since then, subsequent protests have received significant police attention. In particular the protest on January 10, 2010 had announced on the Internet that it was going to attack the ‘Sunshine City’ grocer. That day, 4 large police trucks cordoned off the area and police officers surrounded the grocery store. Around the area, one could also see many plain-clothes police officers. Because of this, no serious trouble occurred and indeed it was over before I could even arrive to observe it. As Yamashita has noted however, this kind of extreme attention had unfortunately strengthened the resolve of the Local Business Association to avoid association with the Chinatown organisers committee. Even sympathetic Japanese business owners were concerned about attracting the attention of conservative groups.

"Actually, at the time of the Olympic ceremony, there were suggestions that perhaps we should hold some kind of public event in the west-gate park. However, if we did something like that then a political group would surely come and harass us, so we called it off. And so, even though the people of the world are buoyant with a feeling of Sino-Japanese friendship (JPN: sekkan no hito ha nichuuyoukou nante kigaruni iukedo) to try to do something in such a shopping area is really a difficult thing (JPN: kouiu hankagai de nanika yaruto iu no ha taihen na koto nandesu yo)."

(Yamashita 2010:149, translation my own)

Chinese community?

My initial excitement later became a conundrum as I came to understand the context of Ikebukuro and Chinese migrants in Japan more generally. Having seen reports of the failed attempt to have Ikebukuro recognised as a new Chinatown in 2008, I decided to focus on the area as a place to conduct fieldwork on recent community
formation practices amongst Chinese migrants. However, the issues surrounding this event were far more complex than I had originally imagined. What is more, they were far less important to the daily lives of the people I met, interviewed and interacted with over my fieldwork. I had hoped to find a newly emerging Chinatown, but whilst there are over 10,000 Chinese nationals living and working within this area, the ways in which Ikebukuro is imagined as a locale amongst its inhabitants differed greatly from my expectations.

Although the various local organisations’ rejection of the proposal was disappointing for the Chinatown planning committee, many migrants did not see it as particularly unreasonable. Indeed, when I first arrived in Ikebukuro, my relentless interest in this one topic was met with assurances that it was only natural that the local Japanese would reject it. My interlocutors acknowledged that the Chinatown proposal would be good for Chinese businesses, but also felt that it was the Japanese right to feel anxious about migrants. As one of my friends said as an empathetic joke:

"Imagine if the Japanese and Koreans in Beijing wanted to call Wudaokou station 'little Korea, or little Japan' all the old farts (CHN: Laotou) in the area would die from shock! (CHN: Jingsile)"

Wudaokou is an area in the northwest of Beijing next to Qinghua University and the Beijing Language and Culture University. It’s an area now renowned for Japanese and Korean exchange students, many of whom have returned to start-up businesses to cater for the student populations in the area. My interlocutor’s remarks
about Wudaokou was perhaps the most entertaining and creative response to my questions. More generally, those who were indifferent or suspicious of the Chinatown proposal would simply say, "This is still Japan" (CHN: Zhe haishi riben le) in defeatist tones. I expressed my frustrations over such responses to my closest friend in Ikebukuro, a hairdresser who allowed me to spend a lot of time in his shop meeting and talking to people. His response about community and the Chinatown proposal struck a particular chord with me, giving me a distinct sense of the contrast between the Chinatown proposal and Chinese migrants’ everyday practice in Ikebukuro. My friend explained to me the instrumental purpose of the Chinatown proposal and how many people living and running businesses in Ikebukuro were indifferent about it. I asked whether it conflicted with the feelings of the ‘community’ (CHN: tuanti) and my friend started talking about how the word ‘community’ much like ‘Chinatown’ did not really describe Ikebukuro well. Listing all of the symbolic markers of a Chinatown, such as signs and gates, as well as the need for government bodies to approve these constructions, my friend stated that Ikebukuro was just “a place to buy things and have fun.” According to him, it had not reached the level of ‘community,’ but was merely ‘popular amongst people’ (CHN: minjian), largely because of its unofficial status. My friend finally returned to the topic of the Chinatown proposal, and talked specifically about the way in which Hu Yifei and the small organising committee set up the proposal. The proposal, in the eyes of a hairdresser, had been set up only to benefit the restaurant owners in the area, despite asking for donations from all the
business owners in the area. To my friend the Chinatown proposal was an unworthy ‘gamble’ and so he chose not to support it. Growing increasingly cynical throughout our conversation, he finally expressed a mixed sense of frustration and hope, showing that he held a desire for some form of ‘community’ but was doubtful about its possibility.

“So the Chinatown proposal never happened. If it does, we’ll still have to see. It won’t necessarily be immediately good, or a community. After they set it up, maybe then I’d invest in it but not until then. On the other hand, this is Japan and we have to think about Japanese people. They won’t let us do this sort of thing, there’s no feeling of friendship between us. You know about earlier this year when a group of them attacked us here in Ikebukuro. Does that give you a feeling of friendship? Not at all...”

Beyond Chinatowns

A recent edited compilation titled _Beyond Chinatowns_, argues that contemporary migration from the People’s Republic of China is distinct from the historical overseas Chinese communities found throughout the world (Thuno 2007). No longer predominantly made up of male labourers, and subject to the explicitly segregationist policies of host countries (such as in the case of North America and Japan’s historical Chinatowns), recent Chinese migration is more fluid, diverse and in many senses mirrors the processes that other large migratory groups experience in the current global context. I would suggest, however, that another distinctive factor for recent PRC migrants is that the ways in which they conceptualise belonging and
community are shaped by their experiences of growing up under the Chinese Communist Party. In other words, the spatial and administrative demarcation of communities in the PRC means that migrants associate different meanings with the common, translatable terms for community. That is, communities are seen as something legitimated by the state or in cooperation with the state. Hence, in the context of Japan, recent Chinese migrants see concepts of belonging and community as shaped by the symbolic acceptance or rejection of "Chinese spaces" by local municipal governments. There are those who have attempted to engage in this symbolic game, creating publications and meetings between business owners, Chinese government representatives and local Japanese municipal government representatives. However, there are also many who are entirely disengaged from this activity. These, I believe, represent the majority.

When I first started trying to introduce my interest to Chinese migrants I met in Ikebukuro, I was surprised to find that very few people consider it a place that fits the usual terms used for community in Chinese. Despite Hu Yifei’s attempts to have it labelled a ‘Chinatown’ and encourage networks of trust amongst Chinese business owners, it was not a place people associated with terms such as ‘community.’ As much as the official rejection of the Chinatown proposal came from Japanese locals, there was also much scepticism amongst the Chinese migrants I came to know during my time there.
As the journalist and social commentator for Dongyangjing noted in his article *Tokyo Chinatown/street* isn’t a town/street (CHN: Dongjing Zhonghuajie bu shijie), Ikebukuro is more a “base for operations” (CHN: jidian) than a Chinatown or community. Whilst he supports the creation of a network for business owners and residents, proposing a Chinatown was to “pull the tiger’s skin too much” (CHN: Hupi che de taiduole) and he feared it would result in “a name not corresponding to reality” (CHN: mingbufushi).

I decided to try to find a term that perhaps better encapsulated how people conceptualised Ikebukuro. I would explain to my interlocutors that I wanted to find out whether Chinese people in Ikebukuro actually see the area as a community, attempting to use a variety of terms in case one was not appropriate. These included tuanti 团体, tuanji 团集, gongtongti 共同体 and xiao shehui 小社会 or ‘small society.’ I would then say that I was interested in how perceptions of community affect their experiences of life in Japan. However, the answers I received in response to this initial statement of interest were often very frank and pragmatic.

"Ikebukuro is about food, play, fashion, hair and finding people who can help you do things that you can’t do yourself when you first get here.” (Man, 28, local Chinese business owner)

“No, not a community. It’s just for eating and play. Some people opened some restaurants here, so some more people came. It’s just like that.” (Man, 29, local business owner and billiards player)
Considering the spatial dynamics of Chinese businesses clustered in one area, the high frequency of Chinese people moving through this area, and the fact that many petitioned the local government to have it recognised as a Chinatown, my interlocutor’s responses contrasted with my desire to find a newly emerging community in Japan. Their frank denials of a meaningful togetherness contrasted directly with my hopes of finding an emergent migrant community with a shared project.

I wondered whether I was simply using the wrong words; I began to try phrases such as ‘feeling of community’ (shequ de ganjue 社区的感觉) or “qunti” (群体) but still received similar responses.

“I’m not sure whether there really are any long-lasting groups here. There’s no feeling of community except for those generated by occasional drinks and business organization meetings.” (Male 28)

“It’s just a place where lots of Chinese people hang out.” (Male 35)

“There’s no feeling of community. People just want to make money, they don’t believe in anything else.” (Female 38)

The Chinese terms I have used above imply solidity, using compounds such as ‘body’ (tǐ), a ‘round mass’ (tuán) or a spatial barrier (qu). In many senses, this bodily or solid metaphor resembles Hobbesian ideas of the ‘leviathan’, where state and society combine as an organised body, protected from ‘a state of nature’, or chaos, by ideas of social contract, with a sovereign power as its head (Hobbes [1914] 1947).
This enduring metaphor of community as organism makes it hard to imagine more fluid arrangements, where networks of interpersonal relations are more important than the establishment of an identifiable whole, and indeed the establishment of a sovereign or group of sovereigns is outright avoided.

I would suggest that the ways in which communities have been administered and constructed under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) perhaps explain why Hobbesian metaphors of community fit well with the Chinese lexical terms. Mayfair Yang has documented the system under which the CCP organised their administrative community spaces and village boundaries (Yang 1994). They created a variety of administrative spaces such as work units (CHN: *danwei*), communities (CHN: *shequ*) and prescribed rural spaces, which were then used as the major units of governance and surveillance. In particular, mobility and the negotiation between these different spaces was highly regulated by the state. When considering this history of regulation, it is difficult to identify any form of state/community dichotomy on the village or small urban district level, at least since the socialist period. Yang contrasts this system to the networks produced and maintained through favours, gift economies and banqueting that form a parallel sociality to that of community in China, but these practices do not fit the concept of an alternative form of community as they are ego-centric networks rather than spaces of commonality.
Raymond Williams provided a cultural critique of key terms within the English language in his *Keywords* project (1976). When discussing the term 'community' Williams noted that it was a “warmly persuasive word” which “unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society and so on)…seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term” (1976:76). Over the past 20 years social theorists have re-invigorated interest in the issues surrounding community, as a response to images of globalization, the increasing speed of transport and telecommunications technologies, and the perceived loss or re-articulation of older forms of sociality. As Williams had noted, community served as a positive alternative to other forms and forces in these analyses. Zygmunt Bauman for example, sees it as a source of security against the transient liquidity of contemporary life (2001). While similarly, Robert Putnam mourns the loss of community in the United States and its effect on mental health (2000).

Other scholars have obsessed over defining community, hoping to hold to its use as an analytical tool in social scientific research. Calhoun, for example, attempts to define community as the agglomeration of space and everyday practice creating something larger than itself.

Community life can be understood as the life people lead in dense, multiplex, relatively autonomous networks of social relationships. Community life, thus, is not a place, or simply a small-scale
population aggregate, but a mode of relating, variable in extent. Though communities may be larger than the immediate personal networks of individuals, they can in principle be understood by an extension of the same lifeworld terms. (Calhoun 1998)

I would concur that community is about a “mode of relating.” However, I am wary of the desire to define localised “modes of relating” with only this one term, and also wonder whether this kind of definition could not be substituted for other terms such as family or friendship. Many scholars and public figures have used the term community to refer to larger scale modes of relating too, such as Benedict Anderson’s analysis of the “nation” which he describes as an “Imagined Community” (1991). Are these always “extensions of the same lifeworld terms?” What happens when a mode of relating denies the existence of “community,” and when the criteria its inhabitants use to define community differ from the criteria of the analyst?

Anthony Cohen’s simple yet prescriptive theory of community (which itself follows Wittgenstein), argues that it is more important to look at the uses of meaning in the term community rather than its lexical contents (Cohen 1985). In particular, he argues that community is a means of creating borders, and so it is best to analyse it from these points. However, Cohen tends to still imply that community exists everywhere, with the analyst merely needing to discover its contours. I extend Cohen’s emphasis on the uses of meaning against Cohen, and argue that community is
not constituted by one thing and cannot be defined analytically, as it finds its meaning in the symbolic interactions specific to a particular context. In this sense, there is no single ontological basis to community that can be discovered. Following the emphasis on meaning and its uses, I would also argue that if Chinese people in Ikebukuro do not see the Chinese lexical terms for community as fitting to their life-worlds, then we cannot truly say the forms of community corresponding to these lexical terms are present.

Gerald Creed, in introducing an edited compilation on this topic titled *The Seductions of Community* argues:

Community does not need defining, and this is precisely why scholars need to pay attention to it. Such common notions reveal the taken-for-granted understandings of the world that are so internalized or routinized as to escape comment and specification. (Creed 2006:4)

Creed’s call to attention on this topic marks a shift in how community is perceived. Rather than something defined, community is a mode of relating that has political, sociological and ideological consequences. Several scholars have started to criticize the obsession with community, both within the social sciences and popular debate, in line with this concern for the effects of debates around community (Creed 2006; Joseph 2002; Nancy 1991). Miranda Joseph for example has criticised romantic obsessions with community, such as those by Putnam, which she argues mask the
term’s crucial role in facilitating capital and managing labour (2002). In line with this scholarship, I argue that the Chinatown proposal was a political and ideological project, rather than a sign of a pre-existing community. Moreover, this project excluded some (such as in my hairdresser friend’s comments above) and was of little interest to many.

The repeated denials of community and communal feeling I encountered in my interviews were often delivered with humorous cynicism. I was motivated to discover what fuelled the cynicism I found amongst my informants. Themes of anomie were common to many of my informants’ descriptions of what it is like to live in Japan. It was not usually described in terms of personal relationships, but rather in a systemic context where Chinese ways of developing relationships, often described in terms of ‘warm sentiment’ (CHN: reqing) are ineffective in developing a sense of belonging in what they see as a ‘Japanese’ community. In this sense, the project to create a ‘Chinatown’ could have become a viable means to create a community sentiment. However, this project found fewer supporters than I had expected.

I interpret this cynicism and disinterest in two ways. Firstly, I see it as the product of exclusion in Japan, and a sense of detachment from China. The experience of being a stranger, an ‘Other,’ is one of the major experiences through which Chinese migrants redefine their ways of sharing life-worlds with other people. It is their positions as strangers within a pre-existing community (in its structural/spatial symbolic sense) that induces them to think of their lives in other ways. It is arguable
that this experience is common to many around the globe, and in some senses is the combination of what Virno describes as the effect of being a stranger in contemporary global capitalism.

...it is not the thinkers who become strangers in the eyes of the community to which the thinkers belong, but the strangers, the multitude of those “with no home,” who are absolutely obliged to attain the status of thinkers. Those “without a home” have no choice but to behave like thinkers...because they turn to the most essential categories of the abstract intellect in order to protect themselves from the blows of random chance, in order to take refuge from contingency and from the unforeseen. (Virno 2004:39)

Virno’s interpretation of the “abstract intellect” is not simply a description of cosmopolitanism, but is also full of the uncertainties the “homeless” contend with living in another country at considerable economic and symbolic disadvantage. It is easy to imagine how people become critical of concepts which simultaneously promise an end to this uncertainty while white-washing over the disadvantages which contribute to it. Migrant community-based initiatives such as ‘Chinatowns’ only tangentially address the economic structures which disadvantage migrants, such as profits for business owners, and potentially create symbols that attract the attention of anti-migrant groups. Consequently, those with little to gain from ‘community’
projects seek alternative ways to define how they relate to people they see as sharing common things with themselves.

I also interpret this cynicism as a general wariness of community building projects, which inevitably end up with a political element. As stated earlier, the CCP’s use of terms for community has resulted in them having rigid and political meanings. The desire to depoliticize aspects of everyday life for ordinary Chinese has been well documented by several scholars (Farquhar 2008; Kipnis 2008). Amongst my interlocutors depoliticization was also desirable. They desired to have peaceful, convivial lives where they could consume what they desired and enjoy the company of friends. They were thus sceptical of politicized projects such as the Chinatown proposal. I also believe their lack of interest in the project showed a sense of the totalizing threat the idea of community can hold.

Jean Luc Nancy criticizes the obsession with community in a way congruent with my interlocutor’s feelings.

The community that becomes a single thing (body, mind, fatherland, Leader...) ...necessarily loses the in of being-in-common. Or, it loses the with or the together that defines it. It yields its being-together to a being of togetherness. The truth of community, on the contrary, resides in the retreat of such a being. (Nancy 1991: xxxix)
During my fieldwork, I found my interlocutors more interested in ideas of friendship, conviviality and fun, than in any form of community or identity forming project. They just wanted to get on with their lives while enjoying the company of others. In this sense, they were more concerned about being-in-common than community. Nancy’s use of the term ‘being-in-common’ effects a critique of the term community through his ontological argument that being-in-common is always a necessary precursor to existence. The notion of ‘a community,’ thus, is actually an act that cuts against this precursory existence, because it excludes others from said community. A shared commonality, he argues, lies in the retreat of such a totalising symbolic form.

In the spirit of Nancy’s critique, the following chapters examine the processes that shape Chinese migrants’ approach to their place in the world. What disjunctures and disenchantments create such cynicism and what hopes, desires and dreams fill them? How do people negotiate their place as a migrant in a space that is yet to become a ‘community’ and what other kinds of conviviality does this afford?
Chapter Two- Everyday Mobility

The experience of migration is a complicated phenomenon which in many ways defines a large part of contemporary human experience. Migration involves both movement between nation-states, and movements within states. It is exemplary of a wider regime of mobility that defines much of human existence. It also involves movements in time, stretched across people’s imagined life projects, both as acts of nostalgic longing and as projected aspirations. However, the instance of migration is not always the most significant moment in people’s lives, and it is not always decided upon through careful calculation. The most common reaction I faced when getting to know the Chinese migrants I hoped to study was how insignificant they saw their own tales of movement. Rather than stories that fit neoliberal economic clichés emphasising the heroics and hard work of moving to a new place, their move to Japan was discussed as something everyday. Within this chapter I examine the regimes of mobility that form the background of the lives of Chinese migrants to Japan.

Chinese migration has been a vibrant area of transnational research within anthropology, producing many of the seminal texts on this topic (For examples see Ong 1999; Nonini and Ong 1997; Yao 2002). Indeed, a great deal of literature has been written about how current Chinese migrants experience a degree of flexibility in the ways they negotiate their identities and lives, becoming recognized assets within China, and creating bridges for international relations and trade, particularly within the
East Asia region (Cheng 2003:170). This chapter focuses on experiences of Chinese migrants in Japan, with a particular focus on how they understand their own mobility. Based on over 20 months of fieldwork within Tokyo amongst various networks of young (18–35 year old) students, workers and business operators, it demonstrates the normalization of regimes of mobility between China and its close neighbours.

The all-pervasive nature of mobility in, and from, China has been well documented by several anthropologists. Aihwa Ong’s *Flexible Citizenship* has been particularly seminal within the field of Chinese migration and represents (1999). She shows how the reform period in China (post-1979) saw a “leaving the country fever (CHN: chuguore), where images of overseas affluence created a “powerful magnet” for Mainland Chinese to “launch themselves into the ocean” (CHN: xiaha1) (Ong 1999: 48-49). Ong argues that for young Chinese, becoming experienced, cosmopolitan and entrepreneurial is “synonymous with being modern” (1999:76). Exploring the re-establishment of ties between Mainland China and overseas Chinese (CHN: huaqiao) since the opening (CHN: gaigekaifang) of the PRC, Ong’s project is to explore the improvised and creative ways ethnic Chinese people negotiate nation-state and transnational projects. She coins the term “flexible citizenship” to encapsulate the:

⋯cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and dis-placement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions (Ong 1999: 6).
Ong provides a wide array of ethnographic vignettes that demonstrate how Chinese agents use ‘citizenship’ and their ethnic ties of “Confucian humanism” to negotiate the complex agendas of nation-states such as China, the United States and various countries in South-East Asia with overseas Chinese populations (such as Malaysia and Singapore). She also demonstrates how governments have encouraged these ties to create ‘bridges,’ making a pun on *qiao* in Chinese that refers to both ‘bridge’ and the term for overseas Chinese, *huaqiao*. Rather than leading to the inevitable decline of the state, movement, according to Ong, has resulted in new “graduated zones of sovereignty”, where the state is actively involved in shaping transnational spheres of influence (1999: 214–239). In this sense, ‘flexible citizens’ are both collaborators and negotiators of this process of establishing distinct forms of capitalist ventures that not only rely on business, but ethnic identification and the renegotiation of the responsibilities of citizenship.

Pal Nyiri’s *Mobility and Cultural Authority in Contemporary China* makes an explicit connection between the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) nation-building agenda and the regimes of mobility it encourages (Nyiri 2010). He takes mobility as the focus of his argument, and uses comparisons between tourists and migrants to show the ways in which their position as Chinese nationals is connected to modern subject building projects in contemporary China.
I suggest that both kinds of individuals have to negotiate their positions as modern Chinese subjects as they cope with the contradiction between the expectation of mobility and barriers in front of it. While unifying the mobilizing images of Chinese modernity are transmitted to them through a range of media technologies from telephone cars to tourist brochures, they have to make their way through everyday situations and contradictory local discourses that stand in the way of movement and strip them of their enfranchisement...The discourses of the migrant and the tourist communicate that it is essential for the modern Chinese subject to be mobile. (Nyiri 2010: 164-165)

Julie Y. Chu’s research in a village in Fuzhou, concurs with Nyiri’s argument. In her ethnography of a village with a great degree of out-migration, she explores the dynamics of mobility from one place (2010). In particular, she shows how immobility is one of the major sources of anxiety for Fuzhounese people. Immobility is thus as much a concern for Chinese subjects, and demonstrates the close relationship between mobility and self worth created by the regimes outlined by Nyiri. Chu demonstrates how, even when immobile both in terms of bodily movement and citizenship, Fuzhounese people still have a vast array of mobile imaginaries and social practices. She shows that the material, spatial and linguistic imaginaries involved in finding one’s place at ‘home’ are as complex and interconnected as the ‘displacement’
experienced in moving. The connections between ‘home’ and ‘diaspora’ are explored through remittance-fueled construction projects and the refurbishment of the historic Monkey King temple in the village. Chu’s ethnography is a description of mobility *par excellence*. It also demonstrates how mobility regimes and the bridges they have created are a crucial part of contemporary Chinese sociality. They even shape the imaginaries of those ‘immobile.’ Indeed, the co-formative dialectic between mobility and immobility described by Chu mirrors Noel B. Salazar and Alan Smart’s suggested use of the term ‘(im)mobility’ as part of mobility research (2011).

These scholars’ work are excellent examples of the central role mobility (or immobility) plays in contemporary Chinese subjectivity. However, they tend to emphasize a sense of novelty in the mobility they describe. Whether it’s Ong’s flexible citizens problematizing the nation-state through their transnational movements or Nyiri’s shifts in political discourse. Whilst I acknowledge the newness of these specific regimes of mobility I am uncertain about the novelty of mobility itself. Iyotani Toshio has questioned the logic where ‘place’ is considered normal and movement is the exception (2005). Citing an impressive span of examples, he argues that it is the opposite; migration being the common trend in human history with only a few periods of stasis. My research shows that as well as being historically common, mobility can also be experientially normal.
The Chinese migrants I interviewed narrated their migration experiences in matter of fact ways that emphasized their sense of mobility as everyday. As much as changes in mobility provide new theoretical possibilities for social scientists, for Chinese migrants to Japan they merely represent a world which they must negotiate pragmatically. This fact was made particularly clear in the everyday conversations I had with many of my interlocutors. In particular, a felicitous interview with my dorm mate Xiaochen revealed to me the pragmatic and disinterested ways many young Chinese people narrate their decision to move.

Xiaochen and I sat in the kitchen together on small makeshift plastic stools, sharing a pack of cigarettes from China, which she’d tricked her father into sending over to Japan as a gift for her friends. They were in fact for her.

Xiaochen and I slowly enjoyed the aroma of Panda brand cigarettes, discussing the nostalgia that the thick, strong and un-contaminated flavour of Chinese cigarettes brought. Xiaochen commented that though Chinese cigarettes are strong, they’re more natural, unlike the chemically stripped and weaker cigarettes popular in Japan. As we discussed this nostalgia however, Xiaochen paused and said:

“You know, I don’t really know how I ended up like this.”

To which I responded, “Addicted to cigarettes?”

“No. In Japan... I’d never really thought much about it, yet here I am.” I quickly asked her to hold that thought and took out an audio recorder, saying “That’s really interesting, is it ok if we talk about it and I record it for my research?” She nodded.
I asked, “What do you mean when you say, ‘you never thought much about it’?”

“Well, I’d often gone to help friends buy things before leaving the country (CHN: Chuguo) and I’d always thought it was strange actually. Everyone seemed to be doing it but I was pretty happy at home. So I’d never thought that one day I could be like them and go overseas.”

“Why’s that?”

“I had no interest, no ‘motivation.’” (JPN: yaruki)

“So tell me the story of how you got here.”

“The year before last I finished high school. At that time I’d intended to attempt the entrance examinations at the local technical college (CHN: dazhuan), but my grades weren’t that good. I talked to one of the lecturers there and he said that there are more and more people with diplomas (CHN: wenping) now, and that even though they have them they can’t find work. So I started to think that maybe I should just work, that diplomas have no use in the end. My mother said to me that they still wanted me to study, and suggested I go to Japan instead. So that year I started at a language school in Fuzhou. Around July...”

“Why do you think they chose Japan?”

“It’s closer, the visa’s easier and they’d seen a few people go there before, I guess”

“And why’d you agree”

“Hmm, I thought that Japan is still a place for Asians (CHN: yazhouren), that it’d be easier than English because of the writing system, and it just didn’t seem as far away.”
“So what else did you do then?”

“Well I studied there for half a year and organised the formalities (CHN: banle shouxu).”

“What did you have to do?”

“Some things my parents organised, like getting a passport. But I had to do some of the things to apply for the visa. The pre-college student (CHN: jiuxue) visa is pretty easy though. You get a year in Japan no questions asked (CHN: meiwenti le).”

“You just need a language school?”

“Yeah, yeah (CHN: dui dui dui..)”

The short ethnographic interview I conducted with Xiaochen is illustrative of the complex interwoven phenomenon that is mobility. Unlike the romantic image of migrants seeking a better life elsewhere, it paints a simple picture of the mundane place movement has in contemporary China. As Xiaochen described the procedures her parents carried out to get her to Japan, she described it with a no-nonsense obviousness, listing the various stages she went through. Yet, the initial trigger for telling this story was a reflexive comment about how “she didn’t know how she ended up” in Japan, suggesting a lack of agency in her decision to move.
**Agency and Mobility**

In stating that mobility, and in particular migration, has become a common feature of everyday life; I do not mean it is solely determined by socio-political contexts or that there is no agency in it. The difficulty of theorizing migration has often fallen upon these lines. Within Neoclassical economic approaches to migration a push-pull model is used to understand an individual’s motives for moving. The individual, seeking income maximisation is drawn into capital rich areas in need of labour (Massey 1999:18). Other approaches, such as the world-systems theory posited by Immanuel Wallerstein, suggests that it is the international division of labour which creates a centre-periphery flow to migration (1974). In this sense Wallerstein’s approach emphasizes structural factors over individual choice. In more recent literature on migration however, the tensions between structural factors and individual choice are collapsed into one another.

The parameters of choice and coercion in migration are difficult to define. Is the decision to leave made out of individual aspiration or collective needs? Do migrants go to foreign countries to offer economic assistance to their parents, or to provide their children with educational opportunities? The constraints of the past and the possibilities of the future are carefully weighed in every decision to migrate. From such a perspective the question of personal choice may simply seem like the wrong question. It gives too much attention to
the individual’s present action, and blurs the complex networks of responsibilities that link a person to the past and future

(Papastergiadis 2000: 60)

In recent scholarship, a balance between structure and agency has been attempted by analysing the ways in which desires, rationales and subjectivity in general are formed. As Papastergiadis states above, the question of an individual’s choice may at times seem like the wrong question; the question of how that choice is produced through broader forces being more pertinent. This question of subjectivity has been a common concern in social theory since the 1970s, whether it’s the ‘practical logics’ and habitus of Bourdieu (1977), or the discursive production of subjects as proposed by Foucault (1977). Both writers have explored how contexts relate to what people do (practices) and both have looked at the ways these practices relate to either, a) in Bourdieu’s case a pre-conscious generative modus operandi shaped by its context, or b) in Foucault’s case, the ‘techniques,’ discourses’ and ‘microphysics of power’ that help shape the self as subject.

In his comparison of Foucault and Bourdieu’s concepts, De Certeau highlights the similarities and differences between the two (De Certeau 1984). Further arguing that each theorist’s concepts rely on assumptions posited by the other. In an eloquently simple summation of his juxtaposition of Foucault and Bourdieu, De Certeau argues that an agent’s interaction with the world is always in a process of
‘making do’ (FR: bricolent), and borrowing an analogy from Kant, that this ‘making do’ can be likened to a tightrope walker, constantly re-adjusting in the attempt to create equilibrium. The eloquence of De Certeau’s term ‘making do’ is that it repositions individual choice within the discussion of how the subject is formed. It suggests that as much as one’s subjectivity is produced by forces beyond one’s making, the actions we take are still our own. In this sense, while Papastergiadis states that perhaps an individual’s choice is the wrong question, I would argue that an individual’s attempt to ‘make do’ is a crucial part of understanding the “complex networks of responsibilities that link a person to the past and future” (Papastergiadis 2000:60) as it reveals the contours and processes through which the subject negotiates.

In Xiaochen’s case, her migration was experienced as a felicitous or accidental circumstance which she negotiated to the best of her ability. Similar to Xiaochen’s experience, other Chinese migrants I spoke to did not describe their choices or desires to migrate as heroic decisions but rather stressed “making do” as they were swept along by the current of ‘leaving fever’ (CHN: chuguore), following friends and kin overseas. The term “fever” is commonly used to describe any kind of popular craze in China. For example, David Palmer, in his research on Chinese body cultivation practices known as Qigong, has discussed ‘fever’ as a kind of “collective effervescence which occurs when official policies and informal signals sent from above correspond with, open space for, and amplify popular desire” (Palmer 2009: 278). The
‘leaving fever’ described by young Chinese migrants in Japan is an example of the inertia created by the desires they and their parents held for educational and economic success, and the ways in which this desire was encouraged by political mechanisms within China.

“My parents suggested I apply when I finished high school because my sister had moved over here, but I was rejected by the embassy during the interview for my application. I didn’t really want to go in all honesty, but when I was rejected, I felt left out and became determined to come here. I applied three more times before I was accepted. By then I was 28.” (32 yr old, male, from Liaoning, Takushita University student)

“Before the moment I sat down on the plane, I’d never thought about coming to Japan. I didn’t do well in school, and after spending a year looking for work, my mother said she’d support me. At that time (2002) everyone was leaving the country. I didn’t think of where I was going, just that I had nothing to do in China. It was a coincidental opportunity (CHN: ouran de jihui).” (27yr old, male, from Harbin, electronics dealer)

“I wanted to go to Beijing actually, but it was easier for my father to organise for me to come here. He’d exported some tea here before and knew someone who could help us organise it. I don’t know how I got here.” (21 yr old, female, from Fujian, language student)

“To make money of course.” (26yr old, female, from Shandong, hairdresser’s assistant)

“Why wouldn’t I? Its only two and a half hours on a plane back home, the language isn’t so different, so I can understand the signs, and it’s better than staying at home all the time. I thought I’d just come and try it out (CHN: shishi kan).” (28 yr old, male, from Shenyang, language student and hotel concierge)
These statements suggest that these migrants experienced the choice to move to Japan as something obvious or coincidental, often framed by a distinct sense that it was what many others they knew were doing, and that it appeased their parents' educational hopes for them. My desire to hear them tell stories about their decisions to move to Japan was met with pragmatic confusion. To them it was rarely a question of 'why?' but rather 'why-not?' In this sense, for Chinese migrants in Japan, movement is not an aberrational decision to move between nation-states, but a facet of what is an essentially mobile social world.

Rather than problematizing the nation-state, international travel has featured prominently in discourses around the desirable in contemporary China.

Two popular mantras perhaps best capture the fin de siècle frenzy and anxiety of the market economy and consumerist China: xiahai (plunging into the ocean), meaning going into the risky business world, and yu shijie jiegui, which literally means “linking up with the [rail] tracks of the world.” The expressions are ubiquitous in both official and popular Chinese discourse. From the popular press to film and television, the media are suffused with tragicomic tales of people who have fared poorly or well in the new enterprises proliferating in China. Linking up with the tracks of the world” is a particularly vivid metaphor that spells out China’s desire to catch the last train of
global modernity, finally overcoming perceived time-lag between itself and the West. It suggests a sense of running out of time, of urgency, and of great risk taking—a concept that became almost obsolete during China’s insulated socialist era, a time when urban dwellers worked low-paying jobs (Zhang 2000: 93).

I would suggest that these processes are part of a distinctly Chinese mondialisation (world-forming) fuelled by the modernising projects of nation-states, in particular the PRC. Andrew Kipnis (2011) has shown how many of the processes ascribed to “globalisation” can be similarly used to analyse the state-building projects found in contemporary China. This “Nation-Building as, Instead of, or Before Globalization” is indicative of the complex mobile phenomena with its “accelerations”, “disembedding” and “standardizations” that make a mobility approach to social research captivating (2011). As Anderson has shown, nation-states themselves are reliant on vast arrays of mobile technologies and people to make them imaginable as a bounded whole wherein people share commonality (Anderson 1991). Similarly, the movement of more and more Chinese citizens for work and study into places such as Japan re-affirms its boundaries (through complex visa mechanisms) whilst expanding its influence and associated imaginaries.
Student visas as migratory channel

Amongst the body of 250 people that I often talked with in my fieldwork in Ikebukuro, 90% had come to Japan on a student visa. Their initial visa status however, did not mean that they all ended up studying for significantly long periods of time, but rather that the student visa system in Japan is one of the most convenient ways to enter the country. This ease of entry intersected with PRC governmental drives for educational reforms and advancement, making educational travel one of the most reliable means by which to go overseas. Legal overseas migration and cosmopolitan consumption have been encouraged by the CCP in the reform era as part of the developmental imaginaries of the nation (Fong 2004; Fong 2007; Nyiri 2006; Nyiri 2001; Xiang 2003). In particular, overseas study has featured prominently in this promotion, as the party attempts to create broad international networks of economic and cultural development (Nyiri 2001). A particularly indicative example of the state’s drive for mobility is found in a 1992 State Council report stating the principles of overseas study policy. These principles were to “support study abroad, promote return, [uphold] freedom of movement,” and to “promote overseas individuals to serve the country,” with “serve the county” (CHN: wei guo fuwu) becoming the standard slogan for overseas students (Nyiri 2001; Cheng 2003).

Migration has also been encouraged in media representations of successful ex­overseas Chinese students who have either returned or stayed on in their country of migration as an economic beneficiary or cultural intermediary. For instance, Fujianese
abroad who were promoted as “successful” donated funds to Project Hope (a school building project for poor areas) and other relief schemes. Similarly, in 2006 a documentary portraying the lives of Chinese students in Japan (filmed by an ex-student herself) was applauded in China for portraying the humanistic nature of Japanese people’s dealings with these students, and the economic hardships that the students themselves stoically overcame (Zhang 2006). The film was screened in both China and Japan as a bilingual edit produced by CCTV and FujiTV, and was praised for not only showing the people of China another side to Japanese people, but also for showing Japanese viewers the hardships Chinese students face.

In her research amongst students of the reform era, and everyday reactions to overseas media events, Vanessa Fong has argued that images of China’s place in the world are embedded in a broader notion of “modernising” China that is simultaneously subject to the perceived need for China to modernise due to its current lack (Fong 2004; Fong 2007; Fong 2011). The students she interviewed often voiced disappointment with current standards in China, and so felt it necessary to go overseas to develop themselves. At the same time, they framed this desire in terms of filial duty to the nation by cultivating themselves overseas and possibly returning at a later date.

Fong has argued that the images of desirable travel, citizenship and personal development are often subject to the tension-based processes of “cultural intimacy”
A term coined by Herzfeld, “cultural intimacy” is used to describe the flip-flop-like process where state-based legal and cultural norms are rejected by citizens at one time and accepted at another (Herzfeld 1997). Herzfeld shows how the dynamic tensions and contradictions between person, group and nation-state are actually constitutive of the state, culture and in particular notions of patriotism. Hence, patriotism is not a thing dictated by the state but a negotiated and contested process that is often utilized by agents in a way similar to De Certeau’s “making do.”

This complex process of educational desire and cultural intimacy has accelerated since Deng Xiaoping instructed education departments in June 1978 to expand the scale of people travelling overseas for study. Today, China has become the world’s largest exporter of international students. In 2006 there were 343,126 recorded Chinese international students, constituting 14% of the total international student population and three times more than the second largest exporter, India (UNESCO 2006). Of this, 89,000 Chinese students went to the USA and 79,000 to Japan. However, due to special vocational (15,000) and pre-college language student (30,000) visa arrangements between China and Japan, Japan arguably constitutes the largest recipient of educationally channelled Chinese migrants. According to Gracia Liu-Farrer’s calculations, the total number of educationally channelled Chinese migrants in Japan was 120,176 for 2006 (UNESCO 2006; Liu-Farrer 2001).
These figures are supported by several new ethnographies on Chinese student migration. In Fong’s recently published research on young Chinese’ aspirations to move overseas, she followed a group of informants whom she had previously interviewed at high school age from the Chinese City Dalian to their migrant destinations in Ireland, Japan, America, Britain and Australia (Fong 2011). Despite voicing a desire to go to America or Britain, the majority of Fong’s informants ended up spending a significant period of time in either Ireland or Japan. This compromise was due to the flexible visa and work systems in these countries, and in particular, the relative ease of getting a Japanese student visa. Fong shows that although migrants have preferences for certain countries, the most significant distinction was whether they were considered ‘developed.’ Fong’s informants dreamed of going to a ‘developed country’ (CHN: fadaguojia), which was envisioned as a general category rather than a specific country. These countries were referred to as a ‘paradise’ (CHN: tiantang), and although it was considered the less prestigious ‘silver path’ (CHN: yinse), 42% of her informants had spent at least 6 months in Japan; making it the most significant mediator in the goals of young Chinese to move overseas.

From 1984 to 2004, over a quarter of a million Chinese migrants have arrived in Japan on either university or pre-university language student visas (Liu-Farrer 20011). This new wave of migrants, the ‘New Overseas Chinese’ (CHN: Xinhuaqiao) have constituted approximately a third of the total registered Chinese population in Japan since the 1990s, and make up two-thirds of the total foreign student population.
By the 1990s, China’s new emphasis on overseas study and migration coincided with Japan’s own social developments. Japan’s slowing economy, ageing population, labour shortage, and the hesitation of the domestic population to engage in certain kinds of jobs, created a new job market for migrants (Liu–Farrer 2007; Liu–Farrer 2011). However, pressure from within Japanese politics prevented the allowance of any form of mass labour migration. The relative ease of attaining one of the several types of student visas, and the part-time work arrangements these permit have ensured that student visas have become a proxy channel for labour migration. Liu–Farrer has noted that the possible combination of work and education via student visas in Japan has ensured that a variety of different aspirations for social mobility and economic success flow through similar migratory channels (2007; 2011).

This variety is reflected in regional differences in migratory paths and channels. During the 1990s, ‘Snake Head’ human traffickers from Fujian (CHN: Shetou) collaborated with Japanese businesses to establish language schools for labour migration purposes. At the same time, aspiring young Shanghainese used similar visa-arrangements and privately run schools to prepare themselves for entry into Japanese universities. Hence, I argue that migration from China should be seen in more diverse terms than national boundary crossing. Regional differences are marked, as are personal and interpersonal motivations.
The North-Eastern regions of China had more historical ties with Japan due to Japan's political and economic control of the client state of Manchukuo (Manchuria) between 1932 and 1945. Many older people within this region had some Japanese language ability and so, when educational policy promoted foreign language learning in the 1980s, many North-Eastern schools utilised this generation's Japanese language ability. Hence, students from the North-East were more likely to have learned some Japanese before going to Japan. Non-Han groups from Northern China, such as Inner Mongolians were also more likely to go to Japan, however, this trend was based on perceived linguistic similarities between Mongolian and Japanese. One Inner Mongolian classmate of mine explained it as a reaction to the 'Sinification' (CHN: Hanhua) occurring in Inner Mongolia. In contrast to the North-East, people from Fujian were known for utilising the historic boating traffic from the area, often migrating illegally or re-establishing networks with previously migrated family members. In Shanghai, during the 1990s, many businesses were set up to work as intermediaries for aspiring migrants, often in cooperation with language schools in Japan. In recent times this industry has come under strict regulation with 300 such registered businesses recorded in Shanghai 2006 (Liu-Farrer 2011).

Regional differences also play out in the spatial distribution of Chinese migrants in Tokyo. Each area of Tokyo tends to have more people from certain areas of China, and inter-regional tensions often shaped much of the daily social lives of my interlocuters. For example, Ikebukuro was predominantly seen as an area for North-
East Chinese (Dongbeiren), and although other people came from areas such as Fujian, north-eastern attitudes and identities were performed more publicly in this space. In contrast, the historically established Yokohama Chinatown was discussed by Ikebukuro Chinese as a place for old huaqiao, Taiwanese and Fujianese. Similarly, Ueno was slowly emerging as a ‘little Shanghai,’ in the words of one of my interlocutors.

Regional differences are compounded by personal and family networks. Of the 120 participants Liu-Farrer interviewed, 102 had siblings currently studying in Japan or had previously had a sibling study there. Amongst my interlocutors those figures were lower, but not significantly. For example, amongst the 28 life narratives I collected, only 13 people had kin currently or previously in Japan. However, they often had friends or kin with ties to Japan (particularly amongst Fujianese interlocuters), even if they did not actually reside there. In short, personal relationships and regional dynamics influence desires to move to Japan.

Whilst these dynamics are significant on a general level of analysis, they vary widely in the way they channel personal life trajectories. An Inner-Mongolian couple’s tale of how they came to Japan exemplifies the process of ‘making do’ while engaging with these forces. Despite growing up together as children, the desire to study had drawn them away from each other since they were 17. The wife, Non, had not grown up speaking Mandarin, and had only learnt standardised modern Chinese (CHN: Putonghua) when she started her later years in primary school. She said that linguistic
difficulties had always made her feel out of place within the urban centres of China, and so, at 17 when an opportunity to study in Japan arose she took it without thinking. She said that Mongolian is grammatically similar to Japanese, and that she thought that she might fit in more in Japan due to a perceived commonality between Mongolians and Japanese people. Her move as a student would later channel her now-husband’s move to Japan. He described his tale as follows:

"The biggest reason is that I met my wife (CHN: laopo “missus”) back where we come from. We got along really well after not having seen each other since we were kids and we started to date (CHN: tanlianai). However, she was going to go to Japan, and I thought ‘Not a problem... it could only be around a year right?’ But she didn’t come back...after that, she got a job and our lives were stable...I know you probably want me to give a really sentimental reason like ‘I came here just for her, blah blah’ but it really wasn’t like that...I really just thought ‘try studying abroad’ (CHN: liuxue bei). See if I can get used to it here, see what it’s like you know. I had no diplomas, no educational experience (CHN: xueli), but I came on the ‘pre-college student visa’ (CHN: jiuxue) no problem. I’ve been here for almost three years now, we married last year.”

Aming’s tale demonstrates the complex pragmatics involved in one instance of ‘making do.’ As much as migration has been popularised within the reform era, and is very much an everyday part of many people’s lives, they must still negotiate these forces as a part of their own life projects. Moreover, as desiring subjects they also rationalise their choices based on multiple and at times conflicting desires, which I shall return to in the next chapter. Another aspect that affects an agent’s capacity to
‘make do’ however, is the multiple agencies of the forces and non-human agents they contend with.

**Visas and passports as flexible agents**

The catalysts and agents within China’s regime of mobility are not only government discourses and personal relations. In calling for a ‘mobility turn,’ Urry utilises Actor-Network approaches to social life to overcome overly-metaphysical approaches to movement (Urry 2007; Latour 1991; Latour 1993; Latour 2005). Taking human agency as a foundational aspect of mobility, he goes on to show how the proliferation of non-human agents (such as cars, telecommunications and global trade systems) intersects with this human potential for agency. Originally coined by Bruno Latour, the term “non-human agents” is intended to capture the active role the world plays in human social life (2005). The use of the term “agent” is intentionally added to disrupt what Latour sees as an overly passive conception of the worlds which humans occupy. To Latour, humans are part of wide networks of actors which all have different agencies, effects and mediations. Each actor within a network is only recognized as an agent if it has a significant effect on the other actors it has a relationship with. Consequently, Latour’s use of the word “agent” is not an allusion to “agency,” which has associations with human “free will,” but rather looks at an actor’s relationships to others. These actors are often humans as embodied selves, but also include forms of material culture, as well as any other things in the world which may hold an important role in a chain of effects, such as animals, natural forces and institutions. Often these
non-human agents are discursive products of human activity, such as books, newspapers and institutions. However, the purpose of naming them “agents” is not intended to purify them of their place in discourse, but rather to recognize the unexpected effects they have as discursive products which take on lives not originally intended for them. In this sense, they have the capacity to speak in unintended ways. The term ‘non-human’ is perhaps a misnomer in this regard, as it builds a false sense of separation between humans and the worlds they live in. However, I choose to use it as a short hand to recognize the active role “things” take in the world. The acknowledgement of non-human agents allows us to consider the way mobilities shape human lives even during stationary moments, as was the case with the gift of cigarettes provided by Xiaochen’s father. In the context of migratory procedures, the agency of entities such as commodities, visas and passports is thus central.

Chinese migrants’ stories show how visas extend potentialities to a person. Akin to Donna Haraway’s concept of ‘cyborgs’ (1991) as an extension of the body, visas allow one to interact with borders, and the various institutions designed to regulate foreign bodies within a sovereign state. Visas and passports can thus be seen as non-human agents that enable new kinds of movement. Scholars excited about the new possible mobilities afforded by transnationalism have often cited unionised passports, such as those found in the EU, or harmonized visa regulations between OECD countries, as a sign of loosening border controls (O’Byrne 2001). However, this trend is only particular to the European case, and has shown a reverse in trend
since the 2008 global recession. Wang Horng-luen, in analysing the Taiwanese visa and passport system, has critiqued this idea, showing how different passports and visas afford different potential mobilities to different people (Wang 2004). Showing how affluence allows for dual citizenship in Taiwan (mainly with the US) and how other factors limit an applicant’s capacity to get a passport. Wang argues that the increasing importance of passports and visas actually ties people to the nation-state in entangled ways.

In a globalized world in which transnational flows of people become phenomenal, it is increasingly likely that the passport serves as a presumed official document of identification worldwide. In a sense, this has enhanced the linkage between individuals and the state. In addition to the apparent function of identification, the passport bears the imprints of class and classification in the world systems that are transmitted to individual passport holders. A dubious passport, moreover, may breach the institutional foundation of trust and thus cause great troubles to its bearer. (Wang 2004: 370)

Wang’s point resonates with other scholars’ arguments that different visa and passport systems situate people in different ways in global capital regimes depending on their citizenship. For example, Kumar states:
For those who live in affluent countries, the passport is of use for international travel in connection with business or vacations. In poorer nations of the world, its necessity is tied to the need for finding employment, mainly in the west. (Kumar 2000: 20 quoted in Wang 2004)

The Chinese passport system is a particular case in point. Its history is much shorter than many other passport systems. Prior to 1985, rather than being issued passports, travellers overseas were required to have specific arrangements and documents attached to a certain institution that would be responsible for the protection and surveillance of their guests. Such arrangements were designed to keep travellers clustered together within their host university, diplomatic mission or, perhaps most famously, performance troupe. However, in 1985 a standardised passport system was introduced in the PRC that allowed travellers slightly freer movement within their destination countries. Currently, Chinese passports still involve a complex system of applications and interviews. Moreover, they are more closely tied to the kinds of visas one hopes to obtain than passports in countries such as Australia or the UK. In the initial application for a passport, a purpose is required for obtaining one. Although pragmatic to some extent, as it is used to determine what kind of

The most famous case of this kind of arrangement is perhaps the defection of the ballet dancer Li Cunxin to the United States in 1981.
passport you require (such as a diplomatic or normal passport), it also allows the
government to decide who has a legitimate purpose to move.

The Japanese student visa system intersects with this institutional assessment
in many ways. The kinds of visa possible, and the flexible work arrangements allowed
on the visa (up to 28 hours), in conjunction with its relative low cost and no language
requirement has ensured that it is not only one of the most reliable means to get into
Japan, but also an easier way to legitimately get a passport within China. The ‘Pre-
college student’ (JPN: Shuugaku) visa in Japan is available for 6 months to 2 years. It
requires no prior language experience, and is the cheapest study visa amongst the
major desirable study locations. Its only requirement is that you are sponsored by a
local Japanese language school, many of which have very low tuition fees (as low as
20,000 JPY, approximately 200 USD).

Benedict Anderson argues “passports have become ‘less and less attestations
of citizenship, let alone loyalty to a protective nation state, than of claims to
participate in labour markets” (Anderson 1998: 2). I would argue that Anderson’s
point is particularly the case in China, where despite huge movements of people
overseas, passports are still relatively uncommon and unattainable for average citizens,
and are more a claim to work and study overseas than a signifier of loyalty or
citizenship.
Lily Cho, in analysing the non-emotional and neutral requirements of passport photography, argues that citizenship, as embodied in the passport, requires the citizen to forgo their humanity so as to become governable (2009). Cho suggests that the passport is an interesting example of the conundrum that is modern citizenship, as certain modes of citizenship require emotion, whilst others refute it. Cho argues that in the eyes of the state, feeling obscures the capacity to identify the citizen. Hence, passports have a large range of strict guidelines for the way a person is to be photographed. According to Cho's understanding, the passport is rarely a point of emotional identification, but rather a point where the personhood of a subject's identity is moved out of the order that they attach to that identity. It is an object which is identifiable by the state, and transforms the holder into a governable body.

This argument is similar to Hal Foster's use of Kristeva's work in his description of the process of abjection, which as a verb is a boundary-enforcing activity enacted on a body that results in a liminal status between subject and object (Foster 1996; Kristeva 1982). This abject state is enforced upon the migrant through the technological means of the passport so that they can become a "subject invaded by the gaze" (Foster 1996:110) of nation-states and their need to govern foreign bodies and those of their constituents.

However, while the passport potentially positions migrants as abject, its meanings and uses do not stop there. Rather, as something which can affect one's
personhood it takes on a certain agency to itself, which my interlocutors acknowledged in playful ways. Many of them took great pride in the fact that they were able to legitimately obtain passports and visas. Legitimacy in the eyes of the law, and having the right documentation, was a status symbol amongst Chinese migrants in Ikebukuro. In contrast, having a ‘black’ status in Ikebukuro was something that the migrants kept close to their chests. The symbol of ‘black’ legal status is borrowed from a term used to describe illegal and undocumented people within the urban centres of China, those with a ‘black household register’ (CHN: heihukou). These ‘black household registers’ pertain to people who have no documentation whatsoever due to being born in violation of birth control policy in the PRC.

When I started my fieldwork, many people would tell me in jest that their visa statuses were ‘black’ only to then boastfully show me their up to date alien registration card. This jest, I believe, depends on a double play of status, not only were they legitimated by their legal status, but they could joke about it because they were made naturally legitimate through the possession of such documentation. In contrast, the vulnerability of being ‘black’ was deeply felt by those in more precarious legal situations. Legal Chinese migrants would often flaunt their legitimacy by using visa status as an insult or a means of discrimination (particularly against Fujianese migrants). Liu–Farrer found similar trends when researching a Chinese social dance party scene in Tokyo during the late 90s and early 2000s. In particular, North Eastern Chinese sentiments of being more ‘legitimately’ Chinese, largely due to their
command of the now-standardised national Chinese language (CHN: Putonghua),
became entangled with stereotypes of certain regions providing more illegal migrants.

Whereas the North-easterners’ cohesive force was a belief in shared qualities, the Fujian group’s was more a shared position of being discriminated against and their reliance on each other for help.

Although almost every province in China produces undocumented immigrants to Japan, Fujian was particularly known for illegal migration and human trafficking. Fujian immigrants were stereotyped as “gone black ones” among the Chinese immigrants. (Liu-Farrer 2004: 662)

In this way, passports, visas and related documentation not only assist one in crossing borders, but also stand as polysemous signifiers with various sentiments (or lack thereof) attached. The legitimacy they allow is proudly worn as a protective shield, or proof to rightfully be in a particular place, and to legitimately engage in labour and educational markets abroad. This kind of pride is not just performed at borders or even in migrant contexts however. As Julie Y. Chu has shown, it is an important status signifier for those waiting to leave in the mainland itself (2010). In her research amongst Fuzhou villagers, Chu argues that the complex mechanisms and procedures for migration are embedded in an economy of status focused on being ‘creditable.’ Credibility could involve the accumulation of massive debt as being a
sign that one has the social capital to do so, or the capacity to obtain legal
documentation through sufficient social and cultural capital. In particular, Chu argues
that to be ‘credible’ in the eyes of the state by travelling legally and preferably via
plane, was a great status achievement for Fuzhounese people aspiring to move. These
dynamics show that whilst passports, visas and other legal documents are not
necessarily a sign of loyalty to the state or emotional citizenship, they are nonetheless
imbued with other emotional sentiments in relation to one’s legitimacy in global capital
regimes as mediated by the state.

In this chapter, I have argued that visa and passport systems’ expanding roles
in nation-states’ modes of governance are an example of the way Chinese people
assert their agency in their life projects whilst negotiating the differing effects of non-
human agents. Study, work and going into business are all possible on a student visa
and the majority of my interlocutors utilised these capacities to their full potential. In
her research on student migration as proxy labour migration in Japan, Gracia Liu-
Farrer likewise shows that the difference between the educational and economic
aspirations of Chinese migrants are not as distinct as one might assume (Liu–Farrer
2011). Educational and economic migration is inseparable in the context of migration
to Japan, with migrant aspirations and plans shifting depending on opportunities and
experience. Many language students originally intending to enter a university in Japan
opt to work instead, and those originally trying to earn money end up striving for some
form of education due to the advantages it brings.
Chinese migrants struggle to ‘make do’ within this system of student visas, educational desire and labour demand. It is not experienced as exceptional or heroic but merely a part of the everyday reality of contemporary China. I suggest that the banality of these processes is facilitated through the everyday and mundane manifestations of discursive forces, as embodied in non-human agents. Passports and visa are one example of these agents, showing how technologies facilitate and police migration. However, the relationships people have to these non-human agents is by no means simple, as the potentialities of making do find them inscribing new meanings onto these governmental technologies of surveillance.
Chapter Three- Being mobile: disjuncture and difficulties

Today, all forms of life have the experience of “not feeling at home,” which, according to Heidegger, would be the origin of anguish. Thus, there is nothing more shared and more common, and in a certain sense more public, than the feeling of “not feeling at home.” (Virno 2004: 35)

Despite the institutionalised and normalised status of migration and mobility in China, migration is far from being a straightforward and trouble free social act. The imperative to work and the pressure to achieve social mobility can lead to considerable hardship for Chinese migrants in Japan. Life is made even more difficult by the diverse range of legal, economic and discursive pressures that act upon them. The small number of qualitative sociologists who conducted research with this population have noted without exception the presence of narratives of ‘bitterness’ (CHN: ku) amongst Chinese migrants. Recent scholarship has explored the importance and popularity of “speaking bitterness” in Chinese narratives of self, memory and politics in the twentieth century. It has been argued that peasants’ stories of ‘bitterness’ during the
early Maoist period were a means for materialising idealist Marxist discourses. This practice carried into the reform era as a way of expressing and legitimizing state and individual actions (Anagnost 1997; Farquhar 2002). For example, in the early reform era, biographies of traditional Chinese medicine practitioners (Farquhar 2002), and a genre of literature known as 'scar literature,' legitimized policy changes by narrating the hardships of the previous regime under Mao. This 'bitterness' has become a common part of narrating the self in contemporary China.

Health issues often arise from the pressures many Chinese migrants endure. Several women who participated in Liu Farrer’s research mentioned that they had stopped menstruating during periods of their student life in Japan, and others complained of insomnia despite extreme sleep deprivation (2011). In one account a woman temporarily lost her hearing, and in others suffered serious injury during strenuous labour. Within my own research, I did not come across quite so many dramatic examples, although talk of insomnia was common. More generally, my informants would talk of a general tiredness, and some said that when ‘too tired’ they would become withdrawn. This withdrawal might involve opting not to work and staying locked in one’s room or apartment, opting not to work and trying to avoid spending money or doing anything at all. As one of my interlocutors proudly told me “you can live on 1000JPY (approximately 10 USD) for a week that way.” He would stop eating or doing anything at all when he found study and work too overwhelming.
Despite these documented hardships, existing studies and statistics suggest that the majority of migrants to Japan do not return to China, but rather remain in a space in between. The hard-won experience, skills and networks migrants attain while studying in Japan mean that it is often counterproductive for them to return to China. At the same time, few truly aspire to become naturalised citizens, or to settle down in Japan permanently. This hesitation is due to both the near-impossibility of acquiring anything more than a permanent resident’s visa status in Japan, and also to a distinct sense of displacement in the world brought on by their experiences abroad. As a consequence, Chinese student-workers elect to remain in a space between resettlement and return.

Liu-Farrer found that only 13% of the 250 questionnaire survey participants she contacted had returned to China to pursue their careers. She notes that most of her participants felt that the times where overseas experience would guarantee one a job in China are gone, and that overall there is still more money to be made in Japan. The most lucrative and desirable job for her interviewees was to be posted back in China under the employment of a Japanese company, but these opportunities were rare. Further, Chinese students in Japan expressed pride about their achievements and a fear that their skills would somehow be lost or diminished if they chose to spend too long away from places they were needed. Chinese students in Japan appeared to worry about having to compete in China’s rapidly developing domestic market, and the potential of becoming a ‘useless returnee’ or ‘seaweed’ (CHN: Haida); a popular
term for unsuccessful overseas returnees. This fear often justified the hardships they faced in Japan and their decision to stay rootless. In the life narratives they shared, there was a sense that they had anticipated the hardships they had suffered, and that although their experiences had been hard, they were necessary to develop the kind of special character and skills needed to survive and succeed in Japan.

This perspective differs from those of Chinese overseas students who travel to countries other than Japan. Unlike the ‘golden paths’ to the US, Canada and the UK, many migrants in their desire for professional development, were concerned about Japan’s status as a second class ‘silver path’ destination (Fong 2011; Saveliev 2003). Scholars researching Chinese migration have noted that Chinese migrants outside of the major Anglophone countries often worried about the worth of their skills. My interlocutors were also concerned about the worth of their skills, them often telling me in frustrated tones how the knowledge and language skills obtained in the English-speaking world was more valuable than those attained in Japan. This concern was further exacerbated by a sense of ambiguity about China and Japan’s historical relationship and future prospects.

Disjuncture

The living conditions of my Chinese migrant interlocutors in Tokyo were typically difficult, and they most often found themselves working within the less desirable sectors of Tokyo’s labour market. In the interviews I conducted, this
hardship was discussed with relative optimism however, as my interlocutors explained that the kind of work they were performing was not dissimilar from what they would be doing elsewhere. For younger middle class students from China’s urban centres who were used to the coddled life of a single child the normality of being both worker and student at the same time in Japan was refreshing and new for many younger middle class students. Nonetheless, a sense of existential disjuncture and alienation was also common.

Michael Jackson, with his emphasis on the personal and existential aspects of anthropological understanding, has noted a similar sense of tension within the lives of migrants he has interviewed (Jackson 2007). He borrows Marx’ analysis of the worker’s alienation from the object produced by his labour to explain the stresses and disjunctures experienced by a friend who had migrated to London. He states “[T]he more intellectual labour expended on the minatory object,” in this case the migratory project, “the more vulnerable, trapped, worthless, and unreal one feels oneself to be” (2007: 128). Although the migrant Jackson describes was a legal migrant with employment, Jackson notes his migrant friend still felt it necessary to constantly construct a sense of legitimacy in the place he was; putting a sense of coherence into

____________________________________

It is common in China for students to be discouraged or forbidden from working whilst studying if their parents can afford it.
his migratory project. However, like Marx’ worker, the more effort Jackson’s migrant friend exerted on his migratory object, the less real it felt.

The Chinese migrants whom I knew in Ikebukuro also experienced anxiety about their lack of a place in the world. None of my interlocutors aspired to remain in Japan indefinitely, but at the same time those who tried to return home would soon find themselves drawn back to Japan. They were transnational in terms of physical mobility, but proved distinctly diasporic in terms of their sense of where they ought to be. Like classic definitions of diaspora which focus on exiled Jewish people (Safran 1991), Chinese migrants’ imaginaries are still strongly tied to the notion of origins; the difference between the classic definition of Jewish Diaspora and Chinese migrants’ imaginaries being that they longed for ‘kin’ rather than a ‘homeland.’ Because of this imaginary, the obligations and sentiments related to their kin (almost all of whom were still in China, or overseas in an OECD country), were constant sources of guilt.

Michael Jackson emphasises the disjunction and alienation arising from fears about place and legitimacy. In Japan, however, the impossibility of achieving legitimacy (in terms of citizenship and cultural incorporation) often pushed these concerns aside. As one person glibly stated, “Japan is for the Japanese of course. I’ll never be Japanese.” Anxiety about the future was very common however, and often directly connected to concerns about the purpose of moving overseas. Uncertainties associated with moving abroad to secure a future led subjects to refer to their
situation as one of ‘floating’ (CHN: piao), and also occasionally as ‘floating/wandering’ (CHN: fuyou). Vanessa Fong notes the common use of this term in her research among young Chinese abroad:

Transnational Chinese students often describe their sojourns in developed countries as conditions of floating (piao), a concept associated with instability, transience, uncertainty, and a lack of rootedness. Terms associated with floating have long been used in Chinese discourses about the unstable nature of life in general and of the lives of travellers and migrants in particular. The term floating population (liudong renkou) has become a semi-official category used by the Chinese government and scholars worldwide to describe rural-to-urban migrants in China. The classic Tang dynasty poet Li Bai (701–762) wrote in a poem, “Now the heavens and earth are the hostels of creation; and time has seen a full hundred generations. Ah, this floating life, like a dream... True happiness is so rare!” (Fong 2011: 98)

In general “floating” has a negative connotation, with a perceived lack of agency and sense of indeterminacy being its major constituents. The story of ‘Laoliu’ demonstrates the personal tensions found within negotiations of place, with its associated diasporic imaginaries and life projects. Moreover, it demonstrates how the
normalized fantasy of mobility as a means to personal betterment, such as those demonstrated by Xiaochen and Arning, conflicts with the everyday imperatives of embodied mobility and the life choices presented therein.

I first met Laoliu whilst watching a billiards game with a group of my informants. They held a weekly match on Wednesdays to play for small amounts of money and blow off steam from their otherwise hectic work and study lives. I sat on a couch near the tables discussing my research question with a new friend I had been introduced to when Laoliu approached us. He wore a grey pinstriped suit and had his hair slicked back in a fashion almost reminiscent of pop culture images of Japanese mafia.

He often spoke to me weaving Japanese nouns and adjectives into otherwise Chinese sentence structures, and occasionally using the Chinese pronunciation of a Japanese character compound. He described Japan as a “benri” (JPN: convenient) place where everyone’s “suzhi” (CHN: quality) was high. In particular, he talked of how he wanted to learn the Japanese approach to “service” (CHN: 务) as he thought it was decidedly lacking in Northeast China. Amongst the people I had met so far, he was the most enthusiastic about his life in Japan. He also suggested applying for Japanese citizenship.

Over the course of my fieldwork, Laoliu and I became very close, and I discovered things about his life that brought many nuances to his original performance of affluence and enthusiasm. In contrast to his initial display of certainty about his life
project in Japan, perhaps a year after our initial meeting he came to a crossroads that made him question many things. I received a phone call from him at around 2am in the morning. He was tentative and sounded concerned, eventually asking me for advice. He explained to me that his Japanese boss had offered him a significant promotion, but that he didn’t know whether he wanted to take it.

Despite Laoliu’s excitement about Japan, when faced with the actuality of living there for another five years (the contract for the promotion), he became incredibly distressed. He discussed with me at length how he wanted to get married but could never marry a Japanese woman; how he wanted to take care of his family but that they could never come to Japan; how he could make more money elsewhere in China perhaps, but that he didn’t have any connections. Finally he said that “most importantly this isn’t my home.” I asked if he’d like me to meet him and suggested that we call some of his friends, but he declined. Despite repeated phone calls he remained withdrawn for the next month, until he finally got back in touch and told me he had decided not to take the promotion but remain in his current job, waiting to see if he had a change of heart. He then said he’d just ‘float’ in Japan.

The distress experienced by Laoliu due to the tensions between his desires to be a successful mobile subject, take care of his family and be in a place he felt he belonged is but one example of the disruptions contemporary regimes of mobility bring for young mobile Chinese. Amongst my interlocutors the sense of being unsure was
incredibly common. The tensions between places and life projects created this alienation. Laoliu did not simply wish to belong in Japan, nor did he just wish to return home.

When considering this tension, his experiences could be interpreted using recent literature on transnational migrants, which emphasizes a position akin to a 'third space' (Schiller et al 1995; Nonini and Ong 1997). For example, Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc have explored the fields of transnationalism created by West Indian, Filipino and Haitian migrants that serve to 'deterritorialize' the nation-state, by creating alternative spaces which migrants identify with (1995). This kind of deterritorialized space has been described as a “transnational social field” by Georges Fouron, who defines it as “a combination of virtual and actual ‘social spaces’ or habitats that span and connect the social and political terrains of the [host nation] and those of the homeland” (2000: 283). Moreover, the interpretation of this field has often implied a sense of freedom and flexibility, as transmigrants move flexibly in and out of “territorially and culturally specific regimes of power and knowledge” (Nonini 2002:5).

While the relationships that position migrants may often resemble this third space however, the experience can of being displaced can be more problematic. For Laoliu, the movement between places has left him vulnerable to his sense of simultaneous uncertainty and obligation. This common uncertainty has implications for
how we envision the transnational. As much as he is positioned transnationally in a
place betwixt and between, he is not enjoying a third transnational space as a flexible
citizen either. His experience is constituted by a dialectic between places rather than
a fully formed third space. It is the excess of options and places, with the simultaneous
impossibility of occupying more than one position at the same time that causes such
anguish for some Chinese migrants.

Anthropological research in recent years has often noted the disjunctive effects
of global processes and migration. Arjun Appadurai describes the weightless and
disjunctive sense of contemporary global capital processes and their relationship to
subjectivity (Appadurai 1996)

The world we live in now seems rhizomic (Deleuze and Guattari 1987),
even schizophrenic, calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation,
and psychological distance between individuals and groups on the one
hand, and fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity on the
other. Here, we are close to the central problematic of cultural
processes in today’s world. (Appadurai 1996: 29)

Appadurai has argued that global processes are best understood as distinct forms of
“imagination as a social practice” (1996: 31).

The world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the
imagination in social life···No longer mere fantasy···no longer simple
escape... no longer elite pastime... and no longer mere contemplation... the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work... and a form of negotiation between sites of agency and globally defined fields of possibility (Appadurai 1996: 31)

In particular, he emphasizes that what is distinct about contemporary global processes is that they are imagined under the framework and flows associated with the term ‘globalization.’ Further, this imaginary is no longer rooted in a centre–periphery system of signs and signifiers but is multitudinous and more akin to a landscape.

As Appadurai argues, there is not a single mode of imagining our world as a globe shaped by capitalist processes, but rather multiple, competing and ever-growing world-formations, whether those of global capital, Islamic modernities or the state-forming project of the People’s Republic of China. Laoliu’s story demonstrates how persons with unique life trajectories and situations must negotiate these imaginative terrains. In this sense, as much as they are imaginative terrains built upon flows and processes, they are also highly unique and resemble other existential conundrums we face in life. Mobile processes, including our own embodied mobilities, are the means by which we have always created our worlds and shape our multiple imaginaries.

John Urry, an advocate of the ‘mobilities paradigm,’ has been highly critical of only associating mobility with contemporary processes (2007). He states that one of
the greatest fallacies within the social sciences is the static formation of societies and cultures. In contrast, he pushes for a "movement-driven social science" that:

…enables the ‘social world’ to be theorized as a wide array of economic, social and political practices, infrastructures and ideologies that all involve, entail or curtail various kinds of movement" (Urry 2007:18).

In arguing his point he conducts an ethno-historical exploration of mobility where recent processes are distinctive for their distance and speed, rather than their mobility itself. As an example he states that a more significant shift occurred at the moment when transnational communication became possible with the introduction of telegraphic technology in the nineteenth century. He claims telegraphs were the first time people were able to communicate with each other over long distances in relatively short periods of time. He contrasts this invention with the internet which is usually used as an example of the revolutionary effects of technology. Urry argues that while the internet is significant in its form, speed and distribution, it nonetheless came into a world of people already able to imagine global communication.

Urry does not refute much of the above scholarship on how current mobilities problematize our sense of place in the world, but rather reminds us to be cautious about connecting mobility to new epochal claims. He argues, in short, that we have always been mobile but that mobility, as a quantum of time and space, is changing.
Urry’s approach is a sage reminder to remain grounded when looking at mobile processes. Rather than celebrating a new epoch of transnational social fields, or imaginative terrains, I suggest it is best to see mobility as a contingent part of our being-with, that although different today, fits within an existential understanding of the disjunctures it possibly creates. What is distinct about imaginative processes today is that the worlds they form are increasingly stretched over time and space, and increasingly related to a multitude of mobile technologies.

Laoliu’s story shows how there can be an antinomy between competing hopes and desires: disjunctures created by multiple imaginaries that move in different directions. His concern for his family, and his longing for home, effect movements across both geographic space and across memory. His obligations to his family are both nostalgic and diasporic in this sense. At the same time, his ambitions for the future conflict with his sense of obligation to his home, which left him in a stalemate where he eventually decided to change nothing. His desire to create his own family has its own imaginative trajectory as he contemplated the possibility of finding someone related to his past but also able to fit into his cosmopolitan and money-making aspirations for the future.

Although Laoliu’s tale was a crisis of choice for himself I am wary of making any epochal claims about current regimes of mobility as a source of crisis. In line with Michael Jackson, it seems more important to emphasize the existential condition of a
problematic subjectivity that each person deals with (Jackson 2008: x). In this sense, rather than globalisation or regimes of mobility being a source of disruption which we can escape, they are merely the context in which we deal with existential problematics. The problematic sense of place in the world experienced by Chinese migrants in Tokyo is not merely the result of being a migrant. The disjunctures they faced were also part of living and moving through the city. This is particularly the case in Tokyo due to its unique distribution, history and relationship to global economic processes. In the next chapter, this dynamic will be explored further, showing that mobility and migration are not merely processes that end at the borders of different states but also carry on into the daily urban lives of Chinese migrants in Tokyo.
Chapter Four- Being in Tokyo: Space, Capital and the Sensory

“*The streets have no real feel (CHN: Meiyou ganjue). You just look, buy... go! (CHN: Zhishi kan, mai...zou!)* ”

(Young woman from Shandong)

“No wonder people don’t ever go home... You know, you always see salary-men out until late every night...and life here is so fast. Who’d want to hang around at home when it’s just a tiny box?!”

(Young woman from Fujian)

The experience of migration and its spaces does not end on arrival in a new place; mobile processes are not limited to those passing national boundaries. Being a migrant involves a particular engagement with new spaces. There are disorienting qualities to a city the size of Tokyo that all residents experience at times, regardless of whether they are a migrant or not. My own experience trying to meet and conduct fieldwork amongst Chinese migrants in Tokyo involved spending a great deal of time moving across the city. Chinese migrants could be found in most suburbs of Tokyo, although they predominantly worked, studied and played along the western half of Tokyo’s major railway ring, the Yamanote line. My attempts to follow them through these
spaces demonstrated how many of their lives involved immense time commitments, with little space left for social interaction. My research left me with a deep sense of the fleeting and often lonely lives young and newly-arrived Mainland Chinese lived. They often said as much, however these complaints were usually expressed in terms of time, money, cramped spaces and the difficulties of dealing with Japanese people.

**Introducing Tokyo: capital and its consequences**

The space of Tokyo itself produces isolated and 'atomized' lives for many of its residents (Waley 2000). This urban isolation has been a constant theme within some of Japan’s major literary works. Natsume Souseki, Japan’s first modernist writer, wrote about the need to escape loneliness and urban isolation in his famous work *Kokoro* (1914). Similarly, Abe Koubou explored the distance between people living in cities in his novel *Face of Another* (JPN: *tanin no kao* 1959), which tells the tale of a plastic surgeon who replaces his face after losing it in an accident. His new ability to be faceless however soon leads to a series of moral dilemmas and a sense of isolation.

Although over 50 years later than Abe and Natsume’s work, my own experiences and my interlocutors’ daily lives in Tokyo reflected similar concerns with isolation; reminding me of Simmel’s original work on the effects of metropolitan life on our sense of belonging (Simmel 2002 [1903]). While Simmel focused on the general effects of money on the individual in the context of metropolitan life on the individual, I am more interested in how flows of capital create spatial regimes in Tokyo, and how
this affects the sensory experience of the city. It is our ‘sense’ of the world that creates the world, with monetary capital only being one ‘sense’ within Nancy’s conceptual meaning of the term (Nancy 1998). Though the experiences of Chinese migrants are often treated as separate phenomena, these experiences can show how capital and bodily senses are entangled with one another. This is particularly clear in terms of the visual dynamics of Tokyo’s streets, where the interplay of vivid display and surveillance show the ocular-centric ways of living and moving through Tokyo. Chinese migrants are subject to surveillance when walking the streets in popular urban centres like Ikebukuro. Consequently, I argue that many migrants live spatially fragmented and interstitial lives, subject to the spatial limitations that capital produces in Tokyo, and the sensory regimes that influence everyday activity within those spaces.

Tokyo was originally a planned city, created and designed with governance in mind. It was known as Edo, and functioned as the bureaucratic and military centre of the Tokugawa Shogunate from 1603 (the Shogunate were a military based government that although technically answerable to the Imperial family in Kyoto effectively ruled Japan up until 1868). It is estimated that Edo was the largest city in the world and was a central hub to a wide range of internal migration practices under the Tokugawa Shogunate. These practices included the strategic movements of nobles and bureaucrats, which were intended to ensure their continued loyalty to the Shogunate, as well as the massive movements of labour and trade which emerged to support this system. At that time, a heavily planned urban system mirrored a central bureaucratic
regime that involved a series of ringed gateways leading to the Shogunate’s castle in
the centre (Sorensen 2002; Bodart-Bailey 2003). Though most of the affluent families
who served as domain lords under the Shogunate’s regime held lands in the
surrounding Yamanote highlands to the west of Tokyo’s central flatlands, the
Shogunate insisted that their male members stayed within the capital’s centre on a
rotational system (JPN: Sankin kotai). After civil war and the re-establishment of the
political position of the Imperial family in the mid-nineteenth century, Edo was re-
named Tokyo, the ‘eastern capital.’ The new capital was subject to immense
modernization reforms under the Meiji government. This reform involved the
rationalization of Tokyo’s space in line with a railway system, and the establishment of
Imperial quarters as the centre of the city.

Tokyo is a city that has been declared, designed, re-named and re-created. It has been constantly re-imagined and rebuilt in line with the political pressures of the time. Despite heavy governmental influence in its history however, the city’s most marked feature is its immensity and sprawling lack of planning. Indeed, as the Japan scholar and social commentator, Donald Richie observed, “Tokyo’s style is an absence of style” (Richie 1999:11). This “absence of style” has been attributed to its rapid urbanization in the Edo period, its consequent destruction due to fires, its rebuilding and then destruction in the great Kanto earthquake of the early twentieth century, and then the immense fire-bombing suffered during World War 2. This series of destructions and reconstructions, alongside the city’s immense population growth has led some to theorize that the distinctive quality of Japan’s urban aesthetic is one where deterioration, disappearance and reconstruction are common (Ashihara 1989; Hladlik 2003). Hence, Tokyo’s buildings are often impermanent, the only exceptions being a few historical monuments to Tokyo’s urban planning past, such as the Imperial Palace, which stands as a “central emptiness” (Richie 1999:13), around which Tokyo’s urban landscape forms concentric circles.
Tokyo’s central emptiness is both a product of dealing with Japan’s defeat in World War Two and the post-war drive to reposition Tokyo as one of the world’s most vibrant economies and capitals. As Carol Gluck, John Dower and Yoshikuni Igarashi have argued, Tokyo and its inhabitants have often purposefully made things disappear in order to revise the inscriptions of memory found within the city (Gluck 1978; Dower 1999; Igarashi 2000). The city, in the minds of these scholars, contained memories of Japan’s imperialist past, including its violence, as well as reminders of Japan’s defeat in the Pacific War. This effort to erase the inscriptions of Japan’s expansionist past however, were not entirely voluntary but were encouraged by the Allied Occupation forces positioned in Japan immediately after the war through economic and democratic reforms. These reforms became further strengthened as the
shadow of the cold war loomed over Japan, resulting in a widespread drive to embrace and harness global capital.

Tokyo’s current expansive and transient urban form is a complex product of Japan’s efforts to change the spatial inscriptions of Tokyo’s past through capitalist expansionism in the Post-War era. The drive for widespread capitalist production in Japan has positioned Tokyo as a “global city” with many consequences for those living there (Sassen 1991). Coined by Saskia Sassen, Tokyo’s status as a “global city” emphasizes its relationship to global finance hubs such as London and New York (Sassen 1991). Sassen argues that due to the accelerated and mobile nature of technologies such as transport and telecommunications, cities have increasingly become sites of agglomerated capital, with a few particular cities featuring as the most influential in this network.

The fundamental dynamic posited here is that the more globalized the economy becomes, the higher the agglomeration of central functions in a relatively few sites, that is, the global cities (Sassen 1991:5).

Viewing cities as a site of capital agglomeration is a useful critique of the dispersed image of “globalization” and advocates re-embedding the analysis of financial relations in terms of their territoriality. Sassen emphasizes the institutional forms shaped by global capital in Tokyo. However, an emphasis on capital’s role in the city can also
help to explain its urban form and more importantly how that urban form affects people’s lives.

The process of capital accumulation in Tokyo has increasingly shaped social relations and spatiality. The primacy of capital shapes the imperatives of the city, and has in many ways reduced it, in the words of Sassen, as a site for:

(1) The production of specialized services needed by complex organizations for running a spatially dispersed network of factories, offices, and service outlets; and (2) the production of financial innovations and the making of markets, both central to the internationalization and expansion of the financial industry (Sassen 1991:5).

While Sassen is correct in stating that Tokyo is shaped by international finance, the international corporations that shape its urban landscape are predominantly Japanese and have a close relationship with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) (Jackson 1996; Jacob 2005; Waley 2007). The close relationship between the TMG and Japanese corporations has in many ways streamlined the connection between the ‘global’ and ‘local’ imperatives of capital. The TMG, which controls zoning laws and approves major construction projects, has thus allowed major companies to control space in Tokyo in ways which are potentially unrivalled in any other ‘Global City.’
One example of the importance of capital and the way it shapes Tokyo’s urban landscape is its elaborate rail system. The largest metropolitan transport system in the world, it’s renowned for its meticulous schedules and regular service. This meticulous regulation creates a particular sensitivity to time and social life in Tokyo dictated by the rhythms of the major rail lines (Tsuji 2006). It also shapes the city’s rhythms in terms of labour. Trains so crammed that platform attendants need to push people in as they close the doors of the carriages are a common sight in Tokyo. These situations are common to the morning rush in Tokyo as workers in satellite areas of the Tokyo conurbation squeeze in to get to work early in the morning. They are then repeated again at intervals throughout the evening as workers go home. Hence, train stations and their surrounding expanse dictate the vistas and paths through Tokyo. It is common for the only named roads to be those surrounding or leading to the station with smaller streets and addresses organized on a numerical block system rather than being marked on maps.

Historically the central areas of Tokyo were a mixture of residential, industrial and commercial operations (Waley 2000; Waley 2002). The ‘low town’ (JPN: Shitamachi) was known for its smaller scale family-based manufacturing operations, and was considered the working class heart of Tokyo. Meanwhile in the west the Yamanote, became a managerial centre and the seat of the TMG. In the post-war boom however, large-scale manufacturing was moved away from Tokyo altogether, although the mixed
zoning of the centre continued. The changing role of Tokyo thus resulted in a dense intermixing of business offices and small apartment blocks in the areas surrounding the railway stations.

The system of urban expansion in Tokyo also resulted in people moving further from their place of work. By the 1990s the average work commute was over 70 minutes and property prices sky-rocketed fourfold, pushing families to obtain mortgages for properties further from the centre. At the same time the centre’s empty spaces were filled and divided into smaller accommodation and consumption spaces, with a boom in single-person Manshon style apartments over the nineties. Paul Waley has documented the changing texture of this urban expansion showing how much of it was the result of collaboration between the TMG and major Japanese companies without consultation with city residents (Waley 2000). This top-down planning designed to house labour in specific ways resulted in the exacerbation of spatial inequalities in the city and the continued ‘atomization’ and ‘fragmentation’ of Japan’s urban social life as families were forced to split up sections of their land and sell it to developers.

Caught between a rock and a hard place, landowning families in urban areas often resorted either to the disposal of small parcels of their land, thereby further splintering an already fragmented pattern of tenure, or to the creation of a corporate entity as owner of their
property, thus exacerbating the corporatization of urban land. (Waley 2000:142)

This corporatization of urban land accelerated during the 80s and into the 90s as the TMG moved in collaboration with major corporations to turn the 6 major wards in the centre of Tokyo (JPN: fukutoshin) into a ring of business hubs around the Yamanote train system which connected these workplaces to residences for workers and their families. These hubs, such as Shibuya, Shinjuku and Ikebukuro, have become some of the world’s busiest railway junctions and are vibrant spaces of consumption and work. The eastern side of this ring, predominantly made up of ‘low town’ areas, has recently regained popularity as the historically and culturally ‘authentic’ part of Tokyo (Waley 2002). Indeed, people travelling there will often say they are ‘going to Edo.’ This side is made up of famous cultural regions such as Ueno which leads to the historic area Asakusa, renowned for Kabuki and other entertainments, and Tokyo station, which is near the Ginza, an area made famous in the early 20th century for its bars, fashion boutiques, and ‘modern girls’ (JPN: moodan gaaru), fashionable young women that were a source of both fear and intrigue.

In contrast to the classic ‘low town’ areas, the western hub stations such as Shinjuku, Harajuku, Shibuya and Ikebukuro are associated with more recent practices of consumption and youth culture. For example, Shibuya and Harajuku have been associated with youth cultures and major corporate advertising since the 70s (Yoshimi...
2001), while Shinjuku is split between its association with the TMG, and its adjoining adult entertainment district, the ‘kabuki district’ (JPN: Kabukicho). The giant shopping centres of Ikebukuro’s east side contrast with the diverse population living on the west (the major field site of this thesis). The reputations of the different areas surrounding the train stations of Tokyo are a source of vibrancy and excitement for many in the city. The ability to go out on the weekend as a walking voyeur and exhibitionist in Harajuku, perhaps wearing exciting fashions that fit into one of the myriad classificatory groups (such as “Goth-Lolita” or “Forest-girl”) is a great source of pleasure for many. However, the fragmentation of the city into multiple specifically defined areas has also created a fragmented relationship between everyday life, interrelatedness and urban space. Indeed, I would suggest that the popular consumption practices associated with these spaces are a reaction to the isolation inherent to living in Tokyo.

In many ways, Tokyo’s rapid urbanization, and its consequent social costs, mirrors much classical thought on the subjects of modernity and urbanization. For example, the atomization and fragmentation Waley and Maruyama speak of utilizes Durkheim’s work on ‘anomie’ (Durkheim 1997). Durkheim argues that with modernization and urbanization former modes of solidarity, or mechanical solidarity as Durkheim terms it, shift to more specialized modes or to organic solidarity. However, within this process there is the potential for the social placement of individuals in specialized roles contradicting other social relations and positions they occupy,
resulting in ‘normlessness’ and ‘isolation,’ what he calls anomie. Durkheim used this hypothesis to analyse suicide rates in rapidly urbanizing societies, claiming anomie was a major cause of suicide for ‘modern’ urbanites. Similarly, Marx argues that isolation occurs through the alienation of labour from its product, whilst Weber was concerned with how mass rationalization and bureaucratization in modern urban systems led to a person’s alienation from process.

Japan is well known for social problems such as suicide and alienation. It has one of the world’s highest suicide rates, with 71 per cent of suicide victims males aged 20–44 (Lewis 2008). Suicide is not merely a statistic however, but also an experiential part of Tokyo’s urban texture. Tales of train lines famous for suicide abound, and the discreet yet disturbing ‘accident’ notifications (JPN: Jinshinjiko lit. person-body-accident) on stopped or delayed trains are a common occurrence. The relationship between this high suicide rate and issues of labour are also quite direct. The age group most at risk of suicide also constitute the majority of Japan’s labour force; popular opinion views job-related worries as a major cause of suicide. In a similar vein, the isolation felt by many people in Tokyo, and their subjection to the demands of work has led to much popular discourse around the city’s effects on health, encapsulated in the term “death by overwork” (JPN: karoushi).

Tokyo is not, however, merely an example of a chaotic and isolating capitalist city. Despite concerns over atomization and overwork, Tokyo is also hailed as a city
that is not subject to many of the concerns of urbanization and modernization. Tokyo has incredibly low crime rates, a relatively stable distribution of wealth (although this has changed since the 2008 financial crisis) and is not known for urban ghetto-ization. Its spaces, although chaotic and confusing to the uneducated eye, have been defended by public figures and architects as being merely misunderstood. Indeed, the architect Ashihara Yoshinobu has claimed that in Japanese aesthetics, unlike ‘western’ ideas of urban space, the interior is most highly appreciated, which results in an appreciation of the fluctuations of buildings and pathways (Ashihara 1989). Tokyo’s streets are also clean, and not usually subject to the street-level congestion found in many other cities.

The pedestrian perspective of the city and its intersection with train travel is perhaps the best way to make sense of Tokyo. In particular, the areas surrounding train stations are a significant space to explore the phenomenology of Tokyo. It is at this point that the orderly maps of its railway system and its relatively homogenous income statistics start to take meaningful shape. As De Certeau famously pointed out in his essay Walking in the City, the spatial awareness of the urban planner differs from that of the ‘walker’ (De Certeau 1984). I would argue that the quantitative view of the city’s incomes and ‘ethnic’ make-up statistics, although slightly different from the panoramic perspective De Certeau focuses on, belongs to the same category. These quantifiable and map-able depictions of Tokyo are what Lefebvre called the “representations of space” which are “tied to the relations of production and to the ‘order’ which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and
to ‘frontal’ relations” (Lefebvre 1991:33). As De Certeau argues, these perspectives are those of the city planner, and arguably the TMG, which relies on “imaginary totalizations” that come from privileged and abstracted perspectives often associated with forms of governance or capitalist production (1984:93). These “imaginary totalizations” mask the everyday texture of what it means to ‘be’ mobile in the city. Indeed, Tokyo, with its lack of vistas and monuments, save for a central emptiness is perhaps exemplary of a walker’s city. This is not to imply that the walker’s perspective is outside of modes of governance or capitalist production, but rather that Tokyo can only be made sense of from a pedestrian view.

The sensorial richness of its streets; with bright lights and large video advertising boards, the smells of cooking wafting out into its pedestrian spaces, and screams of touts enticing you into their stores, makes the areas around the major stations vibrant. This vibrancy stems from the street being both a site for “spatial practice” in its more common embodied sense, and a “representational space” which Lefebvre describes as “embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life” (1991:33). The entanglement of everyday practice and representation produces spaces where consumption is constantly presented to the walker. Though Sassen and Waley have demonstrated the influence of capitalism on Tokyo from a macro level, I would suggest that a walking perspective reveals the everyday effects of capital.
As one walks around the major stations of Tokyo, it is hard not to notice the ‘wrapping’ of these spaces in a wide variety of visual mediums such as digital screens, neon signs and other less luminescent signs. It is in this way that the social practices enacted in these spaces and the representational forms that shape the image of these spaces overlap. Indeed, Morris has argued that ‘un/wrapping’ is perhaps the best way to understand Tokyo’s consumption spaces (Morris 2010). He applies Joy Hendry’s work on wrapping as a social practice in Japan to critique the standard approach to space, which interprets the exterior as hiding the ‘true’ form underneath; what he calls a revelatory approach. In contrast, Morris argues that exteriors, as the product of the wrapping of space, are the modality through which space is made meaningful in Tokyo. He quotes Hendry to articulate his point:

[There is a] problem in our Western propensity to want always to be unwrapping, deconstructing, seeing the objects at the centre of things. Bognar, too, comments about Japanese cities that “if we try to lift the veils wrapping them in endlessly juxtaposed layers, surprisingly...[they] become ‘empty’” (1985:67). Undoubtedly, what we need to do, is to learn to value the wrapping, as well as the wrapped, and seek the meaning they together convey. (Hendry 1993:109 as quoted in Morris 2010)
Morris' interpretation of Tokyo as a “promiscuous display” is shared by many social commentators such as Donald Richie, who noted how “[h]oardings bellow, flags and banners yell, neon points and kanji grabs” (1999:37). However, Morris develops this point to suggest that the verticality of these displays makes Tokyo distinct from many other visually rich contemporary cities (2010:7).

The spatial reach of the Japanese city street expands downwards and upwards to include those shops, eating places, bars, and businesses located anywhere within this vertical range. This has crucial consequences for advertising signage, which colonizes every available space in order to maximize the chances of customers finding or choosing a particular establishment to patronize (Morris 2010:7-8).

Morris’ account of a pedestrian view of Tokyo is excellent. However, one may question what this spatial articulation means for one’s sense of being in Tokyo. The ‘verticality’ and ‘un/wrapping’ of Tokyo’s consumption spaces along the western half of the Yamanote line are a site of marvel and spectacle for many, however this positive experience is not universal. Moreover, this articulation of space makes Tokyo “Henri Lefebvre’s capitalist abstract space par excellence” (Huang 2004:58) as it collapses spatial practices, representational spaces and the representation of space into one another to create an alienated abstract form. This process particularly resonates with Lefebvre’s notion of leisure and the “consumption of space” as
Tokyo’s abstract form becomes Tokyo as image, taken from a pedestrian view that is consumed as a product in itself (Lefebvre 1991:353).

It is a space “made with the visible in mind: the visibility of people and things...and of whatever is contained within them” (Lefebvre, 1991: 75), where voyeuristic walking is pleasurable for those able to read Tokyo’s spaces, but is also consequently illegible to some. The difficulties associated with reading the city’s spaces has resulted in a plethora of mobile technologies designed to assist pedestrians in negotiating Tokyo, for example the GPS ‘navi’ for mobile phones was first implemented in Japan and there is a wide variety of Japanese magazines, such as Tokyo Walker (JPN: TokyoUooka) designed specifically to guide the resident to Tokyo’s interesting hidden spaces of consumption and play.

**Being a migrant in the City**

Tokyo is a hub of migration. Few Japanese nationals living in Tokyo are originally from there and many still return to their ancestral homes for the Bon festival; a summer celebration intended to honour one’s ancestors. The diverse history of Tokyo’s inhabitants is also performed in Tokyo’s streets during the Bon festival, with many areas holding dances and performances specific to another region of Japan. For example, Koenji’s residents celebrate their historic ties to Tokushima prefecture by performing the Awa dance during the Bon festival. This dance, both aesthetically and
culturally distinct from the dances held in Tokyo and its surrounding regions, is now celebrated as one of the major attractions in Tokyo during the Bon festival.

Despite Tokyo’s position as a city of internal migrants however, there is still a sharp distinction between the experiences of Japanese living in Tokyo, and my Chinese interlocutors. Chinese migrants told me much of their experience of Tokyo as a city, which reflected a sense of simultaneous confusion, excitement and disappointment. Their descriptions demonstrated how the intersection of capital, space and sensory experience created a plethora of contradictions in their lives. Tokyo is considered a desirable destination within Chinese discourse precisely because of its relationship to capital, particularly consumption. China’s view of Tokyo as a global city and consumption space is reflected in the recent influx of Chinese tourists who primarily come to Japan to shop for ‘quality’ (CHN: zhilianghao) items that, although available in China, are seen as more prestigious when purchased in the reliable consumption spaces of Japan. In this sense, Tokyo is seen as the epitome of modern consumption in a ‘developed country’ (CHN: fadaguofia). However this image changes for Chinese migrants as the realities of the city take shape during their stay in Japan. In particular, young student migrants’ excited talk of Tokyo as ‘a heaven of consumption’ (JPN: Xiaofei tiantang) would sardonically turn to speaking of how the money earned in Japan rarely made it very far. As one of my friends explained to me, it was like being at a banquet but not being allowed to eat.
Similar to the allure and contradictions of Tokyo as a consumption space, my interlocutors also felt the limitations of Tokyo as a legible space. Many of them told me that one of the attractions of the city before leaving China was that Tokyo was another large city in Asia, and so they felt it would feel familiar. The signs, although in another language technically, used the same or at least similar pictographs to those in China, and it was possible to be less visible on the street. At the same time my interlocutors often described Tokyo as *juan*, as in the conversation with Xiaochen in the previous chapter. This term is usually translated as “chaotic” but can be used in the sense of either “messy” or even “degenerate.” This perception was particularly common among my interlocutors from Northeast China and the recently re-furbished cities in the South, who were used to large soviet style boulevards. Those from Shanghai were less critical, making assertions that Tokyo and Shanghai were very similar, although as one informant complained “they look the same, but the feeling is different, people use the street differently and it’s no fun.”

Tokyo’s rail junction hubs and their surrounding consumption spaces fit with the city’s visual ‘wrapping’ and ‘verticality.’ They are made to be moved through; highly mobile and transient spaces that are designed to be enjoyed as visual spectacle until one arrives at the bar, shop or any other space of consumption one planned to visit. However, they aren’t common spaces to sit and watch passers-by, a common practice in many of China’s major cities.
These spaces are a source of inspiration for some and are crucial to Japan’s innovative pop culture industry (Nobuoka 2010). They are spaces which become sites of interaction and performance that enhance the spaces’ visual qualities. For example, the fashion practices of Harajuku and Akihabara station are reminiscent of Baudelaire and Benjamin’s flânerie, a practice of walking in the city as a performance and a mode of appreciating crowds. However, as Baudelaire and Benjamin emphasize, this experience is also one of “shock and intoxication” as one is subject to the immense stimuli of modernity.

Jostled, pushed and shoved by the seething urban crowd, the city dweller must remain ever vigilant, constantly on guard and alert. In the midst of the crowd, the individual is bombarded by a plethora of unassimilable stimuli. (Gilloch 1996:143)

Whilst Baudelaire and Benjamin speak of the flâneur as a kind of urban virtuoso who appreciates and negotiates this stimuli, it is arguable that appreciation is only possible in certain spaces with prescribed reputations and common practices (such as Goth-Lolita in Harajuku) and is only available to people with the economic, social and cultural capital to do so. Indeed, flâneurs “are cordoned off” (Buck-Morris 1989:344) to spaces of consumption, where only some have the cultural and economic capital to understand and participate in these practices. Others become what Victor Fournal called the badaud, or “mere gaper who becomes intoxicated by the urban scene to the
extent that he forgets himself” (Featherstone 1998:914). Even more extreme reactions to contemporary urban life also occur, for example, popular Japanese discourse recognises a total withdrawal from the social pressures and visual stimuli of the outside world, encapsulated in the term ‘hikikomori’ (Ogino 2004; Borovoy 2008).

The streets of Tokyo are thus confusing, highly visual, and transient; separated between spaces of consumption centred on the major train stations, and peripheral areas of residence. The nature of Tokyo’s streets affords potentialities and problems for Japanese citizens residing in Tokyo, but there are additional problems to moving through the city as a Chinese migrant. Tokyo’s streets are highly regulated spaces subject to rigid governmentality where idleness or deviance is policed through a wide range of techniques. These techniques are usually a gentle but constant process for Japanese or recognizably ‘foreign’ subjects (such as those from European or Anglophone countries). However, other forms of deviance and ‘foreign’ status are more heavily policed.

**Walking in Ikebukuro and an incident of governance**

Negotiating the flow of people during rush hour in Ikebukuro station is an act of virtuosity. One must weave through people, past people, try establishing a small flow oneself with a group of strangers who recognize another with similar purposes only then to suddenly leave when they reach a point in the station where your goals no longer align. Negotiating this chaos as a new comer to Tokyo often leaves one
stationary and gaping, but within little time it seems like a natural situation. Ikebukuro station is not merely one of Tokyo’s major rail junctions. It is a major consumption hub that serves as a gate into the satellite areas of Tokyo such as Saitama; a quasi-suburban area where many office workers’ families live and is often jokingly seen as inaka (rural). The rail station itself is encased in Tokyo’s largest department store, owned by the Seibu Corporation, which operates a wide variety of popular brand specialty stores such as Loft, Muji, and Parco.

On the subterranean floors people rush to their next train or subway connection funnelled by a great expanse wrapped in signs guiding people up into the shopping centre; it being almost impossible to exit the station without passing through a section of Seibu. Outside of the station however, it is not only a space of fashion consumption mainly controlled by Seibu, but is also a new popular place for young teenage women to meet, an increasingly popular site for “ethnic food” (JPN: esunikku ryouri) and Tokyo’s second largest adult entertainment district.

Ikebukuro is uniquely placed in Tokyo. On top of its image as a place of promiscuous consumption, it is also a transient space where ‘Others’ abound. In addition to the significant Chinese migrant population introduced in Chapter 1, there are ‘Others’ both Japanese and Non-Japanese; including the ‘ethnic’ other, ‘dangerous criminals,’ and has started to become associated with a particular group of Japanese pop-culture fans known as fujoshi or ‘Rotten girls’ (Galbraith 2011).
Ikebukuro’s image in popular media is perhaps epitomised in the popular television drama *Ikebukuro West Gate Park* (JPN: *Ikebukuro Uesuto Geeto Paaku*). This series aired in the early 2000s and followed the misdoings of a group of youths that would hang out in the West Ikebukuro Area. The show covered issues such as gang violence, *yakuza*, prostitution, and was well known amongst many of my Japanese friends for its characters’ iconic rolling ‘r’ way of speaking often associated with Japanese *yakuza* style hyper-masculinity. In recent years this TV show has created a spin-off series of books, including a recent series titled *Dragon Tears*, which focuses on the lives of a few Chinese migrants in Ikebukuro.

Ikebukuro is divided by its rail lines that run along a North–South axis. The western side of Ikebukuro is associated with migrants, the Chinese being the largest group. It is a space predominantly full of restaurants and is also home to a large number of adult entertainment venues. The eastern side of Ikebukuro is home to a series of indoor shopping centres such as the massive “Sunshine city,” a multi-storey complex full of small fashion stores, themed fast-food and an aquarium on the upper-levels. The eastern side has also become the home of “rotten girls,” with the junction between Sunshine city and Otome road now known as “the maiden’s way” after the number of young teenage girls who visit the area to buy their favourite genres of comic book, namely “Boy’s Love” (BL) and *yaoi* books which feature homosexual love between young male characters (Galbraith 2011:219).
In this sense the identities and images associated with each side of Ikebukuro are distinct, with the north-western part of the station the site of the “Chinatown” proposal.

As one exits from the northern gate of Ikebukuro station there is only a small indication that this is a space frequented by Chinese migrants. The naked eye tells little of this space, save for the distinct sound of predominantly Northern Chinese accents coming from people climbing the stairs out of the station. There is
one ground level Chinese supermarket with the name ‘Yangguang Cheng’ a Chinese
translation of ‘Sunshine city,’ but other than this, only a careful reading of the space
from the pedestrian view elicits who its inhabitants are. Indeed, as part of a mini-
ethnographic project I conducted whilst learning Japanese in 2009, I interviewed a
group of Japanese twenty-somethings recruited through a local university. Despite
many of them frequenting ‘Sunshine city’ and shopping in Seibu, few of them knew
about Ikebukuro’s ‘Chinatown’ or where it might be. At the same time when I asked
what words they associated with Ikebukuro, many of them said ‘Chinese people’ as
well as ‘rotten girls.’

I lived with a group of young Chinese students and workers in accommodation
near this area and would walk this path almost every day during my fieldwork. It is
‘wrapped’ in banners that remind people to behave in a civil way, with many gentle
but didactic examples of street space governance. The banners shown below were large

Left—

Bag snatching will not
be tolerated by society.

Everyone’s eyes are
upon you! (JPN: Minna
do me, lit. everyone’s
eyes)
five metre long signs hung along the fences lining the train tracks on the North-western side of the station. They were posted by the Metropolitan Police station in Ikebukuro under the campaign slogan (in smaller text at the top of each banner) “If we combine everyone’s strength, we can cultivate safety and peace” (JPN: minna no chikara wo awasete, anzenanshin matzukuri).

Interpersonal street level crimes such as ‘bag-snatching’ (JPN: Hitakkuru), theft and gang-related crime are of concern in Ikebukuro, and form a large part of its image within the imaginaries of Tokyo residents; as can be seen in the TV series Ikebukuro West Park and its predominantly crime related content. When I resolved to live in Ikebukuro and attempt to meet resident Chinese migrants I could meet there, I received many warnings about the dangers of the area from concerned Japanese friends and professors. According to Tokyo’s Metropolitan Police Department Ikebukuro does have higher levels of bag-snatching and theft than many of the satellite areas of Tokyo (TMPD 2011). What fascinated me about these banners

Left-

House burglary- the vigilant person’s eyes are upon you- the community’s eyes are upon you.
however, was not their reference to the actuality of these crimes, but rather the

techniques used to make them an issue of public concern.

Tokyo’s street spaces are not only ‘wrapped’ in visual mediums that
encourage consumption, or create a vivid spectacle, but are also wrapped in a wide
array of notices designed to encourage the disciplining of self. Besides notices such as
those above they also include a wide variety of signs such as where one can smoke (it
is custom not to smoke outside in congested areas unless in a designated zone), and
appropriate behaviour on trains. What is marked about these notices are their
reference to specific crimes and anti-social behaviour in conjunction with the
responsibility of residents to keep an ‘eye’ on each other.

The slogans in above signs actually include short terms that could be literally
translated as “everyone’s eyes”, “the eyes of the vigilant” and the “eyes of the
community.” These metaphors are vaguer than they appear in their English translated
form, as the terms are both a warning to potential perpetrators that others are
watching, and a reminder that the public must keep vigilant. Nonetheless, their focus
on the occular parallels the previously mentioned reduction of the street level to the
visual. However, in this instance, rather than the street being merely a spectacle to
behold, it also serves as a kind of multi-nodal panopticon where one’s visual practice
is seen as ensuring the ongoing integrity and peace of the community. Whether this
‘multi-nodal panopticon’ results in Japan’s ‘shame culture’ famously theorised by
Ruth Benedict (1946), or creates Foucault’s ‘docile bodies’ is hard to verify (1977). However, it does infer that the ‘wrapping’ of the street level spaces of Tokyo is intended to not only encourage the visual consumption of space but is also used as a representational space to remind people to ‘keep an eye out’ for deviant ‘Others.’

During the Chinatown proposal incident outlined in chapter 1, one of the major justifications cited by extremist groups’ anti-Chinese sentiment was a desire to prevent crime. These groups explicitly used the discursive association between Chinese people and crime to legitimize their anti-Chinatown sentiments.

“In the end, these troublesome people have to be made to leave (JPN: deteitte moratta). Otherwise, the Chinese mafia will come...it can’t be endured! (JPN: tamarimasen yo). The Chinese mafia can’t be allowed to join forces with Japanese gangs. If that alliance is allowed to occur then there is a possibility of Ikebukuro becoming a “dark street of the underworld” (JPN: ankokugai)...

Iya, (sound of detestation) Its true!” (Saiki, quoted in Yamashita 2010:150, translation my own)

“As soon as we say ‘Tokyo Chinatown’ more Chinese people will surely come, and with them Chinese mafia will enter too, will they not? If Ikebukuro becomes a nest of those types (JPN: renchuu no sookutsu) what will we do?” (President of the Shoutenkai quoted in Yamashita 2010:151, translation my own)

This discourse affects the everyday lives of Chinese migrants in Ikebukuro and their spatial practices. The sense of being observed and suspected of criminality whilst in street level spaces was deeply felt by my Chinese friends and interlocutors. Whenever we travelled together along the streets of Ikebukuro, there was always a
sense of haste. It was not a space to dawdle or enjoy, and it was often described to me as a space that made one feel annoyed (CHN: 干). This discomfort was due to the imposition of certain norms, such as keeping quiet or smoking in a designated place, but also on occasion due to police harassment. As one man said:

“There are too many Japanese people out there (CHN: zai waimian riben ren tai duo le). If I just speak Chinese then someone might complain or look at me strangely, so I just don’t open my mouth unless necessary. I also don’t smoke outside, I’m tired of having some old person (CHN: Laotou) come up to me and tell me off. I know you can only smoke in some places, but it’s just weird!” (Male, 25, from Harbin)

Comments such as these were common in the daily joking and discourse about Japan which occurred amongst my interlocutors and seemed to be a particular point of annoyance for young men. In contrast, one young woman I met in my friend’s hair salon told me about her ability as a ‘yellow person’ (CHN: huangren) to fit in Japan. As long as she didn’t open her mouth and wore the latest Japanese fashion, no one bothered her. She explained this as the reason why Japan was a better place to be for Chinese migrants, as it was impossible to achieve similar ‘passing’ in Australia or America.

On one occasion as I walked along the same path I always took through Ikebukuro, I witnessed a particularly vivid example of street harassment by two young police officers’ attitudes towards a single Chinese migrant in his twenties riding his bicycle to the station. As he rode, they called for him to stop his bike and present his
‘Alien registration card’ (JPN: Gaikokujin tourokusho) so they could check that he had a valid visa. This practice was not uncommon and I had experienced similar inspections during my time in Japan. However, my experience had always been that of a polite and friendly request made by a police officer. In this instance however, the young man’s bike was stopped forcefully before he even managed to stop it himself, and rather than using polite sentences, the policemen aggressively repeated “registration card, registration card!” (JPN: Gaikokujin tourokusho). One officer came around to the back of his bicycle and started opening the young man’s backpack to search through it whilst the man was busily trying to maintain his bicycle’s upright position while taking out his wallet to show the other officer his card. When his card had been checked they then gruffly handed it back to him leaving his backpack open. However, the young man did not stop to close his bag, but quickly rode away when given permission to go. Whilst this may not be a case of severe brutality or even particularly harsh harassment, what surprised me was the marked difference in the treatment of myself and this young man. This incident piqued my interest and I asked many of my other interlocutors whether they had experienced similar incidents, with one conversation amongst a group of five men resulting in them comparing how many times it occurred to them (their average was 4 times a year). One of these men later stated in an interview:

“The most annoying thing (CHN: zu i fan de shi) is how they stop you then touch you. I don’t know them but they open your bags and search your pockets without asking properly or even checking
to see if you understand Japanese they just start ordering you around (he starts to make mock gestures of them checking a person’s bags and pockets)” (Young man from Dalian)

This sort of experience shaped many of my interlocutor’s everyday lives and sense of place in Tokyo. The constant concern of being caught without one’s registration card wore away at them more than the worry that they might be considered illegitimate. They were constantly reminded that when walking the streets they must discipline themselves in their behaviour and carry the right documentation. My reaction to these tales of unease was very similar to Michael Jackson’s surprise at his migrant friends Sewa’s constant level of unease in London.

What struck me was that although Sewa had a valid visa, he experienced himself as someone whose validity was constantly in question, constantly under suspicion. He could never take his residency for granted. He seemed to live in imminent danger of being found out, of making some inadvertent yet irreversible mistake, of being picked up by the police and deported. There was something dreadfully nonnegotiable about his situation…” (Jackson 2007:115)

Most of the Chinese migrants I knew had valid visas, and were studying and working in Japan legitimately. However, they still found their circumstances constantly in question. This questioning is arguably a constant for any person moving between places.
Anyone who has moved from a familiar lifeworld and gone to live in a place where he or she is a complete stranger, linguistically inept, economically insecure, and socially stigmatized will immediately identify with Sewa’s intense self-consciousness—the suspicion that people were staring at him, that he was under surveillance, that he was somehow in the wrong, without rights or any legitimate identity—though not everyone would share his preoccupation with the power of the police to send him back to his country of origin with no possibility of return, so ending once and for all his dream of improving his lot in life. It was not that Sewa was seeking validation; rather, he was doing everything in his power to avoid the people, situations, and incidents that made him feel as though he was a worthless nobody (Jackson 2007: 115).

The effect of the ‘annoying’ aspects of Tokyo’s street life was a fragmenting of the social lives of the Chinese migrants with whom I conducted my research. Subject to the spatial dynamics created by regimes of capital and surveillance, they were forced to push their everyday social practice into small spaces within the vertically articulated buildings of Tokyo’s urban landscape.
“Receptacle living”

Living in a dormitory (JPN: ryou, CHN: liao) with 9 other Chinese migrants in Ikebukuro affords a very particular experience of the city; the name for this kind of accommodation itself being an interesting example of cultural shifts that occur amongst Chinese networks in Japan. The term used for ‘dormitory’ amongst Chinese migrants in Japan, ‘liao,’ is modern standardized Chinese, but is not commonly used in Mainland China. It denotes a ‘small residence,’ but is only used in conjunction with slightly more esoteric and ascetic forms of accommodation such as a ‘sengliao,’ a form of small hut for monks. In Japanese the same character, pronounced ‘ryou,’ is commonly used for small dormitories. Hence, what might usually be called a ‘sushe’ (dormitory) in Mainland China is called by its Japanese name although, with Chinese pronunciation by Chinese migrants in Tokyo.

I found my accommodation through a local Chinese language newspaper where advertising for liao is common. These newspapers are free and are usually financially supported by local businesses’ advertising. On average there are at least two pages devoted to accommodation in the 4 major Chinese language-newspapers I collected regularly in Ikebukuro, the majority being advertising for liao. Dormitories are extremely popular with new arrivals in Japan due to their low cost. Advertisements usually advertise shared rooms of up to 4 people costing between 25000 to 35000 Japanese Yen a month (between 3-400 USD); although my dorm was a single rooms only dormitory (CHN: danrenjian) with shared facilities at 55 000 a month. Such dorms
are usually closer to major rail junctions, allowing young Chinese to work and play without worrying about transport. In accordance with Waley’s account of mixed zoning and the squeezing of accommodation into the interstitial spaces of Tokyo’s central stations, liao are commonly found in buildings with a variety of purposes. They are a good example of what Waley calls “the ‘receptacle nature’ of Tokyo with ‘pencil buildings, eight-to-ten story, wobbly, windy structures that afford room only for hole-in-the-wall offices and apartments’” (Waley quoted in Richie 1999:12).

The liao I lived in was on the 6th floor of a small multi-purpose building. It was one floor immediately above a small business and shared a large part of its structure with a vertical car park that had a central car-sized elevator to take customers’ vehicles into small box-like spaces for storage. The building wobbled when it was windy due to a large bill-board on its side, and shuddered whenever a car was moved into its parking allotment. The dormitory rooms were narrow, each a slight modification on the other. I was easily able to touch both sides of the wall at the same time easily, and the room was only slightly longer than the length of my body. It was mainly taken
up by a bunk bed that had the bottom bunk removed to allow for a small study space and the roof prevented me from sitting up in bed. Mine was the largest room in the liao although others had low lying beds that gave their rooms a more spacious feel. Each of the rooms was separated by a thin wall made of light construction materials akin to cardboard but slightly stronger. Each partition also rarely extended all the way to the wall, allowing one to have conversations with your neighbours easily, although the gaps were also a source of anxiety for the two young girls in the dorm, who opted to cover the gaps with tape and posters.

The liao was owned by a Japanese man, whom we never met, but was managed by a friendly man from Dalian in North-East China, who had lived in Japan for over 7 years. He would come to clean and collect additional money for bills such as electricity and internet service, often chatting with us for a while before going on to other dorms he was paid to manage. However, many of the other tenants called him a ‘cheat’ (CHN: pianzi) and said that all of his friendliness was ‘fake’ (CHN: jia). The two young girls had been living
there the longest and had moved in just after the dorm had been cleared and
renovated. They were originally told it was going to be a women’s only dorm, and so
felt betrayed when the dorm became predominantly male. When I asked the manager
about this he said that there had been a liao boom, and that it was harder to get
people to pay for single rooms (CHN: danren jian), so he would take whoever applied
stating “most people don’t live like this for too long anyway.”

My own experiences of the liao demonstrate the structurally and legally
tenuous position in which many Chinese migrants live. All of the recently- arrived
migrants whom I interviewed (usually having arrived within a 6 month period of the
interview) were living in such arrangements, although those who had been in Tokyo for
longer than 2 years tended to eventually find small ‘apartments’ (JPN: apaato) in
smaller, older buildings, or ‘mansions’ (JPN: manshon), which were studio-style single
room apartments in large multi-storey ‘mansion’ buildings. They would usually share
this style of accommodation with classmates, a partner or friends. Even the process of
finding these spaces was tenuous however, as it was difficult to secure a lease as a
‘foreigner,’ particularly Chinese, and most of the set up costs were prohibitively
expensive, with ‘key money’ (JPN: reikin) and agents’ fees. Moreover, it was
uncommon for many people to share the small accommodation found in apaato and
manshon, so often migrants intending to share a room together would simply put the
lease under one name and not disclose how many people were intending to occupy it.
Whether an apaato, manshon or liao, the accommodation utilised by Chinese students in Tokyo demonstrates Waley’s description of ‘receptacle living’ well. This kind of living also provided a particular sensory experience of the city. Hidden away in small spaces, one’s engagement with the outside world was often through a small window overlooking some part of Tokyo, which gave a greater sense of spaciousness to what were often incredibly small rooms. In the liao I would often lie in bed trying to read whilst my neighbours played a game on Chinese social networking sites like QQ, or chatted with friends back in China online; series of beeps and message alerts punctuating their conversations. In the kitchen, cooking smells and sounds could always be heard, as some of the liao’s residents often returned late after shift-work and were desperate to eat before going to bed. The liao was also relatively anti-social, most residents keeping to themselves. Irregular work shifts and class schedules further limited contact. However, my desire to get to know them all, bringing sunflower seeds, fruit, cigarettes and beer to the kitchen on many occasions to entice them out of their rooms and ask them questions, made our residence more social than most.

The apaato and manshon that I visited were similarly un-social if more spacious. Most of the people sharing these small apartments lived and worked on different schedules, and consequently didn’t see each other often. One of my friends, Xiaoyang, would often bring me back to his apartment to watch Chinese television series online and keep him company while his girlfriend worked at night. These spaces, although less sensually porous than the small ramshackle rooms of the liao, were nonetheless subject
to the sounds and smells of their neighbours. One young woman, for example, complained that all she ever heard was her neighbours having sex, which she used as evidence for “all Japanese being ‘perverts’ (CHN: biantai).”

These spaces contrast with Tokyo’s streets, where visual splendour dominates. In the small residential spaces which Chinese people find for themselves in Tokyo, other senses are heightened due to the lack of interaction with one’s neighbours. You knew your neighbours more so through the things they did which permeated the thin walls than direct interaction. At times there were conversations between neighbours, but more often than not residents were simply aware of each other’s constant presence, whether from the beeps of their social networking sites or the waft of smoke from a cigarette. This presence to one another afforded some forms of sociality, such as inquiring about the brand of a particular cigarette, but more often than not left one with a sense of being vulnerable to certain aspects of living close to others, with few of the benefits. The receptacle living of the liao was distinctly un-convivial and often resulted in disagreements and fights.

‘Apartments’ and ‘Mansions’ on the other hand were spaces where this vulnerability, atomization and lack of visible interaction with neighbours touches Chinese migrant’s interaction with Japanese residents. Just as my interlocutor above complained about Japanese ‘perverts’, Japanese perceptions of Chinese residents were fuelled by similar concerns about being sensually invaded by Chinese neighbours.
This ranged from gentle reminders about not leaving rubbish out for collection on the wrong day and making sure to sort it properly, to aggressive banging on one of my interlocutors’ walls during the Chinese New Year.

Chinese migrants’ lives are affected by a far-reaching regime of spatial and sensory dynamics, which results in their relative invisibility within broader Japanese public space. They are subject to the limitations of space in Tokyo, which are exacerbated by their lack of wealth. Their sensory experience of these spatial regimes is similarly ‘annoying’ as the visual splendour of Tokyo’s streets conflicts with Chinese subjects’ position as objects of surveillance. The high visibility of the street thus contrasts with the ‘invisibility’ of residential living in Tokyo. Chinese migrants become known as the ‘invisible neighbours’ (JPN: miezaru rinjin), as author Yoshida Tadanori recently called them, although he did not use this term in a derogatory sense (2010). They are ‘faceless,’ save for the nuisances they cause their neighbours due to differing social practices and expectations that sensually permeate space in different ways.
Chapter Five- Plateaus and hairdressers

Spaces of social interaction amongst Chinese migrants in Ikebukuro are nodes within broader networks of mobile everyday practice. Hidden from street level due to the spatial dynamics of Tokyo's streets, these spaces are at times islands of conviviality and commerce, or merely isolated places to sleep such as the dormitories I described in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I will describe another site hidden from the street that features as a vibrant space of interaction for Chinese migrants. In contrast to the spaces I have introduced thus far, this space is a site where forms of being-in-common are explored. It is both a business and a site of play that connects a wide range of otherwise disconnected migrants to each other within one small space. This connection is achieved through practices of consumption, grooming and fun, which create a sense of conviviality in the forms of identity Chinese migrants perform.

The site I wish to describe in this chapter is the small hair salon which eventually gave me access to a wide range of networks in Ikebukuro. I first came across MY Hair Salon (CHN: Mingyang Meilà) while scouring through a local Chinese newspaper, the “Sunshine City Daily” (CHN: yangguangcheng ribao). There are several newspapers like this, such as the Huayi Ribao, Zhiyin Ribao, Ying Cai Magazine, Epoch Times (a falun gong publication), and more. The hair salon had placed an advertisement for a spring festival special they were offering in which the
three hairdressers stood, fist in palm, making a traditional greeting gesture. Their hair was asymmetrically cut and tinted in a fashion common among young fashion-conscious Chinese men at the time. The surrounding motifs on the advertisement were swirls of red and yellow colours with a trimming of what seemed to be a pattern similar to the kind used on carved wooden furniture in China.

I went on a Saturday afternoon using the excuse of needing my haircut and hoping that I may make some interesting acquaintances while there. After some difficulty finding the building the store was located in, I finally came across a converted block of apartments with a small letterbox with the characters for the MY Hair Salon written on the front. I headed up the stairs and started to hear the low pulsing of a Chinese pop song I did not recognise. As I walked onto the floor MY was located on, I noticed a cupboard-sized computer repair shop, a hairdresser called JB on my left, a printing and computer sales shop on my right, and second on my right was the salon I had been looking for. I entered, and said in Chinese that I would like to have my hair cut; the faces which had initially registered concern about potential communication problems cleared into smiles, and the usual small chat about how I could speak Chinese broke out. I explained to them that I had originally studied the Chinese language, and now wanted to research Chinese people living in Tokyo. Aming, the head hairdresser said, “Well you’ve come to the right place! Ikebukuro has a lot of Chinese people.”
I relied on networks of human and non-human agents to find this one small island of sociality. I had used newspaper advertising, smart phone navigation systems, letterbox signage and the kindness of strangers to finally come upon this simple space where one could receive a haircut in the Chinese language. Later in my fieldwork at the hairdresser shop, I discovered my own experience reflected those of other customers too. Customers always found the shop through networks of advertising and other people’s guidance. Indeed it was a particularly difficult place to find, and later on I would often make myself useful by meeting customers at the train station and guiding them to the store. The building was full of small Chinese businesses. However this was almost totally indistinguishable from the building’s exterior. Indeed, much like their discursive namesake as the ‘invisible’ foreigners, there was a distinctly invisible quality to the majority of Chinese business spaces I came across in my research (with the exception of restaurants).

Due to the spatial dynamics of Tokyo in general, its ‘visual un/wrapping’ and the unconvivial, at times foreboding, nature of its streets, Chinese migrants tended to have relatively hidden business spaces that also served as vibrant spaces of interaction. As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari write of Gregory Bateson’s idea of ‘plateaus,’ these spaces each served as a “continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end.” (1987:22). In this sense, the tension between this one shop’s connections to the broader milieu of Chinese migrants in Ikebukuro and its own unique characteristics
provides a ‘rhizomatic’ sense of the ways Chinese migrant live and interact in the various spaces and networks of Ikebukuro.

Deleuze and Guattari use the term ‘rhizome’ to propose a way of thinking that takes multiplicity and interconnectedness as its basis (Delleuze and Guattari 1987). A rhizome is a form of plant that can expand its root system and propagate itself via a network of tubers wherein each point is equally connected to another. Within a rhizome there is no single centre or ‘head,’ and if one of these points is separated and re-planted it will also continue to expand. Thus, as a metaphor it points to the relative constitution of things such as the individual and collective, and the generally intensely interconnected nature of reality. Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic thinking is a form of monism that depends on diversity and interconnectedness. Their metaphor emphasises assemblages, networks and the multitude of forms that constitute such a monism. It also attempts to avoid hierarchical models and thus takes on a utopian vision, making it harder to use in situations where power relations are crucial to one’s analysis.

The term rhizome also appears in Bateson’s early work, begging the question of whether Deleuze and Guatarri borrowed this term from the anthropologist. Bateson states that:

The natives see their community, not as a closed system, but as an infinitely proliferating and ramifying stock. A clan will grow big and it
will subdivide; a village will grow big and it will send out colonies. The idea that a community is closed is probably incompatible with this idea of it as something which continually divides and sends out offspring "like the rhizome of a lotus" (Bateson 1958:249)

Bateson situates the term 'rhizome' within a particular ethnographic context (the Iatmul in Papua New Guinea) and does not foreclose other forms of bounded, hierarchical relations found elsewhere. Indeed he compares the Iatmul to several bounded groups in Australia. Rather than trying to create an ontological monism, as with Deleuze and Guattari do, Bateson posits a way of thinking through human social life as systems. These systems can be open or closed; his later work emphasized an ecological approach to systems thinking.

Spaces such as MY hair salon are 'rhizomatic' in that they are part of a deeply interconnected web of phenomena related to Chinese migrants’ social lives and life in Tokyo in general. They are also points of accumulation in these rhizomatic networks that operate as a 'plane' onto themselves with distinct properties. In many ways, the spatial dynamics of Tokyo situated this place as what Foucault termed a "heterotopia of deviation," a space where "individuals are placed whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the mean or required norm" (Foucault 1986:22). As Chinese ‘Others’ their practices, language and very presence as potentially deviant migrants pushes them into hidden spaces. However, I would prefer to emphasize the agency of Chinese migrants
in creating these plateaus rather than being 'placed' into them. One insight I will take from Foucault's notion of heterotopia is his assertion that "The heterotopia has the power to juxtapose in a single real place several spaces, several emplacements that are in themselves incompatible" (1986:22). This space was one where the space of the hidden ethnic other, and the strategic empowered ethnic other met. Moreover, it was a space where the 'flat' ontology of non-human agents met with that of hierarchies of distinction and gender.

It was hard to distinguish where this obviously vibrant space of Chinese migrant social life ended and where it began, because it extended into a vast array of other plateaus of Chinese sociality. I found this space through networks that consequently connected me to more spaces, networks and plateaus of intense sociality later in my fieldwork. These spaces were equally part of everyday life in Tokyo, being connected through administrative chains of goods, services and people. Yet at the same time they were distinct in the way 'Chinese-ness' shaped much of what was practiced and enjoyed. They were also distinct in the characters that frequented and enlivened these sites of interaction, with their amusing performances and creative language.

This tiny plateau of human interaction had a distinct sense of lively 'Chinese-ness.' When I first entered, I was struck by the pumping music, the smell of Chinese 'Zhongnanhai' brand cigarettes and the noises of a Chinese drama series playing on the small television they had in the store. The smells of hairspray, dye and various
treatments also filled the air. The repetitive snipping of scissors, the sound of running water as people had their hair washed, and the powerful sound of hairdryers cut through conversations. At every customer’s chair there was also a tiny computer that slid out from a tray under the mirror and bench in front of them, a ‘Dynabook’ brand laptop. Customers could use these small computers to go online to interact with the vast Chinese language Internet world. An application called PPTV allowed customers to view recent films and television shows whilst they had their hair done, or they could go online to use one of the various social media sites and applications. QQ, a Chinese one-to-one networking site, was by far the most popular as it allowed customers to chat with their families in China or play small games. QQ is in many ways similar to Skype, with some of the functions of Facebook or the older ICQ in that it is a medium to communicate with friends and family one already knows. Music was often played through QQ’s online radio service, which blasted predominantly Mandarin and Cantonese pop songs, but also featured Lady Gaga. If these devices did not entertain or entice customers, they would text friends or play games on their smart phones.

On the walls, mirrors reflected every which way so that one was always aware of one’s appearance, and above the window that opened onto the balcony was a small embroidered tree with money sewn into its branches. When I asked why it was there, one of the hairdressers yelled “To attract fortune!” Stacks of magazines in Japanese and Chinese were piled at the end of the waiting bench, and free Chinese language newspapers seemed to miraculously circulate between the various shops on this one
There were so many non-human agents working in this one space, it seemed a whole book could have been written about them alone.

A few hours in MingYang (MY) Hairdressers

I wandered around Ikebukuro before entering MY Hair Salon. There were no customers in MY Hair Salon at that time. The three hairdressers Adong, Aming, and Tianye, and a shop assistant, were sitting down, smoking, and looking up into the far right corner. As I entered, I noticed they had just put in a small television and were watching a Chinese period drama called “Fengshenban.” They beckoned me to sit down and I asked about what the show was, and how they got it. “A friend gave me the DVD,” Adong said. “There used to be a place to buy Chinese books and DVDs around here but it was closed recently, I don’t really know why though. Maybe some legal matter.”

We sat and watched the show. The assistant asked me if I understood everything in “Fengshenban.” I said that because it’s a period drama the way they talk is a little too classical for me at times but as long as there are Chinese subtitles as well I’m fine. (Most shows have Chinese subtitles because spoken and written Chinese differ dramatically depending on the region). Adong then explained to me that “Fengshenban” is a series based on Chinese legends set in the Shang Dynasty (1766-1122 BC), some of it being similar to the Ming dynasty novel about a supernatural Monkey’s path to redemption called “Pilgrimage to the West” (CHN: Xiyouji).

3 young girls came into the shop and asked to have their hair cut. After much negotiation about styles, and the possibility of having their hair dyed, only one decided to do it. They had language class later that day and the things that two of them wanted to do would take too long. Aming said to them in a playful tone “From the sounds of it, you’re all from Fujian,” and they started discussing regional differences while one of the other hairdressers yelled the few words in
Fujianese he knew. The two hairdressers, Aming and Tianye, entertained the room with lively discussion whilst Adong directed one of the girls to have her hair washed.

After washing her hair, Adong showed the young girl to her seat and asked what she’d like done. She pulled out her mobile phone and showed him a photo of what she wants, a short bob in what she called a “Korean style.” I asked her what a “Korean style” looks like and she said “Shorter, higher and a little more of a ‘rock n roll’ feeling.” She then remarked on how strange it is to find a “foreigner” (CHN: “Laowai” lit. “Old outside”, also meaning someone who doesn’t know what’s going on) who speaks Chinese in Tokyo. The assistant said, “This is Tokyo, you get all kinds of people here. It’s not that strange.” The girl’s friend objected, “You shouldn’t call him ‘foreigner’. We’re all ‘foreigners’ here in Tokyo. It’d be okay if it was China.”

At this point two girls were spotted waiting outside the front of the shop, and the assistant, noticing them speaking in Fujianese, beckoned them in saying “Come in, come in. Everyone’s from your home village in here (CHN: Dou shi ni de laoxiang a).” The girls came in, talking loudly in Fujianese, and started teasing Adong: they seemed to know each other well. Adong followed the conversation but could only answer in Mandarin; the girls switched to Mandarin and one of them sat down in a remaining hairdressers’ chair, whirled around in it for a second before saying to Aming “Hey, fuck your mother (CHN: caonimade), you said you’d take us out to eat KFC or MacDonald’s” Aming replied, “I’m not taking you to eat that junk food, and who says I’d treat you.” He quickly changed the topic, “Hey, meet my friend Jamie, try out his Chinese, it’s definitely better than yours.” He laughed and swaggered over to help the whirling girl’s friend select a new colour to dye her hair. The whirling girl turned to me and said, “Fuck your mother, you can understand everything I say?” I replied “Yeah, including the ‘fuck your mother’ bit; I used to live in Beijing,” and everyone laughed a little. Aming said to me, in front of everyone else, “Don’t mind her, every sentence she’s ever said has a ‘fuck’ in it,” to which she jokingly responded “I Fuck (wocao).” Aming turned serious, and said in a hushed voice “Hey, try to keep it down though.
There are businesses that make their living on the phone on this floor. They don’t want your dirty mouth echoing in the background,” which he softened with a cheeky smile.

When the young Fujianese girl’s haircut was finished, Adong said to her “You’re so ‘cute’ (JPN: Kawaii) now,” using the Japanese term for ‘cute’ rather than the Chinese. “Make sure you take this hair out on a fun date. Maybe ‘Disneyland’ (JPN: Dizuneerando).” She replied “Okay,” in English. In the a group of boys arrived to get their haircut and everyone got very busy all of a sudden. I tried to make myself helpful by emptying out ashtrays and bringing the waiting customers cups of water. Nobody said much, and we all sat to watch Fengshenbang while the hairdressers had the young men take turns having their hair washed before their cuts.

Hairdressers and barbershops are important sites of everyday practice. Writing about African–American salons, Alexander observes:

The barbershop and hair salons are integral and specific cultural sites within the Black community. Although the word salon refers to a site of hair care and comfort, it can also be defined as a constructed community for social and intellectual talk on agreed issues. Within the barbershop of my childhood, young boys observed and listened to their elders engage in the ritualized act of cutting/fixing hair and community building. Adults used this space as a cultural thrift store of services and information. Barbershops in the Black community are discursive spaces. (Alexander 2003: 105–106)
Alexander’s use of the term ‘discursive’ reflects Foucault’s concept of practices that “form the objects of which they speak” through a nexus of “need, desire, and expression” (1977:107). He focuses specifically on how African-American conceptions of taste, appearance and conviviality are formed through the banter and grooming within this site. In this sense, “blackness” is formed and re-formed within the space of the barbershop. In using Alexander’s approach, it should be noted that the context of Chinese migrants in Japan differs to that of African-Americans. Unlike the long established African-American communities, there is yet to be a solid spatial or symbolic construction of a Chinese community in Ikebukuro. Indeed, many scholars have noted the strength of the spatial and symbolic dynamics of African-American communities in the United States as both a source of resilience and discrimination (Wacquant 2004). In contrast it is the ‘invisible’ and ‘ethereal’ character of Chinese symbolic and spatial practices in Japan that defines their minority status. Nonetheless, whether hidden or a cornerstone of a ‘black community,’ Alexander’s description of these shops as significant discursive spaces is useful in exploring this particular plateau of Chinese sociality.

**Renao and Cultural performances within MY hairdresser**

As in Alexander’s analysis, the MY Hair Salon can be seen as an intense site where Chinese-ness, and more specifically a sense of being a Chinese migrant in Japan, is produced. The above ethnographic vignette is an example of the multitude of cultural performances that are strung together to create a complex nexus of
conviviality in this one small shop. These performances produce MY as a cultural site, “as a space that is inscribed by social practice” (Alexander 2003:118). However these multiple inscriptions go beyond simply creating a sense of Chinese-ness, and accumulate to produce a particular affect that is valued in its Chinese-ness. Hence, forms of banter that are light, generally un-monitored and full of vulgarities and playful insults were valued and enjoyed.

Within Alexander’s analysis of the barber shop, he refers to the importance of ‘talkin’ trash’ as discussed by Smitherman, as a means of demonstrating an ‘encultured’ way of interacting. The ways in which the old men in his ethnographic context insulted each other and teased Alexander defined the important information, the gossip and the areas which were appropriate topics for joking. In a similar way, the ethnographic vignette taken from my field above is a small example of the wide array of ‘talkin’ trash’ thrown around the shop, with playful use of ‘dirty’ terms and discussions about who owes whom what.

All of these playful practices culminate in a distinct sense of cultural liveliness, or what is more usually called renao in standard Chinese. As Feuchtwang describes renao is an important part of contemporary Chinese festivals and is used as a major signifier to assess such occasions (Feuchtwang 2003).

The manifestation of prosperity and good reputation for the territorial place defined by a festival is, in Chinese, renao, a word that translates
literally as heat and noise, but implies a great deal more: carnivalian liveliness, sociable noise, the meat and the alcohol at the offering tables and then the feast tables of every household, the colourful inventiveness of decorations and festival procession contingents, including those of the musical and martial arts bands, and the splendour and drama of the theatrical performances in the afternoon and evening. (2003: 102)

Renao is highly valued in many areas of daily life. Adam Chau has referred to renao as a ‘sociothermic affect,’ a diffuse psychosomatic sense of satisfaction and fulfilment resulting from having partaken in, and co-producing, ‘red-hot sociality’ (Chau 2008). It features in any lively occasion and is also valued highly as a particularly ‘Chinese’ form of fun sociality. The first character re means heat/ hot, feverish, passionate and fervent (Chau 2006:149).

Re had a particular importance during the Maoist era in being demonstrably enthusiastic (CHN: relie). In the reform era, re is used to describe any type of ‘craze’ that attracts a lot of followers such as “investing in the stock market (CHN: gupiaore), going to the disco (CHN:.disikere), learning English (CHN: xueyingyure)” and the aforementioned “leaving country fever” (CHN: chuguore) (Chau 2006:150; Palmer 2009). Re is also particularly important in discussions of sentiment in Northern China, being a sign of an open, welcoming attitude to others. Indeed, the notion of
‘warmth/heat’ (CHN: re), is a common signifier used to distinguish ‘Chinese’ practice from others such as the Japanese who are often referred to as ‘cold’ (CHN: leng).

Nao, the second term in the compound, connotes excitement (Chau 2006: 150). It is used in describing markets, parties and any space of mischievousness. For example, post-wedding festivities (CHN: naodongfang) often involve friends and relatives holding a party in honour of the new couple. The party often involves taunting the bride and groom and playing a series of mischievous games. However, nao can also have negative connotations such as naoshi, to cause a disturbance. In many ways, we can see re as an indicator of the number of people and their enthusiasm about a certain thing, whilst nao denotes the amount of activity held in that space.

In a formal interview with the owner of the shop later in my fieldwork, he used the idea of renao and kaixin (CHN: happiness, literally ‘open heart’) to distinguish the cultural difference between Chinese and Japanese service industries.

“...In truth our shop is too small, we are all stuffed together in there, but Chinese people like renao environments and it’s cheap. Of course, everyone has their own distance (CHN: juli) that makes them more comfortable and in many ways the Japanese way of giving people space is more elegant (CHN: qingqi) and respectful (CHN: zunzhong)...Everyone is like that, doesn’t matter if you’re Chinese or foreign (CHN: waiguoren), however there are limits to this and things can feel too formal...
The most important thing in service is to affect the customer’s psyche (CHN: xinli). We understand that a lot of people feel lonely (CHN: gudan). You know, they come in thinking “How did I end up overseas (CHN: guowai)…” (He feigns a wistful longing voice). Or, they get home and think “Oh, it’s just me here.” They can often feel like “There’s no one who stands with me (CHN: meiyou ren gen wo zhan zai yiqi).” They perhaps have friends, but friends also have their own lives, they can’t be with you every day. Only if you live in a dormitory or have a lot of colleagues, or classmates that you slowly build some feeling for, will you not feel so alone, but a lot of people don’t have such things. They just work by themselves, make money and go home by themselves. The mental pressure of this migrant lifestyle is too high, and they feel tired. But they can come to our store and be contented that they’ll get a good haircut and have some fun while they’re here. They can entrust us with their care (CHN: jituo) and forget that they’re overseas...

However, even if you cut their hair well, they might not feel psychologically relieved (CHN: xinli bu shufu), so it’s the whole atmosphere in our shop. The music… the banter… its renao. When a customer comes in we try to make it casual and fun. It might not be as good “service” (CHN: fuwu) by Japanese standards. But as long as people are happy (CHN: kaixin) it’s enough.”

The shop is purposefully constructed as a space that provides a specific renao affect for its staff and customers. This renao relies on a series of cultural performances by the hairdressers, which are also encouraged by customers, making it a site where Chinese migrants experience a form of conviviality not afforded in the rest of their busy lives. This conviviality is achieved through performances that are legible for those participating, which gives them a sense of inclusion. Indeed, as Alexander notes in his use of Cheseboro’s definition of cultural performance in his analysis of barbershops,
the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are created through such performances. He
defines a cultural performance as:

・・・ a series of exhibitions and public presentations which demonstrate
an affiliation with one’s own culture. These cultural performances
function as “evidence” of one’s identification with the norms, values,
and behavioral patterns which reflect the preferred intellectual
activities, thoughts, speech, beliefs, and social forms as well as the
racial, religious, and social attitudes and beliefs of one’s culture.


In a similar vein, the performances detailed above, including my own, are an
example of how the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are negotiated in this one
space to demonstrate certain identifications found within Chinese migrant life. When I
initially entered the shop, all was quiet and the demand for enacted performances
(whether linguistic or behavioural) was relatively minimal, save for my own capacity to
smoke Chinese cigarettes and understand the television show that everyone was
watching. Nonetheless, even at that moment the blaring sounds of a Chinese television
series echoing down the corridors and the highly considered fashion choices of the MY
Hair Salon’s staff demonstrated both ethnic and fashion-conscious desires. When the
three young girls entered the store however, the cultural performances within this
space became much more explicit.
Language games, “Chinese-ness” and Code-switching

Language and its associated performances contribute to this ‘plateau’ and its sense of renao. Language sits between the human and non-human. It has an agency of its own, but within a given circumstance this agency is not separate from the intentions of its users. Nonetheless, the logics of having a shared language often brings people together, even if it’s simply the deciding factor in where to get one’s hair cut. The play between the music, cigarettes and various other objects, many of which are mediators of language, and the linguistic performances of people within MY hair salon combine to create a sense of Chinese-ness that is valued in unique ways.

One common performance in the shop was an accent guessing game which migrants used to identify the places one another came from. Within MY Hair Salon this was never merely a matter of factual exchange, but always involved a theatrical display of knowledge and, on occasion, mimicry. It was a simultaneous performance of cosmopolitanism and Chinese-ness, as knowledge about the various accents and regions of China demonstrated a sense of virtuosity and ‘cultural intimacy’ (Herzfeld 1997). Amongst the migrants in Ikebukuro, one’s sense of belonging was often specifically associated with one’s ‘ancestral village’ (CHN: laoxiang) identity, and was enthusiastically performed within various social contexts. This often involved a great variety of linguistic shifting such as can be seen in the ethnographic vignette above, where the young girls talk to one another in Fujianese, a language markedly different to standardized Chinese and unintelligible to all but one of the hairdressers.
I speak with a slight northern accent in standardised mandarin Chinese (CHN: *Putonghua*) due to having studied in the North East of China, and mainly associating with Northeastern men. My accent was received as a comical sign of my own 'ancestral village', which I was expected to perform at karaoke parties by singing songs; particularly the theme song to the television series *A Family of Northeasterners* (CHN: *dongbei yijia ren*), originally written by the comedian Xuecun and titled *All Northeasterners are a Living Lei Feng* (CHN: *Dongbeiren dou shi huoleifeng*).

The dialect identification game often resulted in a sense of commonality being forged through acknowledgement of each other’s differences. It afforded a cultural proximity whilst allowing the capacity to recognize more than simply their 'Chinese' status, which was a common generalization within the broader Japanese context. It also served as a playful display of cultural capital with a definite hierarchy of 'real Chinese-ness' contested in these performances. Broad notions of the differences between northern and southern parts of the PRC often filtered into these games. Ikebukuro seemed to have slowly built up a Northern Chinese presence, and the capacity to recognize another northerner whilst guessing at which part of the north they came from was the most common form of developing an affinity through discussion.

Nonetheless, even amongst northerners, these games did not always end in the ways intended. On one occasion a young woman from Beijing and a young woman from
Dalian fell into a yelling match after initiating one of these games within the hairdresser because they disagreed over whose region spoke the most ‘standard’ (CHN: biaozhun) Chinese. Hence, as much as such plays of difference could forge commonalities, disputes over the qualities of this difference also occurred. Further, these games, and their associated failures and successes, showed that Chinese-ness was not a simple thing amongst migrants in Ikebukuro.

Within the banter and chit chat at MY hairdressers there are also performances of cosmopolitanism. This plateau was not only inscribed with discourses of Chinese-ness, but these discourses extended further to become what Werbner has called a form of ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’ (Werbner 2006). As can be seen in the short ethnographic account above, the banter within MY Hair Salon was not merely constituted by shifting among Chinese languages but, also employed the common use of Japanese terms in place of Chinese nouns, verbs or adjectives. In this sense, whilst there were lexical changes in everyday speech, grammar was relatively unaffected. Within my interviews and ethnographic field notes amongst Chinese migrants I noted the most common of these Japanese terms were: benri (convenient), mendou (annoying), kuusai (smelly, but also denotes the quality of a thing such an ethnicity+kuusai = ethnicness), conbini (convenience store), kawaii (cute), kakoii (cool), ureshii (happy) and a wide variety of common food items. There was also often the use of place names, such as Adong’s use of the word dizuneerando (Disneyland) above. Other forms, such as the “okay” spoken by the young girl close to the end of the
vignette are a common feature of standardized popular Chinese lexicon today and should not really be interpreted as borrowing from English but rather an English-inspired Chinese term.

The use of terms from another language, or code-switching, is a well-documented phenomenon amongst migrants. It has been interpreted as having a wide variety of functions, but in general is the product of multi-lingual speakers using different terms or grammars when speaking (Gardner-Chloros 2009). As a practice code-switching brings into question the boundaries of ‘languages’ and the methodologies appropriate to analyse such a phenomenon. It questions how we define what a language is. Ethnographic and socio-linguistic research on code-switching is usually conducted in multi-lingual environments where most speakers are at least bi-lingual. When a speaker uses a mixture of terms it is expected that their listeners understand them. However, amongst the migrants I worked with, there was a wide range of Japanese competency, some not understanding even the terms listed above, whilst others were able to switch whole clauses rather than just the most common terms. Further, the more competent in Japanese a speaker was, the more likely they were to drop in words like these as part of their cultural performance, often opting to use Chinese pronunciation versions of common Chinese character-based Japanese terms.
According to Gardner-Chloros’ summary of ethnographic accounts of code-switching, it is more likely to be an unintentional effect of bilingualism, and was often seen as a sign of ‘laziness’ in the literature she had reviewed (2009: 14–15). In this sense, switching between languages was generally disapproved of, even though most bilingual speakers commonly do it accidentally. Amongst the Chinese migrants in Ikebukuro, and more specifically the cluster of small businesses of which MY hairdressers was a part, there was a wide variety of code-switching performances, some of which fell within the line of this description whilst others were far more intentional. Moreover, rather than censured as ‘lazy,’ chronic code-switchers were seen as boastful. For example, on one occasion as I stood in the corridor leading to MY talking to several of the small business owners on that floor, the woman from the real estate agency next door constantly shifted between Japanese and Chinese. When I spoke with some of the staff within MY later, I commented that she must be really confused speaking that way; one of the staff replied “No, she just does that to boast (CHN: chunju),” and the others chuckled and agreed. I take this incident as an example of how code-switching ‘too much’ and in ‘too complex’ ways was seen as boastful within the discourses inside MY Hair Salon. I do not take it as an example of the real estate agent’s boastful intentions nor do I believe that she was. However, this interpretation of unintentional code-switching by bilingual speakers as boasting suggests that the hairdressers thought of shop room banter as a form of performance.
Sebba has shown how code-switching is used to ‘animate’ discussions in particular ways amongst London Jamaicans. Speaking a distinct ‘creole’ that is important to that community’s identity, shifting between London English and Jamaican is thus used to animate conversations (Sebba 1993). The term ‘animate’ seems appropriate to the cultural performances found within MY Hair Salon. As a space where vibrant renao language is seen as desirable, the use of certain Japanese terms to animate a particular feeling or refer to a particular Japanese phenomenon seems logical. The use of common everyday nouns for convenience stores and food items is a relatively understandable adaptation to everyday life in Japan. However, choice to use many of the Japanese adjectives commonly substituted for Chinese was described to me as based on a feel for certain words.

When I asked about the reasons for the use of these words in general chit-chat many of my interlocutors described how the sound of certain Japanese words had a better tone (CHN: shengyin) and feeling (CHN: ganjue) than their Chinese equivalents, and that it felt more appropriate to use them whilst living in Japan. This is not something I have heard from Chinese migrants only, but have also experienced personally and heard re-iterated by people of all sorts of ‘foreign’ backgrounds in Japan. In this regular use of Japanese words, it is apparent that everyday migrant concerns inhabit the language of Chinese speakers in Japan, regardless of whether they are competent bilingually or not. Migrants negotiate their new context and get a feel
for new semantic relations, which they then articulate through the use of Japanese terms in their interactions with others.

This transformation within the migrant context is embodied in their “feel” for certain words, even when they are not ‘fluent’ Japanese speakers, due to the complex mixture of signifiers found within everyday life. As a young Chinese woman told me, there is an onomatopoeic and corporeal aspect to some of these Japanese words, which, combined with their frequent use in daily life (most of the terms listed above are very commonly used) inhabits one’s speech in a semi-reflexive way. She explained to me how she was particularly fond of the term mendou, which means ‘annoying,’ because the extended and round aspirated “ouh” sound mirrored the groans and sense of exasperation she might have about said annoyance. Similarly, the smiling effect of the long “ii” sound at the end of ‘cute’ (JPN: kawaii) was often emphasized, and at times relished when customers and staff discussed various hairstyles, as can be seen in the ethnographic description above. In addition to its sound, kawaii was described to me as semantically distinct from its Chinese equivalent, being more coquettish (CHN: dia) or ‘stupid’ (CHN: sha) in a sexualised way than the Chinese word for “cute” (CHN: keai), which is more disdainful and childlike.

Chinese migrants can be seen to negotiate the dynamics between ‘global’ and ‘local’ identifications within their lives in Japan. Through the language games they play a distinctly plural and transnational concept of ‘Chineseness’ is performed. In a
similar way, Sebba’s later work on Jamaicans in Britain (in collaboration with Tate) demonstrates the ways in which code-switching articulates local and global identities (Sebba and Tate 2002). Sebba and Tate show how Jamaican is now seen as part of a global Afro-Caribbean cosmopolitan culture that has increased in popularity and spread in recent years, whilst English is now seen as distinctly local. They contrast this new Afro-Caribbean cosmopolitanism to the previous colonial discursive forms of English, which were situated as a “window on the world” in contrast to the parochial interpretation of Jamaican. These two forms of identification are mixed and played with in daily discourse and used to perform different identities in different contexts.

Chinese migrants negotiate multiple scales of identification through language in similar ways to Sebba and Tate’s Jamaicans. Their code-switching performances situate them within the ‘local’ and ‘global’ context of migrant social life in Japan. However, as few of them are equally competent in Japanese and Chinese, their capacity to shift between languages is limited, demonstrating the limits on their performances. Nonetheless, the terms they use and their feeling for certain words show an aspiration to situate themselves within the local. The linguistic performances displayed in MY Hair Salon show a sense of play with the two articulations of global and local, whilst also producing a distinctly vibrant and cosmopolitan sense of ‘Chineseness.’
Chapter Six- Constructing selves

Language games and code-switching are not just means of creating a sense of ‘Chineseness’ and commonality but also involve a sense of distinction. Status was attributed to the capacity to play language games well and to speak in ways in which one does not code-switch too much or with the wrong feeling. In many ways my observations of these forms of distinction do not fit well with the theories of ‘rhizomes’ and ‘non-human agents’ I have previously discussed. I used the theories of Deleuze, Guattari and Latour to explain the flat, ‘rhizomatic’ networks of things, people and language which I felt best described the ways in which tiny spaces of interaction are constituted (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Latour 2005). Deleuze and Guattari would say that suddenly turning to the play of status and distinction within a plateau was a form of ‘arborescent’ hierarchical thought, which is ‘tree-like’ and opposite to the flat rhizomatic thinking they endorse (1987). Similarly, Latour would see it as an example of ‘critical sociology,’ which he believes is riddled with tautologies that use the social to prove the social (2005). Nonetheless, I repeatedly observed incidences of the play of status in my fieldwork, a recurring phenomenon I feel would be disingenuous not to try to analyse.

Despite their critique of ‘arborescent’ hierarchical thought as an ontological basis to understanding the world, Deleuze and Guattari state that arborescent thought
is useful as a form of ‘mapping’ within rhizomatic plateaus. In this sense, rhizomatic thinking incorporates other forms of thinking as experiments with the ‘real’ that function as flexible tools because they are “detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification” (1987:12).

What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency. It is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 12)

Within this chapter, I will map the play of status that is facilitated within and through the hairdressers’ shop. Because of the difficult lack of ‘community,’ and the unique spatial dynamics of Tokyo, Chinese people often have few outlets to perform the self. At the same time, the lack of a cohesive community, and the atomizing effects of Tokyo’s living spaces strategically situate migrants as individuals. Within the context of their sense of self as individuals, the embodied performances of language
and fashion make sense for Chinese migrants, as they allow one to distinguish oneself from others, exploring the possibilities for agency in what is otherwise a rhizomatic and network-based existence.

Bourdieu has emphasized how status is gained, embodied and maintained within much of his work. Utilizing the metaphor of a ‘field’ where games are played, he shows how people behave strategically according to a practical embodied logic rather than an explicit set of rules. According to Bourdieu, a field is produced by a variety of social positions where people share the same sense of investment, or ‘illusio’ in the stakes of the game. This investment consequently creates ‘fields,’ which are the “products of a long, slow process of autonomization” (Bourdieu 1980: 67). This field is not necessarily spatially defined, and depends on the interplay of constant strategic social actions (Swartz 1997: 122). In this sense, occupations such as academia or social positions such as being homeless can form fields. Moreover, fields can exist within fields depending on the social positions of their actors. For example, to be a Chinese migrant in Japan is a field situated within the broader field of various other fields found within Japan. We can also say that certain “social spaces” constitute miniature fields within broader fields where ‘space’ “affirms that every ‘reality’ it designates resides in the mutual exteriority of its composite elements” (1998:31). Hence, the social space of MY Hairdressers is situated in the broader field of Chinese migrant sociality in Ikebukuro. Its reality is shaped by factors exterior to it, such as Chinese migrants needing Chinese-language based grooming services, the capital 179
invested to start the store, and the wide variety of skills and knowledge required to run it. However, this still produces a distinct social space that functions as a field onto itself.

In the example I have given above, which details different speakers’ feel for certain words, how these words were used in interactions, and how the overuse of this practice met with disapproval, I wish to suggest the existence of a social aesthetics in this field, where status is attributed to those who are seen as ‘fun.’ The desire for *renao* thus manifests in a particular ‘illusio’ and a particular sense of taste. Bourdieu argues that taste

...functions as a sort of social orientation, a ‘sense of one’s place,’

guiding the occupants of a given...social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position. (Bourdieu 1986: 466)

Taste is not merely a personal disposition but situates one within a certain milieu. In the case of MY Hair Salon, taste can be seen in the value attached to being ‘fun’ and ‘cosmopolitan,’ culminating in the appreciation of particularly *renao* forms of banter that serve as both forms of cultural and symbolic capital. In distinguishing a sense of fun, cosmopolitanism and ‘Chinese-ness,’ embodied traits such as accents and the ability to identify them become some of the many ways in which regional and class differences are played out in the small social space of MY. Further, the ability to
code-switch between Japanese terms and various Chinese dialects serves as a form of cultural capital which demonstrates a cosmopolitan ‘worldliness’ valued in the broader fields of Japan and Chinese migration.

**Hair and Trans-Asian identities**

The cultural performances that made MY Hair Salon a vibrant site of social interaction also had an obvious purpose: to cut hair and generally groom the body. These practices served to perform certain identifications, to promote a particular gendered concept of ‘Chinese-ness,’ and were subject to certain forms of ‘taste.’ Indeed the ways in which hair was cut and appreciated, on top of other discussions of fashion and taste, demonstrated much about the way in which MY hairdresser’s staff and customers situated themselves in the world. Hair is an important signifier for people, as the cultural studies scholar Kobena Mercer noted when discussing the politics of black hairstyles:

> As organic matter produced by the physiological processes, human hair appears to be a natural aspect of the body. Yet hair is never a straightforward biological fact, because it is almost always groomed, prepared, cut, concealed and generally worked upon by human hands. Such practices socialize hair, making it the medium of significant statements about self and society. (Mercer 1994:100–101)
Mercer goes on to show the ways in which African-American hair was historically de-valued and how grooming processes such as the ‘Afro’ and ‘Dreadlocks’ became a way of re-valuing this devalued hair by showing its ‘natural’ grooming potentialities. At the same time, other forms of grooming such as straightening, previously seen as an oppressive aspect of the devaluation of black hair, became celebrations of ‘artifice.’

Thus artifice—the agency of human hands—is valued in its own right as a mark of both invention and tradition, and aesthetic skills are deployed within a complex economy of symbolic codes in which communal subjects recreate themselves collectively. (Mercer 1994: 111)

Mercer argues that whilst ‘natural’ hairstyles were predominantly diasporic styles connected to an imagined sense of ‘African’ naturalness, they were uncommon amongst people in Africa and were thus also seen as markers of ‘first world-ness.’ Further, artifice and ornate grooming practices such as elaborate braiding and beading were celebrated as more ‘cultivated’ and ‘civilized.’ In MY, Chinese hair was subject to similar discourses and practices that situated a sense of Chinese-ness within the field of Japan. In particular, the dynamics between a sense of ethnically and racially natural hair, and the high value attached to artifice played out in the ways hair signified Chinese migrants’ sense of place in the world. At the same time hairstyle
indicated generational, regional and class differences, with artifice being seen as more ‘civilized’ (CHN: wenming) while other forms of hair were associated with China’s socialist ‘peasant’ (CHN: nongming) past.

When I first started trying to discuss the value attached to hair at MY hairdressers, many of my questions were met with confusion. In particular, I’d hoped to hear whether there were perceived differences between Japanese and Chinese hair and hairstyles, and whether there were any ways in which they tried to distinguish themselves in their daily lives in Japan. Most of these questions were met with the glib statement that they were all ‘yellow people’ (CHN: huangren) and that there was little difference. The greatest discussions about the differences between kinds of hair was triggered when either myself or my wife had our hair cut and the feathery, curly and unruly nature of our softer hair was seen as a hindrance to having more dramatic styling. Indeed, on several occasions one of the hairdressers would joke, “you don’t have hair (CHN: toufa) you have feathers/fur (CHN: mao).” East Asian hair, according to the staff of MY, was mostly the same and could be punished in a wide variety of treatments that involved bleaching, curling and various heat based treatments. It was a Pan-Asian phenomenon which they identified with strongly.

When I originally asked the three major staff at MY why they had come to Japan, they all said that they came because they wanted to make money and they felt the Japanese hair industry was relatively developed. In order to be able to open a
store, the owner had attended training in Japan to familiarize himself with the newest Japanese hairstyles and products. Based on this experience, he commented on the differences between Japan and China.

"There's no real difference in terms of hair, but there is a difference in the way hairstyling is taught. In Japan there are many levels and it's very formal, you can't do your own thing and only the big names innovate. I think most hairdressers here are narrow minded, save for the great masters who start new things. I prefer to be more free ... in China you just cut hair how you want. Of course, Japan is more famous for fashion and hairstyling and those sorts of things, just look at where most of our hair products come from. They're all Japanese brands...although, Korea has become more popular in fashion recently too..."

The quotation above mentions Japan and Korea as being some of the major influences and points of comparison for Chinese bodily grooming and fashion practices, save for the owner's emphasis on 'freedom' (CHN: ziyou) and individuality (CHN: gexing). Much like other popular culture forms, such as television series, films and music, fashion has become a point for young people within the greater geographical region of East Asia to imagine commonalities and differences (Iwabuchi 2002). Iwabuchi Koichi has criticised simplistic models of globalisation that see it as synonymous with 'westernization,' by showing how the consumer markets of East Asia have been a major target for Japanese popular culture producers (Iwabuchi 2002). Similarly, flows of media have extended back and forth between many other major producers such Hong Kong and Taiwan, with a recent surge in popularity for Korean products (Iwabuchi, Thomas et al. 2004; Iwabuchi and Chua 2008). These flows, however, are not equal in
their strength, with the PRC featuring as mainly a body of consumers. In the early reform era (1980s), Japan and Hong Kong were the major channels for pop culture and fashion imports into the People’s Republic.

By the late 1990s Cantonese and Taiwanese companies started to make large profits from the translation of Japanese and Korean audio-visual culture into Mandarin Chinese. However, whilst artistic credit was often given to directors such as Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou in Japan, Mainland Chinese pop culture was yet to become seriously popular in Japan or Korea. In the early 21st century this was still the case, with the exception of a few recent joint PRC–Hong Kong blockbusters. Today, this flow of media is often referred to as the Japan–Korea Wave (CHN: rihanliu) in the PRC, with equivalent pronunciations of the characters that constitute this term found in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan, although in Japan it is referred to as the “Korean wave” (JPN: Kanryu).

A wide variety of ‘crazes’ (CHN: re) demonstrate the Trans-Asian identifications of many young Chinese people. The great ‘Ha’ craze of the late 1990s originally started in Taiwan but has now spread to the mainland and become part of the popular vernacular (Finnane 2008: 287). Ha comes from Taiwanese slang, meaning to like something passionately; ‘Ha Japan’ (CHN: harı) refers to being crazy about Japan. These youths tend to be young women who wear the most feminized fashions from Japan, such as pastels, and emphasize the neat and cute qualities of their myriad
accessories. Their counterparts are the ‘Ha Korea tribe’ (CHN: Hahanzu) who wear large, baggy outfits influenced by Korea’s Hip Hop culture. Similarly, Japan’s prolific animation and comic book industry (JPN: anime and manga) are hugely popular within China as well as globally. Indeed, manga has recently been recognised as an important export within Japanese government policy and was used as a flagship commodity for the ‘Cool Japan’ project (Mori 2011). The proliferation of Japanese pop culture has resulted in a proliferation of fan groups throughout China and East Asia, and the introduction of various identity signifiers from Japanese into other languages. For example, the term ‘otaku’ in Japanese literally means ‘home’ but is now generally used to describe persons who are fanatical about a certain form of pop culture, the term itself implying that they hoard these products in their homes. In Chinese, the kanji character for “otaku” has been added to the characters for either male or female to create the terms ‘zai bo’ (CHN: zainan) and ‘zai girl’ (CHN: zainv) referring to similar stereotypes about fanatical animation and comic book fans who spend all of their time indoors reading, watching and communicating with fellow fans online.

Despite the desires of Japan’s government to promote a distinctly ‘Cool Japan,’ in many ways these cultural flows have become simply everyday parts of being young consumers of commodities in East Asia. Even though there are phenomena such as the Ha groups, other products such as manga and anime are simply part of the everyday fabric, and have become what Iwabuchi calls ‘odourless’ as they no longer carry a distinctly Japanese cultural feeling (Iwabuchi 2002). I was shocked to find that
cultural influences such as these were rarely mentioned in the interviews I conducted amongst my informants, and featured little in their decision to move to Japan.

When considering the Pan-Asian identifications afforded by having similar hair morphologies and a familiarity with the East Asian pop culture scene, the hair grooming practices of MY's staff and clients takes on new meanings. For Chinese migrants, the ability to identify with a Pan-Asian identity is partly due to the perception of a racially shared characteristic in having similar hair morphologies. Unlike Mercer's distinction between the diasporic 'natural' aesthetics of African-American hair, and the appreciation of 'artifice' in Africa, the 'natural' and 'artificial' are layered one on top of the other amongst Chinese migrants in Japan, so that it is the 'natural' characteristics of their East Asian hair which affords a wide range of grooming practices that emphasize 'artifice.' It is this dynamic relationship which allows them to negotiate a complex form of cosmopolitan Chinese-ness that also emphasizes the racial, national, regional and gendered aspects of their subjectivity. They were able to combine and interpret these traits to create 'individualistic' forms.

In my daily participant observation, I found that different attributes were assigned to Japanese, Chinese or Korean fashion items and practices, but that these were generally mixed in a wide variety of ways to produce certain individualistic effects rather than merely a collective identity.
When the young girl in the ethnographic vignette in the beginning of the previous chapter asks for a ‘Korean style’ haircut, she was not merely emulating Korean fashion. Much like the ‘Ha Korean tribe’ s’ emphasis on baggy unisex clothing, the Korean hairstyle was shorter and more ‘rock n roll.’ The term ‘rock n roll’ I believe, showed her desire to express a vivacious sense of self that tapped into the semiotics of the ‘sassy’ and ‘tough’ female characters popular in the recent ‘Korean wave’ soap operas. The gendered potential of the ‘odour’ of Korean styles, rather than its national imagery, made this style desirable to her. Moreover, she juxtaposed this hairstyle with the rest of her clothing, predominantly pastel colours, with accessories and shoes that emphasized an infantile chic popular in Japan, China and Taiwan. In this sense, her grooming practices situate her as a cosmopolitan mix of East–Asian styles that reflect her status as a Chinese migrant living in Japan. At the same time she combines these to promote a particular presentation of herself in relation to this situation. The choice to have her hair cut in this way was a cultural performance within MY which communicated the ways in which she wanted to be seen within the wider spaces of her everyday life.

Botticello has noted that the majority of discussions about clothing and grooming amongst migrants emphasize the production of political and ethnic identities (Botticello 2009). She argues for a more nuanced look at the ways in which such practices articulate individual identifications and how a migrant group member negotiates their relationship to their group. Focusing on Yoruba women in London, she
demonstrates how these women negotiate a sense of ‘uniqueness’ through the use of ethnically identifiable clothes. She describes the buzz of gift giving and discussions surrounding preparation for a birthday event where her key informants and friends insist on certain choices whilst she mediates these suggestions with her own desires to be ‘unique.’ In this sense Botticello shows how Yoruba women “emplace” their individuality within the “wider collective” (2009: 138).

Similarly, the ways in which one combines all the different elements which make up one’s position within the broader experience of being a Chinese migrant is a significant part of the grooming practices found in MY. The modification and combination of the forms that emerged from this experience created the highly valued aesthetic of ‘having personality/individuality’ (CHN: yougexing). A sense of individuality and freedom were significant to the migrant identity of the owner of MY Hair Salon. He used this image of Chinese migrant individuality as a means of situating his own hairdressing practice in relation to Japanese hairdressing practice, and he emphasized it in the various other performances of the shop. Individuality (CHN: gexing) can thus be seen as a strong identification with one’s own agency, and consequently manifests in ways in which agency is easily communicated. Individuality was inscribed on the hairdresser’s bodies through a heavy emphasis on grooming that exaggerated the “artifice” of their fashion. This artifice involved closely shaved eyebrows, and asymmetric hairstyles with a wide variety of colours streaked through sweeping fringes. Often, I would return a day later to find one side of someone’s head
shaved to emphasize the asymmetry of a style, or a totally different hair colour.

Moreover, their clothes were always finely calculated combinations of the latest fashions with accompanying jewellery. Through these calculated grooming practices they performed a particular form of Chinese-ness that was also situated as a hybrid of broader East-Asian popular culture.

When I asked about their immaculate eyebrow grooming, they said it was 'civilized' (CHN: wenming) and that you would just let your other facial hair grow. I responded that I had a full beard, and a young female customer interjected "its unclean!" Similarly, when I asked about the hairstyles the shop promoted, the hairdressers commented that it was simply the best fashion, however when I asked what the worst fashion was, they said that the 'side parted' (CHN: yapa) hairstyles of Chinese peasants (CHN: nongming) and the 'box cut' (CHN: pingtou) styles of older rich Chinese men in the mainland were the worst. In this sense, distancing themselves from images of rural Chinese-ness and the uniform box cut of the generations that grew up during the Cultural Revolution were intrinsic to their desired aesthetics. Indeed, the view of this generation as without aesthetics is a feature of much of Chinese fashion discourse. As the writer Wang Anyi commented in her story *Remembering a Fashion Parade*, the gender and sexuality of older generations was deeply affected by growing up during the Cultural Revolution, and then coming into the reform era.
"They appear to have long forgotten this point. Wearing their sexless clothing they had forgotten their own sex. Carrying out their allotted sexless tasks, they obliterated their own sexuality. They had sexlessly passed their own best years. They seemed, having concluded the best years a woman has, suddenly to have remembered that they were women." (Quoted in Finanne 2008: 274)

Although Wang Anyi’s final statement sounds a hopeful note in this generation rediscovering their gendered, fashionable selves, this did not seem to correlate with the attitudes of the young people I met in MY Hair Salon. Moreover, creating a self that was cosmopolitan and fit into the wider transnational aesthetic of ‘fashionable’ East-Asia was an explicit goal of their grooming practice. It was also emblematic of an individualization occurring amongst young Chinese people and of the ways in which individualization transforms within the migrant context.

**Individualization, Emotional labour, passing**

Distinguishing oneself from others through the careful cultivation of a ‘fashionable’ cosmopolitan appearance situates Chinese migrants in broader discourses of the Chinese self within East Asia. However, this process also takes on new meanings for migrants in Japan. Cosmopolitan performances allow migrants to display the cultural capital they have acquired in their travels, creating a distinction between them and the image of rural Chinese ‘peasants.’ It is also a means of resistance within hierarchical relationships. These are both the gender and labour based hierarchies within the context of MY, and the hierarchies migrants are subject to in the greater context of Tokyo. Moreover, the desire to ‘pass’ unnoticed in the
panoptic streets of Tokyo becomes a motive for the cultivation of a cosmopolitan self. This capacity to pass additionally gives Chinese migrants a sense of agency in their ‘invisible’ status.

The cultivation and performance of self became particularly clear to me through my encounters with many of the young women who visited MY hair salon before going on to work within the local bars and hostess clubs in Ikebukuro. One occasion particularly vivid to me was when a finely dressed woman grabbed some fake glasses which belonged to one of the hairdressers and said in a hybrid of Japanese and Chinese, “Look, look, I look like ‘Erotic Sensei’, now all I need is a whip!” I laughed a little and, having grabbed my attention, she looked in the mirror and asked me “Hey, do you think I look Japanese?” The hairdressers shook their heads and I listened. “Well, the other day at work there were these two customers and they were sitting there looking at all the girls trying to work out which were Japanese and which were Chinese. They said that I was definitely Japanese along with some others, but in fact we were all Chinese.” She laughed at her tale triumphantly leaving me with a sense that her success in tricking a customer not only made a good story, but also stood testament to the connection between bodily performances and the assertion of self.

The young woman’s assertion of self, both within her story and through the telling of her story, caused me to reflect upon recent scholarly interest in the construction of self in contemporary China. Yan Yunxiang’s recent scholarship on
‘individualisation’ came to mind when faced with this young woman performing her own personal ‘individualisation’ of self (Yan 2010a; Yan 2010c). Although I am critical of Yan’s use of the term to describe Chinese modernity, it still holds merit in conceptualising the processual nature of cultivating certain kinds of individualistic selves. Namely, those that can dupe others into believing they are something they are not, or hope to perform the ‘desiring’ or ‘enterprising’ qualities of themselves over others. Yan recognizes this in discussing the conflicted aspects of contemporary images of the ‘individual’ in China today (Yan 2010c). In particular, he attempts to unify other scholar’s work on various kinds of self in contemporary China, such as the ‘enterprising self’ (Nicolas Rose quoted in Yan 2010: 504) and ‘desiring self’ (Rafel 2007). Yan’s use of the term ‘individualisation’ captures some sense that contemporary Chinese practices of self-cultivation, and self-promotion, are often focused on constructing selves that can be perceived as distinct from others.

The enterprising and desiring selves posited by Yan, Rafel and Rose fit well with the image of young Chinese students going abroad for study and work. As discussed in Chapter 2, these cosmopolitan and individualized selves have been reframed as patriotic within Chinese government discourse (as discussed by Nyiri 2010). However, as much as they may be framed as elite successes in relation to China, the difference between performances of success and the feeling of success differs for each person. In addition, the display of certain kinds of cosmopolitanism take on gendered forms, and become the primary site of negotiations of Chineseness in
migrant life. This gendered performance mirrors Rofel’s discussion of women’s central role in negotiations of the cosmopolitan in China, and its connection to the ‘desiring self.’

...young women embody the tensions that characterize the cultural constitution of cosmopolitanism and neoliberalism in China. This tension is expressed as one between the transcendence of locality through consumption and the domestication of neoliberalism through renegotiating China’s place in the world. Women literally embody Chineseness, both reproductively and as objects of desire. But as consumers and subjects of desire, Chinese women also represent the potential to transcend Chineseness. (Rofel 2007: 29)

Within Japan the transcendent potential of Chinese women also often involves the commodification of self in the affective economy of Ikebukuro.

Every evening between 7pm–9pm MY’s clientele would change slightly. Elaborately dressed women would come to have their hair washed and styled before going to work in the nearby entertainment district. Their hair would be teased and worked into distinct blade-like locks, and bleached before being dyed in other striking colours. They would wear large fake eyelashes, and paint their eyes with heavy mascara to make them seem larger and rounder. Their hands would be covered with ornately decorated nails and in the crook of their arms you would often see handbags
with brand names such as Louis Vuitton or Gucci displayed clearly the side. Their clothes often differed, occasionally seeming more like themed costumes than outfits; one day a Goth Lolita, another day a traditional Japanese ‘yukata’ for the summer festivals. However, they were always modified to reveal large parts of their bodies underneath.

These women all worked in the entertainment district nearby, which was home to a wide variety of venues. In particular, the area known as ‘Romance Lane’ (JPN: romansu doori) is renowned for its hostess clubs and adult services such as erotic massage. It was difficult to determine where exactly these women worked. They were often aloof and wary of a young male anthropologist, so I only knew them as customers of MY, and found it difficult to ask them questions about this area or how they felt about it. This unease did not mean we had no interaction but rather that the light playful conversations held when these women came in were intended to be a fun but defensive means of talking. Nonetheless, when I asked about their work they would usually say ‘Kyabakura,’ a term derived from ‘Cabaret club,’ which usually refers to a place where men are entertained by hostesses whilst they drink with other men.

Anne Allison conducted fieldwork in spaces similar to these in the early mid-eighties and describes them as places designed to get “men to relax, feel good about themselves as 'men,’ and be sexually titillated by attractive, flattering women” (Allison 1994: 4). Today hostess bars differ somewhat. Company budgets no longer afford such elaborate entertainment stipends for their employees, and the ethnic
make-up of hostess bars are far more diverse. In recent years the number of Filipina entertainers has declined slightly due to changes in the entertainment visa system. However, according to the opinions of my informants within Ikebukuro, this gap seems to have been filled by young Chinese women on student visas.

Hostess bars are not merely a Japanese practice. They are also a common feature in the entertainment areas of South Korea, Taiwan and the Karaoke bars of Mainland China. Tiantian Zheng conducted fieldwork amongst hostesses in Dalian exploring their strategies in negotiating gender and China’s rural-urban class divide (Zheng 2011). She conducted fieldwork during the late 90s and early 2000s, a boom era for the Japan-Korea wave that has fed much of China’s pop culture. Zheng’s informants were predominantly rural-urban migrants who became hostesses as a means to gain cultural and economic capital quickly. Their fashion choices were a major means of doing this, as they invert the rural-urban divide by dressing in Japanese and Korean fashions that demonstrate a ‘foreign-air’ (CHN: yangqì). Zheng states “clothing has replaced dark and coarse skin as the primary signs of rural origin” (Zheng 2011: 50).

By consuming transnational commodities and adorning their bodies, rural-urban migrants working as hostesses attempt to avoid displaying a ‘parochial-air’ (CHN: tuqì), which is seen as an inherent bodily quality. This strategy ties into the image of the modern Chinese urbanite as a cosmopolitan elite who is highly mobile. Rather than
travelling however, their consumption of transnational products becomes a major means of producing a cosmopolitan sense of ‘global citizenship’ as “foreign objects stand in for the remote places of their creation; possession or consumption (depending on the type of product) replaces travel” (Zheng 2011: 51). In this sense, fashion practices are never merely an imposition of hierarchy from above, but are a crucial part of the dynamic negotiation of power between self and society. This correlates with analyses of other fashion practices, which have shown the important role of dress in negotiating power relations.

For “beings who stand inside and outside of it [society] at the same time” (Simmel 1971:14–15), the dress forms part of an ongoing dynamic between objective social forms and subjective experience. The dress is simultaneously a static icon of cultural identity and also a dynamic enactment of so-called transnational cultural flows. (Durham 1999: 390)

Like Zheng’s rural-urban migrants in China, the women who came to MY Hair Salon to have their hair cut used fashion practices to negotiate their migratory subjectivity. In addition, their consumption of Japanese and Korean fashion mirrored that of Zheng’s hostesses. However, within the context of Ikebukuro there was more a ‘play’ of different hierarchies and their inversions, than simply the dichotomy of rural–urban. This is not to say that being associated with a ‘rural’ background was not seen
as undesirable, but rather that this background was often entangled with the
subjectivity of being a migrant in Japan and so, was easier to alter with a wider range
of cosmopolitan symbolic forms. As one customer blurted out when accused of being a
‘peasant’ (CHN: nongming) after a relay of jokes, “In the eyes of the Japanese, all
Chinese are peasants!”

The adoption of cosmopolitan fashion practices has multiple purposes. For
young women who work as hostesses, it disassociates them from the image of the
rural–urban migrants in Mainland China by allowing them to embody a cosmopolitan
air. At the same time, it also disassociates the young migrants from the image of
Chinese people as uneducated and classless; something that still features in many
representations of China. It also serves as a site onto which they can negotiate their
sense of being ‘visibly’ Chinese, or what Erving Goffman has called ‘passing’; a
practice of performing certain kinds of ‘social identity’ so as to hide a ‘stigma’ which
is “the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance”
(Goffman 1963: preface and 91–94). The ‘stigma’ of being Chinese was often hidden
through games of passing that hostess customers would boast and joke about whilst
getting ready for work at MY. They would talk about their demure use of silence and
fashion to make customers believe them to be shy Japanese girls. The particularly
talented would tell others about their ability to speak Japanese without a “taste/whiff”
of Chinese accent (CHN: yidian ye meiyou wei). Their boastful tales rarely ended
with them totally victorious in their games of ‘passing’; the hostesses played with
their customers, but often they would talk about how long or how many people they’d
managed to trick.

This kind of play is more reminiscent of De Certeau’s ‘tactics’ and
‘strategies’ than simply an inversion of hierarchy because there is no single hierarchy
that the migrant hostesses negotiate. De Certeau distinguishes between tactics and
strategies to explore the different kinds of agency people have in relations of power:

I call a “strategy” the calculus of force-relationships which becomes
possible when a subject of will and power···can be isolated from an
“environment.” A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed
as proper (proper) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations
with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, “clienteles,”
“targets,” or “objects” of research). Political, economic, and
scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model.

I call a “tactic,” on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on
a “proper” (spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a
borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a
tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s
place, fragmentarily, without taking over its entirety, without being
able to keep it at a distance····
Many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking etc.) are tactical in character. And so are, more generally, many “ways of operating”: victories of the “weak” over the “strong” (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order etc.), clever tricks, maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, poetic as well as warlike. (De Certeau 1984: xix)

The play of ‘passing’ in the hostess bar situation seems a tactical assertion of agency within the otherwise commodified affect economy of Ikebukuro’s entertainment district. It is also a ‘strategic’ inversion of the power dynamics associated with the cosmopolitan masculine performances of the hairdressers such as Aming. By gloating over their capacity to ‘pass’ the hostess customers display a particular kind of resistant cosmopolitan Chineseness that only they, as commodifiable women, can successfully perform. This passing strategically inverts the relationship between the image of the cosmopolitan Chinese male entrepreneur and the morally questionable Chinese hostess, if only momentarily.

One evening we all sat outside in the hallway smoking as we waited for Aming to close up shop. As we smoked, one of the hairdressers made an exhausted sound then said “You know, when they’re here I can’t imagine them as hostesses. Always boasting! And they make so much money! Look at their brand name clothes.” I asked...
if they knew any male hosts (an increasingly popular practice in Japan). Aming came out and said as he locked the door “We’re the hosts (JPN: Hosuto).” I smiled at this statement, enjoying his play on words. “We’re the hosts of the hostesses. Our job is to listen to them boast, tell jokes and make them feel good about themselves... Give them a good feeling.”
Chapter Seven- Gendered friendship and play

"These sorts of things, you know 'hobbies' (CHN: aihao) are really good. It's hard to make friends here in Japan, so these sorts of things introduce you to new people with similar interests. I don't know most of the people here actually, but we'll become friends after. Maybe we'll go out for dinner after if we don't finish too late." (Billiards Player 29)

The plateaus of conviviality and gendered play in Ikebukuro such as those of MY hairdresser do not simply mark a different kind of community. These are scenes of momentary fun and renao, sites where the power plays of distinction, fashion and gender are negotiated. Due to the rhizomatic nature of the social structures surrounding MY, I was able to gain access to other parts of peoples' lives in Ikebukuro and Tokyo more generally. Because of my initial disappointment at reports of a "lack of community" in Ikebukuro however, I decided to pursue networks which could introduce me to other kinds of sentiment that give Chinese migrants a sense of being-in-common. I was introduced to a loose network of billiards players who allowed me to spend time with them, participate in their games and interview their friends and partners. Through my interactions with the billiards group, I came to study the friendships, convivialities and plays of differences which seemed to fill these peoples' lives.

As part of my fieldwork in Ikebukuro I regularly attended a weekly billiards competition organized by a few established Chinese businessmen working within the
area. Each meeting would run from 7pm until late at night, usually attended by 15–30 people, depending on personal schedules. It was a distinctly masculine context, where cursing, mockery and laughter were only drowned out by the constant piercing sounds of balls hitting one another. It cost 2000 Japanese Yen to enter the competition, plus an additional charge for cue hire and table rental. Every competition was based on a series of classes; A, B, C, D based on players’ ability in descending order, with the winner of each class taking a proportional cut of everyone’s entry fee at the end of the day. Whilst money regularly changed hands through winning or losing, in general, everyone was there to simply have fun. Indeed, at times players would come with no money and everyone would give them the money to enter the game so that the fun could start. On one occasion, the person who came with no money managed to take it all at the end, which everyone thought was hilarious.

The billiards hall is owned and run by a Japanese entertainment business, situated in a multi-story building in the entertainment district of the west gate area of Ikebukuro station. On the other floors were bowling alleys, cinemas, events spaces and darts bars. The clientele of these spaces are heterogeneous, usually small cliques of friends or couples on dates seeking some form of entertainment. However, on the billiards floor, in the organised meetings of this group of Chinese men, a slight shift in atmosphere occurs. The hall rings with the chatter of Northern Chinese accents with calls of profanity and “good shot!” (CHN: hao qiu!) the only things heard over the
clashing of balls. Women are also not commonly seen amongst the men, save for when they might come to collect their partners.

When I asked what attracted them to this weekly meet, the participants often talked about fighting a sense of isolation in Japan. Indeed, amongst most of the people I have spoken with in Ikebukuro, there was constant discussion of how lonely a place Japan can be. The loneliness felt by my interlocutors was often attributed to the discrimination Chinese people experience in Japan, but it was also seen as something inherent to Tokyo's urban lifestyle, as discussed in the previous chapter. In many ways, men in Japan are perceived as pitiful characters who lack the freedom to create lasting friendships. When I asked an employee of a Chinese business owner in Ikebukuro in his early thirties how he felt about Japan, he responded with the following questions.

"Ok, so when you came here what kind of feeling did you get?"

I answered that I thought I'd gone through the usual stuff, getting used to a place when you've just arrived, and that I wasn't sure whether it would compare to his experiences anyway, as I looked different and was coming for different purposes.

"Did you feel like it's a happy place?" he asked; I kept silent, waiting for him to continue.

"Most men I meet here work all day and then work all night. They have no hobbies or loves and rarely see their families. Even though most nights they'll go drinking after work, it's drinking with
your boss! So you go to work, then 'knock-off' then you still have to go to work! The pressure here is too much! I like to drink with my mates (CHN: gemenr) not my boss”

I also received a related comment from a young designer who had come to Japan as part of an exchange with his home company in Shenzhen. He was complaining about people not calling him back;

“...they're not willing (buyuanyi) to keep in touch. They act like making friends with people who might not speak Japanese all that well, or come from a different place, is too ‘mendou’ (annoying/difficult: Japanese). In truth, I don’t really like Japanese people. Although I think the elderly people here are really kind and friendly...” He paused for a second.

“Yeah it’s probably the environment here, young people like us have no time, it’s not like China where you can go drinking with friends and have fun in the evenings for only a small amount of money.”

In light of their sense of Japan as a lonely and boring place, fun and conviviality appeared important to the Chinese men with whom I came to spend most of my time towards the end of my fieldwork. Friendship was also discussed frequent topic of discussion. However, I discovered that their relationships with one another were wrought with tensions around the kinds of friendship they had and what it meant. They desired friends, but only fun ones that held few responsibilities, often described as ‘banquet buddies’ or ‘fair-weather friends’ (CHN: jiuroupengyou lit. wine-meat friends)
Though the ethnographic method relies on friendship as a means for data collection, friendship, as a topic for research in Anthropology, has often been subsumed under broader theories of reciprocity or methodological considerations of the anthropologist’s relationship with interlocutors (Bell and Coleman 1999). Thirty years ago, Robert Paine noted that kinship, as a classical academic concern of anthropology, often took precedent over other forms of relationship which were equally, if not more important amongst the groups under study (Bell and Coleman 1999: 1). The lack of friendship research is potentially due to the difficulty of mapping multiple egocentric networks whilst conducting fieldwork, or to a disciplinary interest in analysing cultures as ‘structures’ first, and ‘texts’ afterwards. The personal has become of increasing interest over the past 30 years, with researchers paying particular attention to personal experience; however, the experience of friendship has remained an elusive subject for analysis. This thesis aims to move anthropological thinking on personal experience and networks towards an analytic consideration of friendships as a means of forming the self and a crucial part one’s being-with. This consideration returns us to discussions of community, belonging and being-in-common.

Within cognate disciplines such as sociology and social psychology, much of research and popular debate sees friendship as constitutive of community. In particular, discourses surrounding community, social capital and friendship have often been conflated with one another, using trust and friendship as major indicators of social capital or community, imagining locales or virtual spaces where everyone is familiar.
with one another and works together (Putnam 2000; Coleman 1990). Whilst the purpose of these forms of research has been to bolster community-building projects and to argue for the value of social relationships in governmental calculations, the body of this research does not fit neatly with the diverse findings of qualitative researchers. Sociologists Spencer and Pahl have highlighted the shortcomings of the conflation of social capital, friendship and community in quantitative approaches, arguing that a generative research approach focusing on friendship shows the immense personal variety found within people’s ties to one another (Spencer and Pahl 2006).

The methodology which Spencer and Pahl used involved a series of open-ended social mapping exercises where informants were asked to list the most important people to them in a circular distribution, with the centre containing the most important and the periphery the least. They discovered not only the diversity of friendship-making strategies and affective ties, but also the centrality of these processes and relationships to peoples’ social lives.

In Ikebukuro, various terms for ‘friend’ were often used in describing peoples’ relationships to one another. Chinese migrants tended to articulate their relationships to one another through friendship rather than ‘community.’ Friendship was imagined as an ego-centred network of affective relationships; one of my interlocutors used the term geti tuanti, which roughly translates as ‘personal/individual community.’ In this way, sociality took on a rhizomatic form amongst Chinese migrants in Ikebukuro, each having their own personal network that overlapped with the networks of others. These
networks followed gendered lines more often than not, with masculine friendship a major part of my observations of public spaces.

Whilst there is a rich body of ethnography and interdisciplinary interest in gender, and in particular masculinity today, masculine heterosexual friendship is less theorized in Anthropological work (Kapplan 2005). In areas such as gender studies, queer theory and critical theory, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s concept of ‘male homosocial desire,’ whereby friendships between men, even if not overtly ‘sexual,’ involve homoerotics and desire often mediated through a female figure, has been of particular influence (Sedgwick 1985). According to Sedgwick, this process ensures the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity and suppresses homophobic anxieties. Since the publication of *Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire*, Sedgwick’s original 19th century English literary examples have been extrapolated into areas such as American literature and other media forms (see Cole 2003; Armengol–Carrera 2009; Messent 2009). Most of these studies however, have focused on Anglo–Saxon and European contexts. In a similar vein, the area of Men’s Studies has been dominated by sociological and social psychological research in the Anglophone world; falling under the umbrella of the aforementioned body of social capital research, or arguments against homophobic masculinity (For example see Adams and Allan 1998). This research has done a great deal of work to encourage positive forms of masculinity which avoid racist, sexist and homophobic attitudes, however its lack of cross-cultural
comparison means it fails to recognize the diverse ways in which masculinity takes shape globally.

Classically, gendered forms of togetherness have played a large part in ethnography. For example, classic anthropological work often focused on subjects such as men’s cults in Melanesia. However, these studies rarely focused on the gendered aspects of this sociality, but rather interpreted it as a naturalised division within structural–functionalist views of cosmology. Conversely, recent ethnography on gender has taken a ‘reductive turn’ to show what various relationships within interlocutors’ lives tell us about attitudes to gender. A slowly growing body of research in North–East Asian Studies has begun to take a reverse turn however, showing how gender is a formative part of social relationships. For example, Avron Boretz has recently produced an ethnographic account of masculinity and its relationship to martial arts and magical practice in Taiwan and Southern China (Boretz 2011). More specifically, a small body of recent scholarship on Chinese masculinity and friendship has proved a fruitful site within which to explore gendered togetherness due to the long history of homosocial friendship in Chinese cultures. Most of this research however, has focused on historical and literary examples (see Louie 2002 and Song 2004) with literature on Chinese migrant masculine friendship predominantly following the norms of historical scholarship in treating the study of these relationships as a lens for the examination of racial discrimination and broader ‘Chinatown’ community dynamics (For a critical analysis of masculinity in America’s historic Chinatowns see Eng 2001).
My research attempts to acknowledge the extant literature on masculine friendship while exploring its nuances within lived experience. I take Sedgewick’s observation that gender is a crucial part of socialising situations and that men can desire one another in homosocial ways. Similarly, I am interested in how this gendered sociality is central to formations of the self. Finally, my research attempts to combine the disparate literary examples, which focus on classical Chinese images of the masculine, showing the ways in which Chinese men in Japan use similar tactics to form their migrant selves.

Male friendship groups are an important aspect of Chinese masculine subjectivity. Unlike personal relationships such as those formed with wives, partners, or kin, groups of men provide a context in which to cultivate a distinctly Chinese masculine public self. This revaluing of a public subjectivity can be seen as the reification of affective ties. Yan Yunxiang has argued that this reification of affective ties is a large part of the process of individualisation. However, I would argue that, rather than a process of individualisation, this re-assertion of affective ties is a sign of the co-constitutive nature of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, or what Nancy calls being ‘singular-plural’ (Nancy 2000). Regardless of whether one sees this process as on of individualisation or not, it is evident that affective ties, seen as distinct from the economic and political, are becoming increasingly important to contemporary Chinese subjectivity. One simple example of how this frames Chinese male subjectivity is the use of signifiers to demonstrate affective intent. Calling friends by referents such as
‘brother’ (CHN: gemenr and xiongdi), and the use of similar affectionate modifications on standard names (such as the common habit of employing the second character of a name and the suffix ‘big brother’ ge) were common to my interlocutors’ speaking habits. These speaking habits signal one’s place in the referent’s subject formation, and one’s desire for to feature oneself within the homosociality of one’s interlocutor. In this sense, the “you” is no longer signified in non-affective terms to the “me.” It also situates the speaker within the masculine imagery of antiquarian representations of “brotherly loyalty” such as those found in classic novels such as Water Margin (CHN: shuihuzhuan) and Romance of the Three Kingdoms (CHN: sanguo yanyi).

The relationship between masculine friendship, male subject formation and individualisation has been noted by literary scholars. In contemporary China, this relationship has taken the form of an interesting symbiosis between the image of a masculine individualist self, and loyalty to one’s group. For example, the popularity of the recent novel Wolf Totem (CHN: lang tucheng) suggests a re-imagining of male homosociality as singular–plural through the motif of a highly individualistic yet loyal masculinity (Wedell-Wedellsborg 2010). Set in the recent past, Wolf Totem is a story about a young man sent to Inner Mongolia during the Cultural Revolution. It is a semi-autobiographical novel by Lv Jiamin, but was originally ghost-authored under the name Jian Rong. The story is based on Lv Jiamin’s experiences in Inner Mongolia, re-imagined from the present time. In particular, it focuses on his fascination with the way
wolves are both strong individuals and powerful collectives, and spurred the idea of ‘the way of the wolf’ (CHN: langdao).

Each member is independent, wild and free at the same time as loyal to its pack and willing to be sacrificed if needed for the survival of the group. It is a strictly hierarchical formation with a strong and wise leader, whose authority is unquestioned. (Wedell-Wedellsborg quoted in Yan Yunxiang, 2010:24)

In this sense, brotherly friendship and its associated ethos have re-emerged in contemporary China, paralleling the process of individualisation. The reinvigoration of masculine friendship also signifies a shift within the ideals of a generation subject to the process of individualisation as suggested by Yan Yunxiang, where gendered forms of togetherness allow a singular–plural notion of self.

The interdependent relationships created by masculine friendship also provide affective and instrumental support. Michael Strickland argues that the affective and instrumental aspects of male friendship take on distinctly entangled forms in China, where the affective and instrumental are difficult to separate (Strickland 2010).

Strickland, describing these dynamics amongst young Chinese men and their ‘brothers’ shows that they are often interdependent.

The affective loyalty and commitment that xiongdi [brothers] feel for one another cannot exist simply in the abstract, but must be realized
in practice. The ganqing [sentiment] of xiongdi [brothers] is itself largely born of the willingness and experience of brothers helping one another in moments of need. Material support among xiongdi and more distant or casual relations may sometimes look very similar, but, as one informant simply put it, ‘the feeling is not the same’. This is the value of considering xiongdi ties and the concrete exchanges that take place within them, for they lead us to think more deeply about the nature and boundary between aid and affect, and show that at least at some level, within certain contexts, instrumentalism and affect may not only coexist, but in fact be rooted in one another. (Strickland 2010)

In many ways, friendship research is not dissimilar to the literature on the terms guanxi and ganqing in Chinese social life (Kipnis 1997; Strickland 2010). Guanxi is a popular term used amongst Sinologists when dealing with Post-Mao Chinese social relationships (Gold et al 2002). It can be loosely translated as relationships, connections or as ‘related to.’ However, its use within the social sciences has much wider implications. For some, guanxi carries implications of a particular form of ‘Chinese nepotism’ that fuels rampant corruption in Chinese societies, or a distinct cultural heritage that adds an ‘element of humanity’ to cold economic transactions (Gold et al 2002: 3). To others, it is simply a Chinese way of referring to the ‘personal networks, social capital and gift economies’ found throughout the world (Yang 1994).
Indeed, *guanxi* is a parallel but alternative form of sociality to that of community practice in China.

While *guanxi* is a common term in the daily vernacular of Chinese social life, it was not mentioned amongst the groups I spent time with, save for when referring to it as a vital social strategy at home in the mainland, or as a primarily instrumental practice. Hence, I am hesitant to use the term outright to define the particular practices of Chinese people in Ikebukuro. Rather, I intend to explore re-articulations of these dynamics in line with more contemporary concerns of migrant sociality. Within the context of Ikebukuro, the *guanxi* economy is seen more as an entity related to getting ahead in the PRC than something distinct to everyday practice in local life. As one informant put it:

> "The nice thing about Japan is that you only need to work hard to make money, *guanxi* is less important." (Small-business owner, 28)

Rather than discussing the *guanxi* they felt, most of my informants simply referred to their friendships. Despite many using the term ‘friends,’ however, friendship groups appeared to have many of the same effects of instrumental and affective support as discussed in the literature on *guanxi*.

The networks of friendships which formed out of the billiards hall often had pragmatic supportive effects. I witnessed examples of men from the billiards group utilising their friendships for a variety of purposes such as selling a car, receiving
discounted services, getting advertising for a business, and finding work. Hence, the group was constituted by a combination of instrumental and affective goals. Speaking with an employee of one of the billiards hall regulars, I asked him about this issue of the emotional versus the instrumental.

I began, “My impression is that friends are important in Ikebukuro.”

“Yeah, for example I’m friends with a few guys here (at the billiards room) that’s how I originally found the job with Looming, he introduced us. Before that I was working in Yokohama in a business there run by a Taiwanese guy. But then Looming met me here through my friend and said he was opening a new store, so I moved here.”

“So do you think that sentiment (CHN: ganqing) and benefit/profit (CHN: liyi) are always separate? Or can you become good friends with someone who originally just gave you a job or finds you work?”

“Hmmm, when you get older, these things become more complex I guess. When I was growing up friends were just about friendship (CHN: youqing) and usually did the same thing as you, like [make friends with] classmates. But when you are our age you need people who can help you, and they often end up being your friend”

“Is that particularly the case in Japan?” I asked.

“Yeah, definitely, you need people to help you here because there are a lot of things that are annoying.”

“For example?”
"Well, recently I have had to do all that stuff at the Embassy to try to do a visa application. I didn't know where to start with it but some of my friends who had done it before organised it all for me."

In a broad sense, instrumentalist and affective practices are complexly entangled amongst the men of the billiards hall. I found that although Strickland's theory that the instrument and affective are less distinguishable in Chinese masculine friendship held in some senses in the billiards group, there was a spatial distinction between the affective and instrumental. I never observed pragmatic actions conducted within the space of the hall or at any of the drinking parties afterwards. Rather, it seems that these things were sought more discreetly outside of the meetings of the group. Indeed, billiards hall players who outrightly sought instrumental arrangements with other players while in the hall were scolded and taunted by others for only coming for 'profit' and ruining the 'atmosphere' (CHN: qīèn) of the hall. On one particular occasion, the pursuit of a business deal halfway through a game ended in angry outbursts from several people telling the pursuant to drop the issue:

"This place is for play, talk about it later!"

This incident was surprising, as the person scolded was one of the most prestigious players in the room, and I had assumed his status as a player would afford him different kinds of leverage. However, after the scolded player quietly retired for the night, I asked some of the others about what had happened. It turned out the
player was trying to buy cheap electronics from one of the players who works in a major electronics company in Japan. When I asked the electronics employee about the incident, he responded:

"This is Japan, prices only go so low here and no amount of guanxi will get around that. This isn’t China. I can’t get around the rules and prices my company offers...But that isn’t the biggest issue..."

I asked him what he meant.

"We all work all day and then come here to enjoy ourselves. It’s for play (CHN: shi weile wanr). Talking like that just ruins the atmosphere (CHN: ba qifen pohuai le)."

Incidents such as this demonstrate that there is an articulation of spaces appropriate for pursuing instrumental goals, and others where conviviality and sentiment take precedence. As discussed earlier, anomie and discrimination feature strongly in the minds of Chinese people in Ikebukuro. Consequently, fun and the production of warm feelings of friendship were articulated as important goals in themselves. These goals took on a greater meaning in the billiards group due to the diasporic context of the players. The stresses and fluctuations of migrant life inhibited the building of long-lasting ties because people would come and go in erratic ways. Hence, amongst the men I knew, friendship was not necessarily a question of trust and reciprocity, but rather fun and conviviality.
It's for fun: *Wei le wanr ba!*

Judith Farquhar has argued that in exploring socio-cultural practice and network formation, emotional effects, particularly pleasures, should be considered carefully (2002: 146-153). Recounting a banqueting experience where she found a “turning point” in her attitude to what has often been seen as the benchmark of corrupt cadre and chauvinist *guanxi*-forming behaviour, Farquhar portrays the experiential rewards of the simultaneously competitive and sharing behaviour seen at a banquet (2002: 147-150).

By the end of the evening, I had drunk more liquor than ever before. I felt quite lucid, though not entirely in command of all my limbs, and I loved these men...for being good allies and opponents, for drawing me into the circle of men, for respecting me...and for simply being there with us as this game was played. (Farquhar 2002:150)

Like so much of social life, pleasure, in all its myriad, interconnected and fuzzy forms is difficult to conceptualise. Pleasure involves linguistic games, and yet is deeply embodied; it is ‘good,’ generally speaking, and yet it often involves unbalanced subject-forming processes and competition; it is very personal, yet often involves the consumption of a wide variety of impersonal things whether they be non-human or human. Pleasure is referred to implicitly in many contexts, with the term itself often carrying erotic overtones. As Farquhar notes, within classical Chinese concepts of
propriety pleasure derived from consumption and sex is seen as base but inevitable. She quotes *Mencius*, one of China’s earliest philosophical works, believed to date from the fourth century BCE, where a disciple opens a debate with the phrase, “Appetite for food and sex is nature” *(CHN: *shì sē xíng yē)*, before going on to debate other aspects of what is potentially human nature such as benevolence *(CHN: *rèn)*. Farquar argues that this section would read more like “[it goes without saying that] appetite for food and sex is innate,” showing that such base pleasures are often taken for granted and receive little discussion in classical Chinese thought.

‘Play’ *(CHN: *wàn*) is treated in a very similar way amongst the billiards hall players. When I asked members of the group about why they were friends, or how it was that they became friends, I was met with a disbelieving stare as though I had asked something obvious which did not need explaining. When pressed, they’d simply say “It’s for fun/play!” *(CHN: *Shì wèi le wàn le ba*); when I asked them to describe what play was to them they’d say, “Play is play and that’s it!” *(CHN: *wàn jiūshí wàn er yì)*. Play, much like other simple pleasures, is more a deeply felt practical logic *(Bourdieu 1998)* than something open for debate.

The term *wan* acts as both noun and verb in standardised modern Chinese and can mean both the act of playing and its effects (i.e. fun). I add the northern dialect ‘*r*’ sound at the end of it in many of my transcriptions as this was how my interlocutors pronounced the word, and also because it embodies the slightly more masculine and
direct tone that many northern Chinese men pride themselves on. It is distinct from other terms for competition such as *sai* and *cheng*, associated with frivolous and enjoyable activities. Huizinga’s cultural history of play, *Homo Ludens*, explains play in China in this way.

Most important is the word *wan*, in which ideas of children’s games predominate, but extending its semantic range to the following special meanings: to be busy, to enjoy something, to trifle, to romp, to jest, to crack jokes, to make mock of. It also means to finger, to feel, to examine, to sniff at, to twiddle little ornaments, and finally to enjoy the moonlight. Hence the semantic starting-point would seem to be “handling something with playful attention”, or “to be lightly engrossed”. The word is not used for games of skill, contests, gambling or theatrical performances···Anything to do with contests is expressed by the special word *cheng*, the perfect equivalent of the Greek *agon*, apart from which *sai* denotes an organized contest for a prize. (Huizinga 1949:32)

Huizinga’s description is remarkably apt, considering he was not a China scholar (he cites help from a Prof. Duyvendak). Indeed, the etymology of the pictograph for *wan* represents a jade being handled, which mirrors his definition of *wan* as “handling something with playful attention” nicely. However, I would add one
exception, the distinction between *wan* and other terms for play being not so much the activity (such as a game of skill versus child’s play) but rather the stakes of the activity. In this sense, it is indicative that despite playing for money, the billiards hall players did not see much at stake in their weekly matches.

If money was not much at stake in the billiards game, why play? Something else was desirable in the social interactions of the billiards hall. Erving Goffman’s description of ‘face’, which he defines as the “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” is useful in considering what makes a social interaction desirable, possible and worthwhile. He describes how one becomes attached to the image of oneself, and how the maintenance or transformation of this is often what makes participation with others a commitment (Goffman 1969). In other words, images of self as they relate to others are at the core of affect in social relations, and it is the dramatic play of forming, reforming and deforming this image that makes interaction a game worth considering. Goffman continues this line of thought in the context of gambling and games in his essay “Where the Action Is.” He argues that a sense of fatefulness and consequence is what makes a game worthwhile. He pushes this analysis further, showing how all social action is in many ways consequential, but in contexts where this consequence becomes apparent, one’s interest comes to the fore. In this sense, an interaction is felt to be dramatic and have specific affects.
This sense of drama, derived from something being at stake, is in many ways similar to Bourdieu’s notion of *illusio* (1998). If we interpret the space of the billiards hall as a ‘field’ in Bourdieu’s sense then we can say the ‘illusio’ of this field is less tied to the instrumental networks it produces than it is tied to the idea of a ‘fun’ (CHN: *haowanr*) ‘atmosphere’ (CHN: *qìfèn*) (Bourdieu 1998). Consequently, the affective and fun aspects of these friendship networks and the spaces they occupy is valued as a form of capital, with competitive games and joking taking on the strategic aspects of this ‘field.’ This is similar to Goffman’s emphasis on the competitive stakes of a scenario; however, Bourdieu differs in his emphasis on the habituated and embodied way in which this sense of ‘stakes’ is experienced.

...the fact of being caught up in and by the game, of believing ..., to participate, to admit that the game is worth playing and that the stakes created in and through the fact of playing are worth pursuing; it is to recognise the game and to recognise its stakes. When you read, in Saint-Simon, about the quarrel of hats (who should bow first), if you were not born in a court society, if you do not possess the habitus of a person of the court, if the structures of the game are not also in your mind, the quarrel will seem ridiculous and futile to you. (Bourdieu 1998: 76–77)
On my first visit to the billiards hall, the congruence of these two concepts became apparent to me. I could see that one must become learned in the game, or develop a billiard player’s habitus, before one could fully appreciate the acts of virtuosity taking place. At the same time however, the sense of small victories and losses hung thick in the air, giving one a sense of the relationship between the “stakes” and the fun they generated.

On my first night in the billiards hall I decided to enter into the competition. I put my name down and had to pay 2000 yen to enter. Each game of billiards was randomised by a draw of cards. I drew a card with the number 8 written on it and was quickly directed to the table where I would play against a short chubby guy who had lived in Tokyo for 5 years. Despite explaining him politely claiming he was not very good, I suffered an embarrassing defeat, and the match slowly turned from a competition to a coaching session; him shouting “Haoqiu” (CHN: good ball) to encourage me whenever I sank a ball and cursing me admiringly whenever I put him in a bad position.

The evening continued in this way, me suffering defeat after defeat, and my opponents encouraging me. However, as the night drew on, my incredible lack of skill became a spectacle in itself, with some disbelieving laughs and jokes going on in the background. My efforts to play nonetheless gave me a sense of inclusion in the group and I appreciated the encouraging remarks I received throughout my defeats. I also felt
I had earned my welcome into the billiards group. At the end of the night one of the best players in the hall came up to me and said “Don’t worry, it looks like you’ve just got bad luck today” (CHN: ni de yunqi buhao), leaving me with a sense that I was welcome to try my luck again next week and also sparking my anthropological imagination as to the relationship between skill, luck and its social consequences.

My obvious lack of skill allowed me to create fun for others, as they showed their prowess in beating me (and taking my money). However, they communicated this to me as “bad luck”, which I believe was as much a statement of faith in the stakes of the game as it was friendly words intended to soothe my ego. Indeed, luck (CHN: yunqi) was a large part of how they described the allure of the game to me. They listed the way that ‘luck’ (CHN: yunqi) and ‘skill’ (CHN: nengli) combine in unknowable ways as one of the major attractions of getting together to play billiards. In my observation of their games, this was indeed the case. At times, players known for their prowess would be vexed by a poorer player whose ineptitude would put them in situations where they’d end up losing the game. Such occasions would often result in the higher player admitting defeat even before all the balls are sunk, to the amusement and jeers of those sitting nearby. One interlocutor, discussing this attraction of the game, said that he found the contemplation of all the different variations and possibilities soothing, and so he would always come to watch even if he didn’t play. Another said that he enjoyed the moments of ‘no-mind’ (CHN: wu xin) he
experienced when taking a shot. These elements of possibility, virtuosity and game-based affect create the context of drama for the billiards hall players.

The tension created between luck and skill in games has been discussed by several China studies scholars in relation to gambling (see Wang 1998; Bosco, Liu et al. 2009; Steinmuller 2011). Wang Mingming for example, argues that amongst Southern Fujianese people the tension of ‘ability/skill’ (CHN: nengli) and ‘fate/life’ (CHN: ming) creates a ‘social ontology’ (CHN: shehui bentilun) that Fujianese people use to describe their lives (Wang 1998). Joseph Bosco, Lucia Liu and Matthew West similarly explore the craze in lottery speculation in China, focusing on the “Mark Six” lottery (CHN: liuhecai), a game operated by the Hong Kong Jockey association that is illegal in Mainland China (Bosco et al. 2009). They argue that local speculations on the numerical predictability of the lottery (ie. Skill) are shared between participants and combined with narratives about the ‘rigged’ nature of the lottery. Bosco et al.’s discussion of the finite details of gambling and the lottery also demonstrates the relationship between micro-scale games of chance and macro-scale phenomena. In this sense, notions of fate also served as an allegory for Chinese peasants’ relationship to the state, and provided villagers with a sense of agency against contemporary neoliberal capitalist policy. As Bosco et al. argue, these games “represent ‘hidden transcripts’ of resistance… to the imposition of neoliberal policies and the enrichment by cadres in rural China” (Bosco et al. 2009: 55).
Hans Steinmuller’s work on gambling as a means of producing ‘social heat’ is of most relevance to the Ikebukuro billiards hall (Steinmuller 2011). He is critical of the reduction of gambling and speculation practice to the greater context of neoliberalism Bosco et al.’s paper. Citing Kipnis’ recent critique of ‘tropes of neoliberalism’ (Kipnis 2007), he argues for a practice-based theorization of gambling in Chinese social life.

I argue that analysing popular gambling in rural China in terms of ‘neoliberalism’ would mean positing an absolute and totalizing frame which misses out social action on the micro and medium range and obfuscates the interplay of local sociality, official discourse, and state control. (Steinmuller 2011: 264)

In particular, he focuses on dynamics between competitive play and games of chance as important to the production of ‘social heat,’ a term he uses to generally refer to terms such as renao, naore and huoqi (discussed in the previous chapter). He also distinguishes between the descriptions of fate (CHN: ming) and luck (CHN: yunqi) in Chinese, noting that luck is seen as something more within one’s control and less consequential. Gambling that affects one’s fate then, is seen as the negative and dangerous aspects of social heat, often only possible amongst young risk-taking men willing to force themselves into heavy debt through games of chance. In contrast,
whilst there are still stakes at hand, ‘play’ wan is less consequential, and seen as fine so long as small amounts of money are risked.

This wan side of gambling is also extremely important for the celebration of kinship, of friendship, even of relatedness in general.

To ‘play’ (wan) together is the best way to cement a relationship.

Wan can involve gambling, but also many other social activities, such as playing games of any kind, eating, making an excursion, chatting, joking, and so on. The social exchanges in these activities ideally should be lively, hot, and noisy··· in short they should produce ‘social heat’. (2011:268)

Like gambling, the potential loss of a small entrance fee to the winner and the status achieved through winning and losing games is a large part of how the feeling of fun and pleasure is generated within the billiards hall group. As much as my lack of skill was tolerated and seen as ‘bad luck’ for a while, it eventually came to position me as no fun to play against. My declining popularity as an opponent demonstrated the importance of ‘stakes’ of the game, showing how my ineptitude diminished my competitor’s sense of achievement. My sense of how important ‘stakes’ are to a sense of fun and ‘social heat’ was later confirmed for me when my friend said to me after a long night of hapless defeats “Playing with you isn’t interesting at all” (CHN: gen ni wanr, yidianr yemeiyi).
As I continued attending the billiards group, my participation in actual matches dwindled gradually, my lack of skill obviously becoming more of a bore than a joke. I opted to simply watch after a while, trying to make myself still part of the fun through taking peoples' names in the registration, providing drinks and cigarettes for attendees, and always being eager to spend extra time with people afterwards at the almost-weekly drinks at one of the local Chinese restaurants in Ikebukuro. Whilst the lampooning of an unskilful player was fun at first, it eventually came to diminish the sense of fatefulness of the game, which was embarrassing for me, but also illustrated the centrality of the game itself to this group. As much as they all told me that it was good to have fun with friends because of the loneliness of Japan, this fun was not merely generated out of friendship, but was mediated by a shared goal or activity. Hence, the game, much like Durkheim's totem, was what centred the group, each of them pouring social energies into it to get a sense of belonging (Durkheim 1965 [1915]).

Other games

My quasi-voluntary exclusion from the billiards matches did not exclude me from all the other forms of play and games involved in the group. Indeed, the billiards game explained in many ways 'why' this disparate group of Chinese men became friends, but not entirely 'how' they are friends. The pleasures derived from their friendship were not solely enacted through billiards, but also through the small bodily
techniques, rituals and habitus (Mauss 1954) which ran throughout their interactions, the feasting afterwards and the constant banter and joking.

One of the ways this occurred was through the constant play of jokes within the billiards hall. Part competitive practice, part frivolity, joking was ‘fun’ because it had a sense of fatefulness and skill associated with denigrating another, or deprecating oneself (which was often my position). This competitive practice allowed for the production of temporary ‘fields of sentiment’ where masculine forms of friendship and subject formation create a sense of conviviality. Joking focused on a person’s social position. It was a tactical and strategic play about a person’s networks of meaning which construct who they believe themselves to be, and how others see them.

The drama of social joking and banter is hard to capture analytically. As a non-native Chinese speaker, the webs of meaning, slang and accent elude me at times, and so a full transcript–based linguistic analysis of every joke would be almost impossible. Moreover, this would not fully capture the situational gestures and performances that add to each comedic act. One difficulty of researching a migrant context is the variety of different accents, slang and jokes one is exposed to. Having predominantly spent my time in Beijing, I was sometimes at a loss when those from other parts of Northern China started to make word plays based on their own regional ways of talking. I attempted to closely record the interplay of drinking, eating and joking on a few occasions but often succumbed to participating more than observing. I have included
an account of one of our evenings in hope of generating some sense of the fun and convivial atmosphere produced by such everyday practices. This occasion was early on in my introduction to the group, and due to my obvious efforts to record what was happening, situated me as the brunt of much of the joking and fun. Nonetheless, the level of banter and drinking was not exceptional to other instances I participated in.

As I walked in to the restaurant, I heard a rowdy table around the corner and found Aming, the hairdresser who introduced me to the group, along with eight others from the billiards group. They beckoned me over and re-arranged the seats making sure that I was equal distance to each them. They all started talking about the game that day and one of them, Yuanding mentioned that he lost the last bout with a player he’d sponsored that day, LaoHu. At that point LaoHu and his friend came in and sat down to my left, and Yuanding said to LaoHu with a cheeky smile “Eh you little thief, tonight you’re buying the drinks.” Everyone burst out laughing and throwing in jovial curses as the waiter came with a whole tray of beers. One of the players asked everyone “Drink?”, then answered his own question by saying “Not drinking” and jokingly unpacking the tray of beer onto the table in front of him. At this point everyone admonished him and started to ‘steal’ beers from where he’d placed them, and he feigned coveting like gestures as each one was taken. Yuanding grabbed one for me, holding it out as if to ask if I wanted one, to which I said “of course! Australians love to drink.” Yuanding eyed me with a challenging smile, saying “More than Chinese? Is this a challenge?” I paused, smiling, and one of the others yelled, “Hey, don’t give him any, it’ll be a waste, meaningless (CHN: meiyisi).” Another echoed him, “Yeah, I hear Australians drink beer like water!”

The topic then turned to questions about my accent, a man with a thick Beijing accent, hearing how I spoke, asked me “So how long did you live in Beijing?” I replied “just over a year.” He cheerfully complained “Fuck, I’ve been here 8 years and still can’t speak Japanese that well”
Yuanding then threw in a play on words, saying “You can, just one percent (CHN: ye hui shi yibaifen yilei),” which was particularly eloquent in Chinese because it rhymes. One of the others then laughed at the Beijinger and commented on his use of some Japanese words “Yeah, you’re always saying ‘majide’ majide” (A Japanese exclamation meaning “no way!”) and everyone laughed.

The Beijinger continued “I bet you this ‘foreigner’ (CHN: Laowai) can speak Japanese too.”

Yuanding interrupted as the Beijinger said ‘foreigner’ wittily stating, “Hey, we’re all foreigners here. Haha. I remember when I first got here I was so surprised by how many Europeans (sometimes used as a more polite way of referring to white people) there were. I was like ‘Oh, there’s a foreigner, and there’s one too’ and then I realised ‘Hey, I’m one too’” He mocked a wistful smile as though pondering mysterious relativity of it all. The evening continued this way until 4am in the morning, everyone laughing and beckoning each other to lift their glasses to toast every successful play of word, and every mocking gesture.

The good ‘atmosphere’ generated in these instances, much like a billiards game itself, allowed for the display of a wide array of similarities and differences within group. Nothing was taken seriously, save for the sense of play and creating a good ‘atmosphere’ (CHN: qìèn). The practice of joking falls under a wider register of practices that produce ‘sentiment/human feeling’ (CHN: gāngqìng), fun and what Chau has called a ‘social sensorium’ of renào.

Andrew Kipnis, working on guanxi in a rural Chinese village in Shandong, shows how networks are constituted by kinship, friendship, marital ties and fictive kinship relations (Kipnis 1997). These relationships are materially expressed and re-produced...
through practices of gift-giving, banqueting and other forms of bodily care, which he describes as sentiment or ‘ganqing.’ The production of ganqing also infers a sense of obligation which ensures future reproductions of guanxi. These relationships are marked by their patterns of complex integration between different kinds of relationship within a smaller village context, and make up much of the fabric of everyday life in the village.

Kipnis, referencing Sun Longji, argues that ganqing (sentiment/human feeling) is one of the most significant aspects of personhood in China. Whether it be the feelings one has for family or for friends, ganqing is the centrality of human feeling in Chinese life that dictates much of Chinese practice. Sun Longji dichotomises Chinese social relations between those of the ‘heart/mind’ (CHN: xīn) and those of the body/self (CHN: shen) (Sun 1987). These two are not entirely exclusive, but rather can be situated more like a ‘taiji’ symbol, a black and white circular symbol signifying how opposites balance and constitute one another (Sun 1987:17). Using this model, Sun assesses the issue of collective and individual selves in Chinese culture. He emphasizes the xīn self as most important, as it “actively overcomes the singular notion of self, thus connecting a person to people” (Sun 1987: 17).

Sun’s analysis of the “heart/mind” is put to particularly interesting use in Kipnis’ writing, as it shows “ganqing’s power to constitute the individual and the social” (1997:10). In this sense, the “heart/mind” and its individual motivations are
“always defined socially through ganqing” (1997:10). What is more, ganqing helps to form “magnetic fields of human feeling” (CHN: renqing de cilichang), creating the groups that people occupy. Kipnis argues that Sun’s value lies in his “grounding of subject formation processes in interpersonal relations” (1997:10). This notion of “magnetic fields of human feeling” and the co-constitution of the individual and the social are useful in considering friendship and its relation to the formation of the self. However, the priority accorded to the idea of the body/self (CHN: shen) and heart/mind (CHN: xin) as separate ignores the fact that ganqing is often materialised in explicitly bodily ways. Utilising Sun Longji’s discussion of ganqing in Chinese culture, Kipnis looks at how “Gift giving, toasting, and serving food at banquets, and ritualised decorum like bows and kowtow (CHN: ketou) are all methods of materializing ganqing” (1997:27). I would argue that ganqing is explicitly material in itself, and only communicable through embodied material interaction. In this way, the materiality of billiards and drinking created ganqing amongst the billiards hall group.

Bodily presence and interaction is another important aspect of friendship and the ganqing associated with it. Adam Chau focuses on the interactional and embodied sensorial production of Chinese fun and sociality (2008), using the term ‘affect,’ which has recently been popularized by theorists such as Deleuze, Guattari and Brian Massumi (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Massumi 2002). Felicity Colman writes of Deleuze’s concept of affect:
Affect is the change, or variation, that occurs when bodies collide, or come into contact. As a body, affect is the knowable product of an encounter, specific in its ethical and lived dimensions and yet it is also as indefinite as the experience of a sunset, transformation, or ghost (Colman 2005:11).

Adam Chau uses this concept of affect to describe “hot” and “fun” Chinese sociality (CHN: renao) as a form of ‘sociothermal affect’ (Chau 2008). The warmth of these occasions comes from the touching of bodies, the consumption of food and alcohol, loud music and occasional fireworks. This sense of ‘sociothermal affect’ captures the sensorial and embodied aspects of the billiards hall well. Amongst the billiard-playing men, the thick haze of cigarettes was ever-present, and the banquets were filled with faces reddened from alcohol. Chau uses this Chinese example to critique what he calls the “sensory-interpretation model” prevalent within the Anthropology of the senses and embodiment (Chau 2008: 488). Chau argues that too much ethnography treats sensory stimuli as outside of human sociality, which neglects “the active participatory role of human agents as makers of the social sensorium” (Chau 2008: 488 italics in original text).

A culture’s sensory order is instrumental in forming its people’s ways of perceiving, knowing, and being in the world, but what is left under-investigated is the nature of ‘the world.’ This ‘world’ is hardly a
Chau’s simple yet illustrative description of the importance of a socially created sensorium is inspirational. He extends the importance of social actors in creating their sensory worlds whilst leaving the concept of the ‘sensory’ open, having listed a wide range of smells, sights and sounds as well as temperatures. Reading his descriptions, I am taken back to many occasions with the billiards hall men, as well as other occasions I’ve celebrated with Chinese friends. However, Chau’s focus on renao leads him to concentrate on the sensorium of noise and temperature more than other practices. In particular, these senses feature heavily within Chinese dialects and so, are ‘good for speaking’ to paraphrase Levis-Strauss (1966). They have descriptive and linguistic equivalents that the analyst can use to create a captivating fit between the sensory and the linguistic. However, some experiences are less easily described and often less discussed; featuring as the everyday practices of semi-conscious habitus. Touch is one such sensory experience, and has featured less in the anthropological cannon than any other sense perhaps due to its elusive yet central place in our being—
in-the-world. Whilst one may be blind, deaf or anosmic, it is rare to find people with no touch, showing its central place as a shared experience.

The billiards hall is full of touching practices such as slaps on the back when joking, the playful distractions of touch used against one’s opponent when playing, the distinct habit of lounging over one another when relaxing between games, and cupping each others’ hands to light one another’s cigarettes. Similarly, the drinking parties that often arise from these contexts also involve the lighting of cigarettes, ecstatic toasting and chinking of glasses and increasingly close bodily contact as everyone becomes intoxicated. The men would constantly lean over one another, to ask a question or to express exhaustion after a big match; sitting close together or partially on each other’s laps and the occasional holding of hands when directing a friend somewhere. The lighting of cigarettes in particular involved a formalised ritual wherein the recipient cups the flame whilst the lighter cups the other side, and the recipient taps the hand of the lighter to give thanks.

The senses are intertwined to create a full sensory experience. As Michel Serres argues, this is more a topology than singular (as is implied in Merleau-Ponty’s focus on vision) where “the five or six senses are entwined and attached, above and below the fabric that they form by weaving or splicing, plaits, balls, joins, planes, loops and bindings, slip or fixed knots” (Serres 2008 [1985]: 7). Whilst theories of embodiment and the sensory have gained popularity in Anthropology, scholarship in
these areas tends to emphasize sight, sound and smell or a more general approach to
the body in total. For example, in Sarah Pinks recent field guide *Doing Sensory
Ethnography* she mentions ‘touch,’ but in the sources she cites and in her own
method she often treats ‘touch’ as an afterthought.

Touch deals explicitly with one’s presence to another person. Through
touching, the limits of oneself and the limits of the touched are collapsed into one
another. In this sense, a theoretical consideration of touch problematizes classical
distinctions like subject–object, and self–other like no other sensory experience, as
one can simultaneously occupy these positions depending on the touching act. If one
touches oneself, where does subject and object begin or end? If one touches another,
one simultaneously becomes object to the other whilst maintaining subjectivity to
oneself. At the same time however, touching reveals the boundary of ourselves and our
finitude. It is this simple yet illustrative problem that feeds much of Jean–Luc Nancy’s
work on ‘Being–with,’ and leads him to describe existence as a state of ‘Being
Singular–plural.’

From one singular to another, there is contiguity but not continuity.

There is proximity, but only to the extent that extreme closeness
emphasizes the distancing it opens up. All of being is in touch with all
of being, but the law of touching is separation; moreover, it is the
heterogeneity of surfaces that touch each other. *Contact* is beyond
fullness and emptiness, beyond connection and disconnection. If “to come into contact” is to begin to make sense of one another, then this “coming” penetrates nothing; there is no intermediate and mediating “milieu.” Meaning is not a milieu in which we are immersed. There is no mi-lieu [between place]. It is a matter of one or the other, one and the other, one with the other, but by no means the one in the other, which would be something other than one or the other (another essence, another nature, a diffuse or infuse generality). From one to the other is the syncopated repetition of origins-of-the-world, which are each time one or the other. (Nancy 2000: 6-7)

Lighting another’s cigarette whilst cupping the flame and tapping their hand for thanks produced a sentiment of familiarity and egalitarianism between members of the hall who knew little of each other outside. Indeed, one man who often failed to do so, sticking his cigarette out to be lit by others without tapping for thanks, was jokingly reprimanded by another for ‘thinking he was the boss’ (CHN: ni yiwei ni shi laoda!), that sort of behaviour being reminiscent of a mafia king ignoring his underlings. In this sense, it was not the sentiment towards the other that was seen as inappropriate but rather the communicative act in itself. Indeed, Chau cites similar acts to this, which he defines under the Chinese concept of “responding upon feeling” (CHN: ganying), which foregrounds the moral obligation of responsiveness (2008:491). He uses this example to criticize phenomenological accounts that rely on the “sensory-
interpretative” such as Merleau-Ponty’s argument that the visual “awakens an echo in the body” or Csordas’ reference to “attention” as somehow separate from the embodied act itself.

The Chinese concept of *ganying* stresses the action in response to the feeling rather than merely and interior ‘echo’ (Merleau-Ponty) or ‘attention,’ somatic or otherwise, to one’s own and others’ bodies (Csordas) (Chau 2008: 491)

Whilst I agree wholeheartedly with Chau’s notion of the sensorial production of the social, his analysis hints at a sensory version of Durkheim’s ‘collective effervescence’, which doesn’t allow for the chance that some within the sensorium find it loud, unpleasurable, or indeed the sentiment generated unconvincing. Using the work of Nancy adds to Chau’s celebration of the sensory, by showing that contact can simultaneously connect and distance the self from the world. In touching the other, the self is exposed as part of, and separate to, the other. What Nancy calls being singular–plural (2000). The men of the billiards hall used sensory cues such as noise and smell to create a convivial atmosphere, and from this, an aspect of their identity as Chinese migrants. However, this sensorial identity construction can also be its own undoing. As Nancy’s work suggests, self-building can be undone by something as simple as touch, which ‘others’ one from one’s companions, suggesting the precarious nature of friendship and its effect on self-formation.
Chapter Eight- From friendship to elsewhere

The very fact of the concentration acts as an exceptionally powerful stimulant. When they are once come together, a sort of electricity is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation...[W]hen arrived at this state of exaltation, a man does not recognize himself any longer...

Everything is just as though he really were transported into a special world entirely different from the one where he ordinarily lives, and into an environment filled with exceptionally intense forces that take hold of him and metamorphose him (Durkheim 1965:246-47;249-50).

The strong sense of mirth and play I felt within this group of men led me to see their interactions as a kind of temporary “collective effervescence” where friendship and conviviality was communicated in both competitive and sensory ways.

Consequently, the topic of friendship became an obsession of mine close to the end of my fieldwork. I finally felt that I had developed some close relationships with people in Ikebukuro and came to depend on their companionship when I was lonely. By this time, I was living in the small dormitory mentioned in the earlier chapters, and was feeling the sense of atomization in Tokyo vividly. My participant-observations had started to overwhelm me as I interacted with small groups across Ikebukuro. The small spaces I lived in alongside my fellow dorm-mates were also becoming frustrating. I often sat at
night listening to my neighbours' conversations with friends and family via QQ, MSN or Weibo, through the thin, unfinished partitions which separated our rooms. I was subjected to these sounds throughout the night, but was unable to participate in this part of their lives, often greeted by tired looks implying "Mind your own business," when I asked about their families and conversations in the shared kitchen area the next day. These sorts of experiences left me fascinated by the relationships I was partially exposed to, but I was also frustrated by the barriers to participatory-observation I met in Ikebukuro. In contrast, the billiards group was a haven of sociability. At this point, I decided to conduct some formal interviews in order to focus on the topic of family and friendship more specifically. Rather than finding correspondence between my sense of strong friendships within this group and ways in which its participants understood their friendships however, I discovered a great sense of distrust throughout the group, much like that I had found in my original forays into issues of community and the Ikebukuro Chinatown I had come to explore.

On one of the days prior to the weekly billiards match, I arranged to meet one of the regulars, "Laozhou" to have a coffee and conduct an interview in the hall before the others arrived. He was by far one of the most successful and mature of my informants. He had originally come to Japan to study design after holding down a job for a few years in China. He was 35, married and had worked in a Japanese company for a while. He also spoke excellent English. We sat on a couch and shared a pack of cigarettes as I went through a series of "warm-up" questions about where he grew up,
whether he’d ever imagined coming to Japan when he was young, and some questions about his experiences in Japan. I then attempted to enquire further about the relationships that were important to Laozhou. I’d used this technique with several others and had found it generally successful. Taking inspiration from Spencer and Pahl’s social mapping method that ranked people on a piece of paper, I asked informants to write down the names of the most important people in their lives on blank cards, and then to sort them into categories of importance and discuss the differences among them. However, Laozhou looked at the cards, and wrote down the names of his parents, siblings and one friend in China. I asked “No friends in Japan?” and Laozhou started listing the various reasons why he didn’t list anyone in Japan. At first he listed the reasons why he didn’t consider any of his Japanese acquaintances friends. Despite having lived in Japan for a long time, and listing the various circumstances which he thought would produce friendships with Japanese colleagues and classmates, Laozhou did not consider any of them as “friends.” Laozhou’s comments did not entirely surprise me, as intercultural animosity and differing norms on what one does with their friends had often popped up in conversations with my Chinese interlocutors and Japanese friends. My Chinese interlocutors would often complain of how Japanese people would “make friends” (CHN: jiào pengyou) only to spend months without contacting them, resulting in a “cold” (CHN: lèng) feeling about the whole relationship. Similarly, my Japanese friends would complain about the overwhelming and immediate intimacy many Chinese men expected as soon as one
became friendly. Considering these differences, Laozhou’s comments did not surprise me.

However, Laozhou did not reserve his sceptical remarks to Japanese acquaintances. After discussing his “feeling” about Japanese people, he then continued to discuss the “selfish” (CHN: zisì) and exclusive nature of Chinese friendships. I asked about the billiards group, which I had observed him joyfully spending his time with, and he stated “They’re just for playing billiards. They’re just drinking buddies. Lots of people here don’t know my full name and I don’t know theirs. They don’t worry about me. I could die and they’d just say ‘Oh he died.’” He then continued to make a more general statement about Chinese friendship practices, which sparked my ethnographic imagination.

“It doesn’t matter where you go in China, it’s like this. Friends are friends, outside of this circle are only those so-called ‘friends’ we meet occasionally, like ‘banquet buddies’ (CHN: jiuropengyou). We’ll always ask, ‘who would you put first?’ and of course they (Chinese people) wouldn’t think about any of those people [outside of their circle of friends].”

“If you’re not a friend then you’re a potential enemy. You look at these guys here [he nods to the billiards hall]. No one knows who anyone else is. The first thing is always to protect yourself. Of course, after a while some of us regulars have gotten to know each other, but there still isn’t that much trust there.”

After the interview, I stayed to watch everyone play and tested my meagre skills against a few young students who had come in to watch. As I walked around that
day, I started to feel conflicted about my understanding of the dynamics of this group.

They all laughed and cheered each other on, jovially calling this or that person “brother.” I wondered how this fit with Laozhou’s comments, and with the similar observations I had started to collect from other interviews.

I noticed a few of the regulars looking over a piece of paper with balls and a green background on it. It was an advertisement for a big competition they were putting together: “The first, end of year Chinese-in-Japan (Zainichi Chinese) Billiards Championship” (CHN: Dìyījié zàií huàrèn tàiqìu dàjiàngsài).

Below this title, written in bold red font, was the slogan “100,000 yen trophy! We’re waiting for you to get it” (CHN: shìwàn yuán dàjiàng: dēng nǐ na). Along the sides were the names of businesses and organisations that had lined up to help, such as Dabao restaurant, Yipin hotpot restaurant, the all-Japan driving school (a driving school set up for Chinese migrants) and a wide variety of newspapers. I asked who had come up with the idea and YuanDing, one of the regulars told me how they had thought of it while drinking at one of the local restaurants. They thought it
would encourage more people to come to the regular weekly event, and give them an incentive to keep coming to hone their skills. I asked where the 100,000 yen came from, and he grinned, saying that a few of the restaurants have vouched for it but that if each entrant pays 5000 yen to enter then they only needed 30 people to cover the prize and hall costs. He added, “But I think we’ll get more.” He continued that this was a good advertising opportunity, and so a lot of businesses had promised their support. For example, one of the regulars who knew staff at the Yanguang newspaper had thrown together the promotional poster with their help.

That evening I went around asking people whether they knew about the competition, and many responded with surprised sounds to the effect that they’d heard it mentioned, but didn’t know if it was going to happen. My questioning turned out to be a form of advertising. Many seemed happy for it to occur without holding any explicit opinion on it, while others were opposed to the competition, saying that the problem with the billiards group now was that there were too many strangers already; they didn’t want to attract more and, as my hairdresser friend who regularly attended observed, “This effort to make money will simply destroy the feeling of the group. Isn’t this just supposed to be fun?”

That night, after the billiards game had concluded at 11pm, Yuanding and some of the regulars said they were going to Dabao restaurant to meet the owner “Second Brother” (CHN: Er-ge), show him the poster, and discuss the competition with him.
“Second Brother” was a man in his mid-fifties who had come to Japan in the 1990s on the profits he had made as an entrepreneur in Harbin. His northern Chinese speech thickly accented his Japanese, and he seemed to spend most of his time entertaining customers whilst his daughter and staff ran the business. He was an incredibly warm man, who prior to this evening had several times drunkenly promised to take me to his ancestral village. Despite his affectionate promises however, his jovial demeanour and love for idle chat meant that it was very difficult to find out exactly how it was he came to manage this restaurant; his stories often took unexpected and humorous turns. For example, when I asked him why everyone called him “Second Brother” he said, “Well if the restaurant was big they’d call me ‘Big brother’ (CHN: Da-Ge) but as the shop is small they call me ‘Second Brother’ (Er-Ge). And don’t I look like an ‘Er-Ge’?"; he started acting slightly half-witted and speaking in a northern accent so thick I couldn’t understand him. At first I was confused by his explanation, until I later found out that “Er-Ge” was a television series in China that featured a loveable but somewhat silly northerner akin to Forrest Gump. The term “Second” (Er) has also taken on a slightly derogatory tone due to its translated English initial being “S”, which stands in for the term “sha” (stupid). In line with this logic, “Second Brother” can also be read “SB” which can also mean “shabi” (stupid cunt), although the second term is not as strong in Chinese as its English translation, being a common term used by men on the internet and in mobile phone text exchanges. Others told me later on
that “Second Brother” asking us to call him by a slightly insulting name was a way of affecting closeness, rather than something derogatory.

That evening, he greeted us loudly and told us all to go to the private room upstairs. As we sat, he ordered the staff to bring drinks and dishes of all sorts, saying “Tonight it’s my treat!” We all interjected; “There’s no need, Second Brother,” but he insisted. Over the evening, YuanDing took out the poster to show Second Brother and he nodded approvingly, noting his restaurant’s name printed on the side. He made promises to provide discount vouchers for his restaurant to all attendees of the competition, and to vouch for the trophy prize if not enough people competed. Everyone graciously accepted with a chorus of “There’s no need”, “That’s too much,” and so forth. I was positioned second down from the head of the table, within reach of Second Brother, so that I could fill his glass and accompany him for toasts, getting drunker with every one of his enthusiastic promises.

After a while, Second Brother started to justify his generosity. He began to talk about how they “as brothers” (CHN: xiongdimen) should support each other. A series of toasts to one another followed this statement, as the drinkers lamented the hardships they faced as migrants in Japan, and expressed the thick emotions they felt for one another. As I sat close to Second Brother, they would often take an instructive tone with me, telling me how important brotherhood is to Chinese people and demanding I keep up with the toasts. At one point, as I took a break to go to the
bathroom, I waited until someone else was finished and was chastised for not peeing with the rest of them, because “that is what brothers do.”

Despite the play of toasts and declarations of brotherly love for one another, I couldn’t help but recall Laozhou’s comments earlier in the day. Were their declarations of brotherly sentiment merely a performance, or was the cynicism Laozhou showed an attempt to appear worldly? At one point Laozhou leaned over to me amongst the toasts and said in English into my ear “They don’t mean what they are saying.” I became more confused, as I thoroughly enjoyed these occasions and felt very close to these men, however individual interviews with them had started to show that they did not feel as close to one another as their performances implied. I asked members of the group whether the friends they have in Japan were important to them, and consistently observed sceptical remarks about how the people they knew in Japan were simply “for fun,” (CHN: *wei le wanr de*) and were not people that they’d really rely on. Like Laozhou, one of the members of the billiards group put it in these terms.

“To tell the truth, before... when I was in the Mainland I had a lot of important friends, but after being away for about a year we haven’t been in touch. Besides this, the friends I’ve come across outside [CHN: waimian chuangdao de pengyou], there isn’t a single person I feel really close to. The friends that are next to you... you think, can they help you? And I tell you, I can’t think of any [who can/would]. It’s because we don’t really spend that much time together, so I don’t know what they’re really like; we haven’t lived together or anything like that. So would they help me? In fact, I don’t know? It’s possible they may show concern for me and help, but I don’t understand
them, and wouldn’t rely on them. We come from different places and live different lives after all. I don’t even know what half of them do.

Everyone in Japan is very independent (CHN: du/i) and they’re also very busy, no one has time to go find "true friends" (CHN: zhenxing de pengyou). It’s just that, you can meet someone, think “Hey, this person is a true friend,” and then all of a sudden they’ll go. Or you go. Afterwards will you still keep in touch? Very few people do. Some of my classmates will, they’ll contact me once or twice a year, in Japan it’s really rare though. So you asking me whether they’re important or not, I can’t say any kind of “importance” (CHN: shuobushang shenme zhongyao).

At the moment you probably think that I am surrounded by friends, right? But can you really say that if you have a problem you can ask them for a hand? How to put it...it’s just that, everyone is simply brought together through a hobby (CHN: aihao zai yiqi), just to take advantage of life/ to enrich your life (CHN: shenghuo chenshang); you know, eat together, have a chat, drink together...But this doesn’t really mean much to my life, they are just one part, right? It’s just for fun. They are what we call in China ‘Drinking buddies’ (CHN: Jiurou pengyou you drink, play and do all those sorts of things together, but that’s enough. You don’t want to get too close, because every ones’ heart is constrained (CHN: mianqiang).

When we’re all together it seems we’re all very happy (CHN: kaixin), but it’s just for play. You know, after playing some mahjong or billiards we’re very happy (CHN: kaixin), its good. But a true, mutually helping each other out kind of situation, if they, or if I...if they needed help I could probably do so but I’m not sure they would for me. It’s probably a matter of degree, you know a small amount of money at dinner or something, but does this come to the level of friend? Or is it simply a good public relationship (CHN: gongzhong de guanxi)’?"
Many felt that this sceptical mode was part of their migrant condition, and experienced feelings of disappointment about their life projects.

"It’s totally different here. The relationship between Chinese and Chinese here is one where you’ll never find particularly close (CHN: tebie tiexin) friendships. I have not a single friend that matters."

"Why is this?" I asked.

"Because we’re abroad. How to put it, perhaps it’s getting used to a second language that has changed this. Or our busy lives. Or maybe we learnt it from the Japanese. We’re afraid of being cheated (CHN: pian), this is certain, being just one person abroad. Right? You think, if you were cheated back in China, you’d have your family, your parents. So it’s not like overseas, you don’t have a single person who’s concerned [about you]. You could say that overseas its tough (CHN: xinku), you’re alone and you have no money. You just go home alone; when you go home you call your parents only to realize that you’ve achieved nothing here (CHN: yiwusuocheng)."

"How is that?"

"To not have accomplished much, you know, spent many years overseas and have nothing to show for it. You are an outsider to your own feelings, putting on a front (CHN: zuole renqing ziwaide). So, what do people in Japan become; their expressions all become fake, they put on a front."

This attitude was mirrored by another member of the group, who was sceptical about the sincerity (CHN: shiyi) of group members’ actions.
"They aren’t the same as the people you grew up with, those people will always be the closest. In Ikebukuro, a lot of the time it is not that sincere (CHN: shiyi). You know, sometimes its for business, sometimes just for fun. But then again, there are people you meet here who are really close. For example I met my fiancé here. She’s the person I am closest to."

Another man in the billiards group shared similar sentiments, and was dubious of the attempt to organise the billiards competition and give the group a name. I interviewed him on a Wednesday afternoon in the billiards hall before the others had arrived.

"This group of billiards players is only brought together because they like billiards. It’s just fun... they like to play and that’s it. But some things aren’t that simple..."

I ask "Such as?"

"In Japan it doesn’t matter if they’re Japanese or Chinese, the friendships here are immediate (CHN: zhijie) and unfeeling/cold (CHN: lengku)."

“But you have lots of friends here.” I nod towards the billiards hall where the group meets.

“In China we have a saying ‘its only possible to have others envy you, no one will pity you’ (CHN: zhihui youren xianmu ni, meiyou ren kelian ni). It means, when you’re doing well you’ll have lots of friends, but when you’re not doing well you’ll have no one to help you. We’re all just together because we CAN (CHN: hui) play together, not because we NEED (CHN: xuyao) each other."

“So why bother making it more formal with a competition?” I ask.
"Some of those guys think of themselves as mobsters or something like that simply because they all know each other. They're just boasters (CHN: chuiniule). It's boring, they just say things they don't mean (CHN: bujiaobiao de hua), and boast (CHN: chuiniubi). Real friends will just naturally help each other; they don't need these organizational titles or groups (CHN: tuanti). It's just because they want to boast."

The championship

Despite the overwhelming number of cynical responses about the sincerity of the billiards group I had observed, the members managed to organise the proposed competition with very little internal division or dissent. It was publicly announced at a very late date (only a month before the competition day) and as I had not known about it until then, I had already arranged to be overseas with my family for Christmas (the competition being on Boxing Day). I scrambled to collect interviews about it before hand (many of which provided the excerpts above), so that I could get a sense of how
the organization of the competition fit into everyone’s view of the group. I discovered that it was really only the dream project of two of the regulars, but that everyone else was happy to go along with it. “As long as I get to pay billiards,” one of the regulars said, “they can do whatever they like.”

When I asked one of the managers of the billiards hall about the competition, he was very positive about it; Chinese students and workers “probably make up 40 per cent of our customers, and so, of course I support this kind of competition, is it not good (JPN: ii janai ka?).” Every single one of the regulars I knew from the group attended the competition, and in the month leading up to it all contributed the small amounts of money required to sign up (CHN: baoming).

On December 26 2010 the first All-Zainichi Chinese Billiards Championship (CHN: di yi jie zairi huaren taiqiu dajiangsai) was held in the billiards hall in Ikebukuro. The competition started at 10am and was initiated with several formal speeches by representatives of sponsors, as well as hopeful remarks about the intended effects of the competition on the Chinese people living in Japan. The competition initially ran as a series of small group competitions that led to the knockout round before the semi-final and final. Amongst the 60 competitors there were the “Lao Jianghu” (literally “rivers and lakes” referring to itinerant kung fu masters and vagrants) who carried their own specialised cues, as well as friends and enthusiasts who were associated with the regular billiards groups. There were also a few unknowns (CHN: lengmen) in the
small group competitions. The competition lasted over 12 hours and culminated in a
dramatic final competition which was documented by journalists on the Modern China
Net (CHN: xiandai zhongguo wang) news service in the following way:

By late that evening, the climax finally arrived. The finalists Liu and Weite became the focal point
of the day. Their tables kept fans going for the 12 and half hours of competition without losing
interest. Weite’s friends stood by his side until the final round. His spirit of play was stable;
thinking well, and accustomed to the closely fought contest with his opponent, Weite relied on his
calm and cool-headed psychological quality (CHN: xinli suzhi) and excellent skills to win the day.
His opponent was his good friend Liu Yuncheng, who attended the competition at Weite’s
invitation. So when the final competition started there were no brandished swords but chatting
and laughing together. (Guo 2011, translation my own)

Liu eventually won the final round that evening and a series of formal awards followed.
All attendees won a small award which was orchestrated as a ‘lucky dip’ by the
The billiards hall staff and the grand champion’s trophy itself was a 10,000 yen necklace donated by the Chinese Weekly (CHN: huarenzhoubao). The All-Japan driving school also donated over 10,000 yen worth of lesson vouchers as part of the prizes; an important commodity for new migrants eager to get work as a delivery driver.

The goal of the competition was to create an incredibly warm atmosphere (CHN: shìfènreliè) and to promote the various businesses that had contributed monetarily. The competition succeeded this with aplomb with all those attending stating they hoped the Zainichi Chinese Billiards Championship would become a yearly event. The festivities which followed the competition could also be described as one of the “renao” events of the year. The winner, Liu, used his prize money to treat his friends to a large banquet and karaoke session in the nearby Ikebukuro area, which many of them regaled me with stories of on my return to the field.
This event signified a solidification of sorts, and was quite unexpected to me considering the group's previously sceptical remarks about their relationship with one another. In naming the championship, they used the term “in Japan” (CHN: Zairi), the Chinese pronunciation of an identity marker that has been used by Japan’s other major migrant group, the “in Japan” (JPN: Zainichi) Koreans. The term literally means simply to reside in Japan, the first character “Zai” meaning “in” and second meaning “sun”(CHN: Ri/JPN: Nichi), which is the first character in the shared northeast Asian terms for Japan (JPN: nihon CHN: riben), literally meaning the “origin of the sun.” Although the meaning of Zainichi is “in Japan” however, the term is now almost synonymous with immigrant Koreans in common Japanese discourse, as it is in Japan studies literature on migration. Hence, I have opted to translate the championship title with the term “Zainichi Chinese” due to its common use within Japan studies.
The use of the term *Zaire/zainichi* Chinese in the title of the competition signals a different strategy compared to the use of other terms for Chinese migrants in Japan. The term more commonly used in Ikebukuro was *Xinhuaqiao* “new overseas Chinese,” which was the common term within newspapers, and featured heavily in the Ikebukuro Chinatown discourse. Moreover, the term for “Chinese” the billiards players used also differed to some extent for the usual terms, as they tended to use “*huaren,*” a general term for ethnic Chinese which includes overseas Chinese groups as well as mainlanders.

When I started researching the group, they simply referred to themselves as a group of friends; however, by the time of the competition they had rebranded their activities as the Zainichi Chinese Billiards Association (CHN: *zairi huaren taiqiu banhui*). They had created an advertisement on several online media such as Xinhuanet and Xiaochuncnjp.com, which are sites that Chinese migrants in Japan use to share information. At first I thought this competition signalled the emergence of a new identity for the group, one more cohesive and identified with their shared presence in Japan as Zainichi Chinese. However, when I asked three members of the group after the competition in January, they stated that this was merely “for advertising” (CHN: *guanggao*) purposes, and that it didn’t really mean anything. The organisers iterated similar sentiments. When I asked about this title of the competition, “Zainichi Chinese” (CHN: *zairi huaren*), one of the two organizers of the competition stated that they wanted as many people to come as possible, so using these terms would attract
Chinese people from Yokohama and elsewhere in Tokyo. He continued that there were originally more Taiwanese people in Ikebukuro, and they didn’t want to deter them from the games. When I asked what he meant by this he elaborated; “Some ‘Chinese’ (CHN: Zhongguoren) think ‘Chinese’ (CHN: Zhongguoren) sounds bad.” At first, I interpreted the competition and the changes in the way the group labelled themselves as a shift in the group’s identity. However, an organizer of the group said to me, “There’s no change! This is just so we can play more happily (CHN: wanr de geng kaixin). Also, people are always leaving, so if we get organized then it’ll mean there’ll always be someone to play with.”

Later on he also told me that he hoped to return to China someday soon “maybe in the next five years,” and that if he made enough money he would open a billiards hall. He continued that the competition organization was thus a good experience (CHN: jìngyàn), enabling him to see how these sorts of things can make money.

**The role of “banquet buddies”**

When I asked people about the competition in January, they talked about how everyone went “crazy” (CHN: fèngle) after the game, and that most of the champion’s winnings were spent by the end of the night. Much like a potlatch ritual where the dynamics of gift-giving and feasting can create a sense of equality for members of a group if the right dynamics of reciprocity are observed, the winnings of the day were
redistributed so that the social sensorium and the friendship it produced could be even more ecstatic (Mauss 1954 [1925]). It is not that the material exchange enacted in the banqueting afterwards was calculated to the point of a zero-sum, but rather that this act of feasting communicated a certain kind of friendship where obligation and reciprocity were quickly dispersed to create a sense of light convivial play.

In his descriptions of urban guanxi production, Kipnis notes that urban forms of friendship have several forms, some more materially beneficial than others.

"At Nanjing University, I heard college students differentiate between two types of friendships. One was based on deep mutual ganqing and a willingness to sacrifice materially for one’s friend. The other consisted of an affected ganqing and was established for the purposes of enabling mutually beneficial material exchanges. The sarcasm adopted when calling both sorts of guanxi “friendships” illustrates the difference between these two sorts of guanxi. However, here I would also emphasize the similarity. Even when two “friends” desire only a mutually beneficial exchange, they still find it necessary to affect ganqing. In both instances ganqing and mutual indebtedness go together." (Kipnis 1997)

These forms of urban friendship practices are often used for practical purposes, according to Kipnis, without necessarily jeopardising a distinct ethics of ganqing.
production. They also relate to the distinct experiences of post-socialist Chinese urban life, where personal relationships are crucial to career advancement and wealth.

Kipnis uses the term “practices of ganqing avoidance,” to explore ways of manipulating relationships that do not depend on ganqing explicitly (2002). He provides several examples of this such, as the writing up of contracts, and other small practices such as speech etiquette and gift giving.

“Practices of guanxi production manipulate relationships by presuming a congruence between ganqing and material obligation. This congruence does not imply that practices of guanxi production can only work to deepen relationships. Diminishing both ganqing and material obligation, by giving a smaller gift than expected for example, can still be considered a practice of guanxi production because of the presumed or asserted correlation between feeling and obligation. In contrast, practices of ganqing avoidance work to limit ganqing without diminishing the obligations associated with the relationship. Practices of ganqing avoidance attempt to produce the situation in which feelings are irrelevant to social relations.” (Kipnis 2002: 31)

In many ways, the practices of the billiards hall players can be seen as both a form of guanxi production and ganqing avoidance, as the production of a loose, weak network of associates with little sense of obligation to one another. On the other hand,
their practices can also be seen as *gangqing* production with *guanxi* avoidance. These dynamics are clearly at play in the context of the billiards hall group. To the men of the billiards hall, *gangqing* and *guanxi* were an economy of practice for their lives back in China, even though they often developed instrumental and sentimental networks in Japan. When I enquired about these topics, the ensuing discussion focused on “types” of people rather than ideal social forms. In particular, the terms ’banquet buddies’ or ’fair-weather friends’ (CHN: *jiurou pengyou*) were constantly reiterated. However, few of my interlocutors could really define what a ’Banquet buddy’ was, other than through what they ’do.’

For the billiards players a ’banquet buddy’ was someone whose only attachment to you was through play. As one player said “They’re just for eating [with], drinking, and playing to one’ s heart’s content” (CHN: *tamen zhishi, chi, he, wuér de hen tongkuāi*). Others explained to me that they are just there for the moment, and that you wouldn’t contact them afterwards other than to organize another drinking session. What is more, they often used the term in the negative, as in “they are *only* (CHN: *zhīshí*) or *just* (CHN: *ěr yì*) a banquet buddy.” Scott Wilson has discussed how ’banquet buddies’ facilitated industrialization in the reform era rural areas as groups of entrepreneurs, bankers and managers met together in the late 1980s and early 90s to produce farm projects (Wilson 1994). That, however, was a very different social context. Rather than men experiencing the ’floating’ life of a migrant, Wilson’s
account involved the very ’rooted‘ peasant entrepreneurs and cadre of rural China in the 1980s.

A cursory search on the Chinese blogosphere shows that the ’floating‘ interpretation of the term has become more common and valued. ’Banquet buddies‘ are not seen as true friends, but merely people to share good times, especially amongst young bloggers. Some entries state that ’banquet buddies‘ are “useless,” before defending the affective uses they hold. The author of the blog “Clear water Archives” (CHN: chushuiwenku), Li Peiming writes

“What people have in this world, besides their parents, are largely friends. There is no way to choose your parents, but you can still discriminate among friends. Older people often tell us we must take care in choosing friends, that “being close to the cinnabar makes you red, and the pitch makes you black” (i.e. environment changes a person). Make more kind and frank friends, and fewer “banquet buddies.”” (Li 2004, translation my own)

The author details how, despite her parents advice, she found that the light friendships of “banquet buddies” had their own uses.

“I accept your criticism, good medicine tastes bitter, why don’t I love to simply spend time with the friends who truly love you and will help you? It’s true! It’s true! They will help me in my growth and my future, but they can’t help with my mood at all.” (Li 2004, translation my own)

Similarly, Zhou Hailiang of the blog “Thanksgiving” (CHN: GanEn) (Zhou 2008) writes:
“According to past sayings, the most useless friends in the world are banquet buddies. Banquet buddies drink wine and eat meat; when the wine dwindles and the meat is finished they’ll all disperse in a stupor. Can this kind of friend be counted as a friend? Of course they can...

Banquet buddies are pure friends, drink a little wine, have a little chat, if happy you’ll sing a few songs, if unhappy you can curse your mother, no demands, no desires, no schemes or hidden meanings (CHN: wusuojiliang he wenzhang). If you have a few friends like this by your side, loose and relaxed you’ll be and your life will be a great pleasure.” (Zhou 2008, translation my)

The kind of masculine friendship found in the billiards hall is seen as the practice of ‘banquet buddies.’ Although labelled as such, the relationships constructed amongst these men still enact powerful and enjoyable sentiments within a particular social space. Despite showing a lack of trust for one another, the billiards players enjoyed each other’s company and continued to play games and drink together, for this is what a 'banquet buddy' is. Much like Nancy’s description of touch as showing both one’s shared relation with others and the limit of that sharing, the “touch” of performance involves the shared aspects between self and other that make a social sensorium sensible.
Chapter Nine- Family and Being a migrant

Reflecting on his research on international Lebanese migrants, Ghassan Hage states, "it is a mistake to think that if people move across national borders, this movement is necessarily the most significant and defining element in their lives" (Hage 2005: 459). Critical of migration literature’s tendency to overemphasize the importance of “imagined communities” and mobility as the defining aspects of migrant life, Hage argues for more careful ethnographic attention to what is symbolically significant in people’s lives. Within this thesis, I have demonstrated that there is no singular imagined community amongst Chinese migrants in Tokyo, and that efforts to create an identifiable symbol of such an imaginary, such as the “Tokyo Chinatown” in Ikebukuro, were contested as much amongst Chinese migrants as local Japanese community organizations. Amongst the people I spoke with, migration was by no means the most purposeful aspect of their lives, as the decision to move was often seen as accidental or serendipitous. Although ‘normal,’ the decision to move to Japan was by no means smooth, and once in a new place many found themselves with a sense of disjuncture or tension in their lives. In part, this disjuncture reflected the spatial and mobile dynamics of Tokyo itself, in which for many only ‘hidden’ plateaus of sociality were available. I was disappointed to find that many of these plateaus held little importance in how they imagined their lives. Hence, I would paraphrase Hage in saying that it is a mistake to assume that simply because you are observing people’s lives in a particular
situation and place, those circumstances do not necessarily mark the most important things in their lives.

My interest in friendship and community led me to more formal interviews in the last few months of my fieldwork. I worked my networks, collecting interviews first amongst my dorm mates, then in the billiards hall, and was then referred on to friends and co-workers of my interlocutors. Altogether I collected 28 two-hour interviews consisting of life narratives, social mapping exercises and unstructured discussions about whatever came up. Much like my conversation with Laozhou, in the social mapping exercise I would ask my interviewees to list the most important people in their lives on small flashcards, and then ask them to describe their relationship with each person listed. I would ask them to sort them into groups or rank them depending on how comfortable the interviewee was with the task. The intention of this exercise was to not pre-suppose the importance of any form of relationship and to try to be inductive in my data collection. I expected a great deal of diversity in people’s responses, recognizing the unique positions and relationships they had formed. I had expected people to list friends and other figures such as teachers as much as relatives, but to my surprise, my interviewees were consistent in emphasizing a wide range of family relations as most important.

Whilst conducting this exercise with a 21 year old Chinese student within my dormitory, I was asked a question of morals. He had just written down his parents’
names on each card and described a little about them when he stopped and asked me a question.

"If you had both your wife and your mother fall into a river but you could only save one, who would you save?"

I paused for a second and said "Of course I want to save both"

"But you can only choose one," he said. I thought of my mother and knew that my understanding of her nature would make this decision for me. My mother has always had a flair for the melodramatic, and had in fact broken into macabre discussions of this sort at family get-togethers before. Indeed, she would talk about how she wasn't getting any younger and that she didn't mind so much, particularly since my father died. When I weighed this up against the prospective future I held with my wife, it seemed clear what my mother would want me to do. And so I said, "I would save my wife."

The Chinese student chuckled a little before saying "Jamie, you're too cruel! (CHN: ni tai canren le)"

I shrugged and asked, "So who would you save?"

"Of course I'd save my mother. You only have one mother, but you can always find another wife. This is where you're different from Chinese people!"

Later I tried to find the on-line version of this story. Within Chinese blog forums, answers to this moral question were not nearly as clear-cut as the young student implied. In fact, the most popular version of the question was a joke, which
went through various famous Chinese figures guessing what their answer would have been. The decision to save one’s mother was that of Mencius (the classical Confucian scholar who espoused filial piety and righteousness), whilst the decision to save one’s wife was the option chosen by King You of Zhou, a figure renowned for throwing out his queen for the love of his favourite concubine and then playing tricks on the kingdom just to make her laugh. The other figures included Zhuangzi, the Daoist scholar, who sat by the side of the river singing a song whilst his wife and mother both drowned (a reference to a famous story in which he celebrated when his wife died because there is nothing sad in returning to ‘the way’). The details of this joke are beside the point; the important aspect of this event was how it highlighted the importance of family in popular debates amongst young Chinese migrants.

I conducted the card exercise with 24 of my 28 interviewees. Three of them were from Fuzhou, one from Xian, two from Beijing, two from Hohhot, eight from Harbin and eight from Dalian. There were six women and twenty-two men, and the majority came from major cities save for those from Hohhot, and two of those from Fuzhou, who had moved between several cities and a nearby rural area. With the four remaining interviewees, I did not conduct the card exercise, although questions about who was most important in their lives were asked. In all cases, the most important were always kin, with the exception of one billiards player in his 30s, Yuanding, who answered:
"When I was a child I would have said my parents, then in my 20s I would have said friends or maybe my girlfriend, now I would say myself, not because the others aren't important, but because I am useless to them if I don't put myself first."

Even though Yuanding had voiced his preference in more individualistic terms than the others, his list of those most important to him was still family members. Parents were always listed first, with paternal or maternal grandparents listed afterwards depending on who had the largest caretaker roles in my informants' lives. After this, aunts were listed by my female informants while elder-sisters played a similar role in many of my male informants upbringing; this often being the product of the birth planning policies of China (popularly called the 'one child policy'), which allowed families with a daughter to try again for a son depending on the region. The two from Hohhot were not of Han ethnicity, and had extensive sibling networks, ethnic minorities not being subject to the same birth control policies as Han Chinese. However, they also spent more time with distant relatives due to their families' tendency to migrate for work. These two also had more extensive networks of 'fictive kin', friends who had provided them with so much support and care that they figured as elder siblings in their kinship imaginaries. The two from Fuzhou were similarly closer to their aunts and older siblings; their parents had spent more time away from home for work, running "private enterprise businesses" (CHN: getihu) selling electronic accessories.
My findings reconfirmed those in much of the recent literature on kinship in China. Kinship is now seen as "a complex, hybrid process of establishing relations of proximity, not separable from the more general phenomena of intimacy and relatedness" (Brandstader and Santos 2009: 9). Kinship is about how we understand who we are, rather than a simple analytical tool for understanding descent groups. This view has been partly the result of Janet Carsten's push for a focus on 'relatedness' as a more open term for anthropological inquiry (Carsten 2000; 2004). She frames her claim as such in order to avoid the technical language that dichotomized the social and biological into pre-given anthropological categories, preferring to emphasize emic terminology used for commonality.

As Brandstater and Santos note, from an imperial system of "patriarchal kinship institutions organized around ancestor worship and organizing a patrilineal system of transmission of identity, power and patrimony" (2009: 5), China has experienced several major upheavals that have targeted the family and its modes of relatedness as part of its social engineering projects. A cursory summary of these include the collectivization projects of the early Maoist period which re-configured family-based descent groups into collectivities, the rustication youth campaigns that were the basis of huge rural re-location schemes for young urban students with bad class backgrounds in the 60s, and the birth planning policies intended to slow down China's rapid population growth. The increasing prevalence of international migration in China marks another transformation. Brandstater and Santos also propose a "new
materialism" in studies of relatedness and kinship "as a constructive process by drawing attention to various materialities involved in its making (blood, qi, emotions, memories, rice, labour, property) and their inter-relation or 'co-association'" (2009: 10). This emphasis on materialities mirrors many of my own findings.

In the volume introduced by Brandstater and Santos, William Jankowiak argues that in urban centers, a more truncated and individualistic kinship network has formed (2009).

"The disintegration of the danwei system, combined with the steady expansion of urban development, has changed neighbourhood social interaction from one of intimacy and mutual aid to one best characterized by distance, avoidance, and a mutual respect for personal privacy." (2009:73)

The isolation described above resonates with Yan Yunxiang's hypothesis of individualization in contemporary China and its effects on the structural qualities of kinship. However, rather than a process of individualistic atomization, this change in many ways has intensified the importance of immediate kin. My interlocutors unanimously listed their parents as the most important people in their lives. When I asked why, their answers employed terms associated with support and sacrifice. Andrew Kipnis has similarly analysed this language of sacrifice and support within parents' educational goals for their children in Zouping, Shandong, as a kind of
material relationship that creates bonds between child and parent (2009). Kipnis found that many rural parents would sacrifice themselves to their children’s educational projects by labouring hard to support their children financially. Lacking the education to tutor their children in their class subjects, an emphasis on financial and nutritional support became a large part of how they defined their kinship relations. Kipnis also shows parallels between teacher–student relationships and other kin; the labour invested by the teacher positioning them in a similar nurturing relationship.

My interlocutors also expressed a deeply felt sense of gratitude towards their parents’ sacrifice. The sacrifice was described as both a financial and physiological one. One of my informants from Hohhot who rarely saw his mother while growing up, said, "She sacrificed her health for me; first she gave birth to me and then afterwards she worked endlessly to support me even though I rarely saw her." Fathers were more often seen as predominantly financial providers, although the term "spoilings" (CHN: chong) was used to show the interconnection between emotional and financial support. The financial support necessary to move to Japan was also spoken of with mixed feelings of gratitude and guilt; two of my interviewees told me how their parents took out extensive loans attached to the mortgages on their apartments to fund their children’s travel. All of my interviewees had received money from their parents to study in Japan with several saying that their parents had taken up extra work to support them. The issue of getting work whilst studying as an international student also became a topic of debate in this regard, because many Chinese students felt guilty
about how hard their parents worked to support them. Despite their parents’ efforts, the money sent was often not enough and so all the students I lived with in the dormitory would secretly get jobs to supplement the financial aid from their parents.

Supporting oneself was not seen as an admirable thing in many parents’ eyes however, as Xiao Li a young girl from Dalian, found when her parents discovered she had taken a lunch-packing job. I overheard flustered scolding coming from the computer in her dormitory room as her mother told her she was wasting her parents’ money by not studying hard and by taking up part-time work (CHN: dagong). Upset, Xiao Li told her mother “It wasn’t like that,” (CHN: bushínyáng de) and that “It’s very expensive here” (CHN: zhèlǐ hén guī). When I asked Xiao Li about this incident, she said “I don’t dare tell her how much it costs here, she really loves/worries (CHN: teng) for me you know?” Xiao Li’s use of the term “teng” struck me. Usually it means ‘pain or discomfort’ although it can also be used for ‘love/worry.’ The word ‘teng’ connotes sacrifice and suffering as part of the kinship process. I have mainly heard ‘teng’ used in relation to major female caring figures, such as mothers and aunts, and I believe it hints at the kind of anguish and physical responsibility that motherly care involves.

After parents, grandparents were often seen as the next most important people in my interviewees’ lives, with a particular tendency towards privileging maternal grandparents (Laolao and Laoye in North China and Wàigōng and Wàipo in the south).
The reasons for this were framed less in terms of financial support than in terms of time and care. Due to the busy work schedules of my interlocutors' parents, a large part of the child rearing responsibilities was taken up by retired grandparents. My findings here echo those of much of the literature on young working migrant mothers, who drop off their children in the morning on their way to small manufacturing jobs, and also literature on the burgeoning mild class families with two working parents. However, it also marks the explicit desire of grandparents themselves to take care of what is possibly their only grandchild, fitting with Jankowiak's observations on the position of grandparents in Hohhot.

"Because the patrilineal ideal is no longer critical to achieve material gain or social success, urban Chinese have come to live in a de facto bilateral universe organized around sentiment and negotiated ethical obligations. This structure means that paternal and maternal grandparents can claim rights of access to their only grandchild. In the pursuit of their own interests, a new institution has emerged that has yet to receive a name. It is organized around the sharing of responsibilities towards rearing a grandchild. As an emerging institution, there are no formal norms and thus it requires frequent negotiation over issues of parenting rights, responsibilities and future obligations. Taken together, these negotiations and habitual patterns are reshaping what was once a patrilineally grounded extended family
into something that resembles a vertical orientation linking paternal
and maternal generations together into a quasi-bilateral
multigenerational family. The bilateral multi-generational family...is
not automatic, but is based entirely on sentiment and personal
commitment. (2009:84)

Sentiment and a sense of personal commitment were crucial to how my
interviewees saw their grandparents. Whilst parents were seen as necessary for
existence and were perceived as making huge financial and bodily sacrifices for their
children, it was their grandparents that many of my interviewees grew up with. A
nineteen-year-old woman said:

"My parents always spoiled me, buying me things and making sure I had money for school etc.,
but it was really my grandparents whom I grew up with. It was with them that I spent all my time."

My younger interlocutors, who were born at the peak of China’s one-child
policy in the late eighties and early nineties, were more likely to be only children with
wealthier parents in urban centers, who worked long hours, and could afford to keep
their preferred kin close by for child rearing purposes. However, a few of my older
informants listed other family members who had devoted a lot of time to them as major
caregivers, such as elder sisters, and spoke of the affective debt they felt for them. In
particular, one informant’s elder sister in Harbin had spent most of her time caring for
him when he was a child in the late eighties, as both of his parents worked long hours.
His sister moved to Japan in late 1997, and he followed her in 2003. During his first two years in Japan, he lived with her and she paid for his Japanese language tuition whilst he studied on his pre-college visa. Afterwards, she returned to Dalian to work for a Japanese recruiting agency there, and he found work managing a hostess bar after an introduction from his sister. When I asked what his future plans were, he said that he wanted to start some kind of business so that he can take care of his family. He mentioned his sister in this regard, saying that he’d like to make her life happier because she “cared for him like a mother.”

The material support necessary for nurturing (mostly parents) as well as the time spent together (mostly grandparents) defined the importance of relatives in my interlocutors’ lives. This emphasis on material support and nurturing in Chinese kinship is the focus of Charles Stafford’s studies of relatedness (Stafford 2000). He uses the term ‘yang’ as an alternative folk theory of kinship in his research in Dragon Head, a small village in North-East China. ‘Yang’ is a term commonly used in standardised Chinese to refer to any kind of act of caring or nurturing. As Stafford states, it is used in a variety of ways

“...to ‘raise flowers’ (yang hua), ‘raise pigs’ (yang zhu), or to ‘raise children’ (yang haizi). In the case of children, the provision of yang— a kind of all-encompassing nurturance— is of course, very complex. It is
also productive of an almost inescapable obligation; once they have
grown up, children are heavily obliged to yang. (Stafford 2000:62)

Stafford goes on to show how the concept of ‘yang’ can be used flexibly to understand
Chinese relatedness because it allows for relationships that do not fit the lineage
paradigm but are nonetheless important to Chinese notions of family and obligation.

Much like my interlocutors sense of debt towards their grandparents and sisters,
Stafford shows how the process of yang can make or break kin relations. Children can
lose their kinship status through a failure to repay their yang obligations, and friends
can become kin through providing caring relationships for friends and families.

**Being and Materialities**

This thesis has explored what it means to “be” a Chinese migrant in Japan. It
has attempted to emphasize the emic aspects of what is at stake in migrants’ lives,
using a relational idea of the existential as encapsulated in the term “being-with.” I
have demonstrated the wide variety of situations, events and forces that Chinese
migrants negotiate in their life projects, and attempted to talk about the
interconnected ontologies that shape and define migrant ‘being’ as observed through
participant observation. Each chapter has included ethnographic descriptions about
the interplay of being acted upon and acting upon others, and has shown how this
often has disjunctive and paradoxical effects. At the same time, these effects, which
were often confusing and frustrating for me, were not always problematic for those I
conducted my participant-observation with; they were happy to revel in the convivial moments they could afford whilst maintaining a stoic cynicism. This last section about the persistence of kinship however, demonstrated to me the persistence of cultural forms and ‘habitus,’ and the ways these forms articulate with the agency that comes with the mobility celebrated in much migration literature.

Much of the ethnography I have provided in this thesis fits neatly into the extant literature on migration. The Chinese migrants I met are in many ways transmigrants. They live geographically between two places, maintaining a relatively high level of mobility, and often demonstrate imaginaries that are betwixt and between. Moreover they fit into the broader trend of recent Chinese migrants who are positioned in a third space of “non-remaining and non-returning” (Cheng 2003). In this sense they fit Basch et al.’s definition of the transmigrant “whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relation to more than one nation-state” (Basch, Glick-Schiller et al. 1994: 48). In the early stages of theorising this phenomenon, transnationalism was perceived as a state which calls the nation-state and its boundaries into question (Basch, Glick-Schiller et al. 1994). However, more recent work has explored the continued importance of boundaries where the dialectic of here and there is more salient than a transnational “third-space” (Basch, Glick-Schiller et al. 1994).
Transnational approaches have often emphasized the agency of migrants. This emphasis in many ways was an antidote to the image of the passive migrant, who was depicted as a victim of politics or a passive subject of economic motivations within classic sociological approaches to migration. Glick-Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic state that the “experience of movement can become a form of flexible social capital that enables people to form and maintain social relations and live with multiple identities” (Glick-Schiller, Darieva et al. 2011: 405). The image of Chinese migrants as ‘flexible citizens’ has been depicted as a prime example of this kind of transnationalism. However, on investigating what it is like to ‘be’ a migrant, I would suggest that the limits to this flexibility become apparent. Throughout this thesis, I have emphasised the tension between choices and their limits. This last example of the continued significance of kinship demonstrated the unthinkability of certain choices and flexibilities. These final ethnographic vignettes highlight the reality that even when choices are present, the agency afforded by moving is not always experienced as liberation but as an anxiety-inducing sense of responsibility.

One man who was experiencing a great degree of success in his work expressed to me how difficult he found his success in Japan. Fearing that someday it would be difficult to justify a return home, he said to me:

"You know, I am an only child, and you probably know this because you speak Chinese and lived in Beijing, but it's really important that I take care of my parents when they get old. I don't have any brothers or sisters and so they only have me to take care of them. I know in Australia you
probably wouldn't want your parents to live with you as you got older, but that's exactly what I need to do. No matter how successful in Japan... So eventually I'll move back, I don't really see them coming here.” (Hotel worker, Male 32)

This sentiment was common, particularly among the men whom I spent time with in the billiards hall. It defined the limits of what they hoped for in their future and echoed Pan’s assertion that

“For commitment to one’s native place, one’s ancestral home, few people could beat the Chinese. The word *hsiang* which can mean a village, the countryside, one’s home town or native place, is one of the most evocative words in the Chinese language, far more emotive than its equivalent in English.” (Pan 1991: 21)

**Kinship and diaspora**

The term ‘diaspora’ was originally used solely to describe the dispersed Jewish population. Cast out from their ancestral homeland, the Jewish diaspora was defined by this initial trauma, its shared ‘homeland,’ and the hope of returning to it (Safran 1991). This definition was later extended to various African diasporas, separated from their homelands due to war, slavery and colonisation, and has been applied to Indian, Japanese and Chinese groups who never returned to their homelands after being forced into indentured labour abroad. The term became associated with any form of traumatic separation from origins, with some scholars applying it to ‘queer diasporas’ (Gopinath...
The extension of the term was so prolific in fact that Brubaker warned against its use at all, stating that “if everyone is diasporic then no one is distinctively so” (Brubaker 2005).

In “Global Diasporas” Robin Cohen defines the Chinese diaspora as a “trade diaspora” (Cohen 2009). He outlines the historical spread of Chinese merchants and labourers internationally and the eventual recognition of them as a diaspora, as encapsulated in the term *huaqiao*. Cohen’s definitional argument overlooks, or at least simplifies, the problem of conflating the multiple movements, displacements and dislocations of people who originally came from the area we know as China today. Many were not ethnic Han, or were at least distinct Han groups such as those from Fujian. Even more problematic is his mixing of what may be justifiably called the historic Chinese trade diaspora with the flux of post-Mao reform era migration since the 1980s.

Kinship, like homeland in classic diaspora studies, figures as a simultaneously nostalgic and utopian imaginary for Chinese migrants in Japan. It forms an integral part of the materialities that make the existence of a ‘self’ thinkable. Vanessa Fong uses the concept of ‘filial nationalism’ to argue that Chinese students are filled with a sense of obligation and love for their nation, despite also being critical of it (Fong 2004; Fong 2011). Like the love and sense of obligation one has for family members, the
nation, no matter how backward or embarrassing, is still one’s home. Chinese nationals’ identification to their own ethnicity, language and nationality was structured by a distinct sense of cultural intimacy that was critical of China whilst still making it unthinkable to consider oneself not Chinese.

“If the nation is credibly represented as a family, people are loyal to it because they know that families are flawed—that is part of love—and so they rally to the defense of its compromising but warmly familiar intimacy” (Herzfeld 1997:172 cited in Fong)

On September 7, 2010, a Chinese fishing trawler (the Minjinyu 5179) collided with a Japanese coast guard patrol boat near a disputed group of islands in the South China Sea, known as the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. After Japan’s defeat in the Second World War, many of the territories that it had expanded into and occupied (such as Formosa, now known as Taiwan), were surrendered to the Allied Forces. This surrender involved the return of Taiwan to the then Republic of China, and a special occupation arrangement with the United States taking a trusteeship of many of the islands south of Japan, such as Okinawa, the Ryukyu islands and the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. In 1972, the territories that the United States had taken a trusteeship over were officially given over to the jurisdiction of the Japanese Government, with the disputed islands included within that agreement. Both the Taiwanese and Mainland
Chinese governments objected to the demarcation of territorial boundaries under a US–Japan treaty.

The facts of the boat crash itself were difficult to determine. The Chinese vessel and its representatives claimed that the Japanese patrol boat had rammed into them, whilst the Japanese authorities claimed otherwise. The Japanese authorities refused to release video footage of the incident, and detained the Chinese crew. After an escalating diplomatic dispute and a series of protests in both China and Japan, Japanese authorities released the Chinese captain a few weeks later. Footage was also eventually released; however it has only served to encourage each party’s claims. Filial nationalism emerged strongly during this incident. Despite their insistence on many of the shortcomings of Chinese people, when faced with political tensions, it became apparent that a large proportion of my friends and dorm mates felt it unthinkable to be anything but supportive of China’s claim to the islands.

On the October 2, 2010, I had lunch with a Japanese friend who enjoyed practicing his English with me and was keen to take me to his favourite beef restaurant in Shinjuku. As we walked out of the restaurant and entered the Kabukicho area, one of Tokyo’s busiest entertainment districts, the usual visual fanfare of large screens and booming music was drowned out by the shouts of protesters on megaphones. The protest, organized by a group called GanbareNippon, featured thousands of angry Japanese citizens holding up placards with slogans such as “We will not allow Communist China to invade our territory.” The number of people near the station exit surprised me, as usually these sorts of protests only featured small groups shouting inflammatory slogans whilst the majority rushed by, ignoring them. Today, however, many, including my friend, stopped
to watch for a while. Due to my living with Chinese migrants, and spending most of my days conducting fieldwork in Ikebukuro, my attitudes to the boat crash had been influenced by their own. Unfortunately, this meant that when watching the protests I blurted a thoughtless "Unbelievable," to my friend, and told him that I thought Japan had the weakest claim to the islands. My friend turned away from me, murmuring that if China wanted to go to war then so be it. I was surprised at this, my friend being a self-avowed cosmopolitan who had lived in both Canada and America, and was often highly critical of Japanese norms. I left him, pretending I had not heard his last comment, and got on the train to return to Ikebukuro.

That evening, as I sat on a small stool in the kitchen of my dorm talking to two of my dorm mates, a third burst out of his room cursing and shouting about the protests that day. He was a Fujianese student who spent more time working than studying, mainly because he liked to go out drinking in search of a girlfriend. He had explained to me how he would save his money throughout the month so that he could go out once or twice and spend lots of money in hope of attracting Japanese girls. He said he liked Japanese girls because they were "cute"; he used the Japanese term "kawaii" rather than "keai." However, he didn't present his plan as some kind of conquest, but rather in terms of being a kind of sexual cosmopolitan; he said that the best way to learn a culture and language was through direct contact with the opposite gender.

That evening he sat down with us and strung a series of curses together whilst pulling a cigarette out of the packet we had all been sharing. He mirrored my Japanese friend's sentiment earlier in the day:

"If Japan wants to go to war then I'll become a soldier (CHN: dangbing)."

The other two started making fun of him for this, telling him about all his shortcomings and how he'd never be allowed into the military. He rebutted, asking whether they would join the army if
such a thing happened. They replied “Of course.” I asked, “So you’d all join the army?” to which they nodded, saying that rejecting China would be akin to giving up on their parents.

The protests and their surrounding political circumstances triggered a series of imaginaries amongst my dorm mates. These were often voiced using the language of kinship, and related to their sense of being diasporic and transnational. For some, these imaginaries were a reversion of initially cosmopolitan ambitions, and appeared out of character to me as they became increasingly patriotic. However, there were also critical voices that said ‘in fact’ (CHN: qishi) the island belonged to Taiwan, with a wide variety of opinions on the sovereignty of Taiwan taking precedent over the issue.

This event, its associated filial nationalism, and the continued importance of kinship amongst the Chinese migrants I met, demonstrated to me the grounded nature of their transmigrant imaginaries and sense of being in the world. In exploring what it means to ‘be’ a Chinese migrant in Tokyo, we can see the range of materialities that situate a migrant’s sens of ‘being-with.’ Imaginaries are not immaterial projections across space and time, but rather are deeply grounded in the materialities that situate and shape them. These can be the materialities that constitute relatedness in general, the way this extends to a sense of nationality and how an event which we can interpret as an agglomeration of materialities reveals certain attitudes or directs people to respond in ways that are again grounded in notions of relatedness.
Conclusion

In the weeks following my return from fieldwork, the terrible events of the Tohoku earthquake, tsunami and the consequent 7 failures at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Reactor unfolded. It was the largest nuclear reactor disaster since the 1986 Chernobyl crisis, causing a mixture of emotions within Japan, East Asia and globally. As of March 2012, the Japanese Police Agency calculated that over 15,000 people have lost their lives, with 6,000 injured and over 3,000 still missing at the time of writing.

In the weeks following the disaster, my research took on new meaning for friends, family and colleagues who were both glad to see me out of potential harm’s way, and hopeful that I would somehow afford a unique understanding of the situation because of my time in Japan. Although I was shocked and upset by the events, I had little to offer in terms of insight or connection to the disaster. I had not lived in the area directly affected (Miyagi Prefecture) nor had any of my Japanese friends. I felt a strange sense of serendipity for having left Japan only a few days before it occurred and guilt for abandoning a place I had called home for two years. I also felt a sense of irrelevance during a time when researchers with specialist knowledge in Japan and a compassionate understanding of Japan’s contemporary situation were needed. My research, although situated in Japan, often felt far removed from the lives of Japanese people, and so I felt unqualified to comment within the various seminars and
roundtables that proliferated at the Australian National University and conferences further abroad.

Although Ikebukuro was far removed from the epicentre of the disaster, its effects were still felt amongst the Chinese migrants I knew. My dorm mates told me how they were “frightened to death” (CHN: jingsile) as the shoddily-made fittings of the dorm shook under the power of the earthquake in Tokyo, which despite being relatively distant from the epicentre was still significant. The disaster also drove many of my informants to leave Japan. In my correspondence with them through QQ, e-mail and Weibo, I was surprised to find how many of the young students had left immediately after the disaster. In the cases of the newly-arrived and very young, fear of radiation caused many of their parents to almost force them to come home. At the Association for Asian Studies conference in Toronto in 2012, I met a young Korean PhD student who had planned on comparing the various Chinatowns in Japan, Korea, Canada and the United States, as a study in urban planning. She said that when she visited Ikebukuro in late November she was disappointed to find fewer Chinese people than expected. It is difficult to say how many people have actually left. However, many have stayed. Some of those I have kept in touch with have shown a stronger degree of decisiveness in their migrant life projects. For example, my Inner Mongolian friend told me that the crisis made him and his wife decide clearly to remain in Japan. He wrote to me “We have decided, our lives are in Japan” (CHN: women jueding le, women de shenghuo jiushizai riben).
Faced with such a devastating event, I cannot help but seek a positive conclusion to my research. In many senses, the body of my research had a decidedly negative tone, emphasising the disjunctures, cynicism and alienation many Chinese migrants conveyed to me. In particular, I experienced many frustrations in the early stages of my fieldwork, particularly when I entered the scene of a failed attempt to have Ikebukuro recognised as a new Chinatown. Rather than seeing this ethnography as a dystopic portrait however, I would view it as an attempt to capture the temporary and liminal sense of being a migrant at a specific time. My interlocutors were in the midst of 'becoming,' subject to the dynamics of "liquid modernity," (Bauman 2000) and without a fixed sense of ethnic community or transmigrant identity. Despite the diverse forms of sociality I witnessed, I still felt that there was yet to be a sense of shared collective aspiration or 'community' amongst the migrants I met in Ikebukuro. However, there were definitely seeds for future developments.

The shared experience of a single event as tragic as the Fukushima crisis may precipitate unexpected possibilities for the future of Chinese migrants in Japan. Jean Luc Nancy uses Hegel’s dialectics to explore the event’s crucial place in becoming. He argues for the importance of the liminality or “unrest” of certain events in the passing of the dialectic of becoming. In this sense, much like Turner’s notion of liminality in ritual practice (Turner 1995), a state of unrest is necessary before new forms can come into being.
The event indicates what has to be thought at the very heart of becoming, pointing to it as something more deeply withdrawn and more decisive than the "passage-into" to which it is ordinarily reduced. Insofar as it is understood as "passage-into," becoming primarily indicates that which is passed into, the having-become \([\text{etre-devenu}]\) of its result. But in order for the passage to take place, in step with the passing \([\text{dans le pas du passer}]\), there must first be the agitated "unrest" \((\text{haltungslose Unruhe})\), which has not yet passed and does not pass as such—but happens. (Nancy 2000:163)

Several events constitute this ethnography. The initial protest over a proposed "Chinatown" was a complex event which resulted in the polarisation of Chinese and Japanese residents in Ikebukuro. Another event, the billiards hall championship, was almost exclusively for Chinese migrants themselves, reflecting back on their relationship to one another more than their relation to life in Japan. These two events stood as means to explore the exigencies, effects and materialities that constituted Chinese migrants' "being-with." These events, as Michael Jackson suggests, helped me understand the complex relations within my informant's life projects (2005).

Our interest is both in the ways an event gradually or dramatically illuminates what is at stake for those involved, and in the ways it carries ethical and practical implications that far outrun specific
individual intentions and awareness. To stress that events tend to take on a life of their own... is to emphasise the currents and cross-currents, eddies and sudden calms that characterise the course of any event, as well as the recurring patterns and precipitating causes.

(Jackson 2005:xxvii)

I would argue that the events surrounding the Tohoku earthquake illuminated what is at stake for many of the people I met during my fieldwork. Although the young left, many of the migrants from the billiards hall remained. They held a second championship at the end of 2011, stating in the local news how good it was to celebrate the end of an emotionally and physically exhausting year. The continued

"The overseas Chinese in Japan wish the people of the ancestral land a happy new year." Image taken from the Modern China News for the 2011
success of this group, despite the fractures I observed during my fieldwork, implies that a shared sense of their lives in Japan continues to emerge.

As the image above shows, in celebrating the championship, they identify themselves as “Japanese Overseas Chinese” (CHN: riben huaqiao huaren) whilst directing their well wishes back to the “ancestral land” (CHN: Zuguo) (Guo 2011). This event suggests the emergence of shared symbols for Chinese migrants who would like a clearer relationship with Japanese society, through identifying as “Japanese Overseas Chinese” while also building a diasporic identification with China through the motif of the “ancestral land.”

Other events have also created shared symbols which situate Chinese people living in Japan in specific ways. During the disaster, Satou Mitsuru, a commissioner for the Sato Fisheries Corporation, led 20 Chinese research students to safety on the day of the tsunami before losing his own life when he continued his search for his family (Jie 2011). Yi Yanan, one of the rescued students told the Xinhua news that she had seen Satou Mitsuru climb onto the roof of a building to escape the waters before being swept away. In Onagawa Cho, the area most significantly hit by the tsunami, around 100 Chinese students were reported, all of whom remained safe in large part due to the efforts of locals such as Satou Mitsuru.

This incident had wide-ranging effects throughout the Chinese media world. For example, Zhao Jianxiong, a reporter for the RenminWang news, called for a
moment of national silence in China for Satou Mitsuru (Zhao 2011). Similarly, on the February 10, 2012, a New Year’s festivity was held in honour of Satou Mitsuru with the hope of creating a ‘cultural dialogue/exchange’ (JPN: bunka kouryu) between the various ethnic groups living near Ikebukuro (Wang 2012). The event was organized by the original spokespeople for the Tokyo Chinatown proposal Hu Yifei, and composed of a council member of the China–Japan Friendship Association, Ozaki Takanobu, the Tsukuba University Professor Yamashita Kiyomi, the director general of the International Communications Association Qing Mumeng, and the director general of the Zainichi Korean Federation all attended the event. In addition to these key figures, the banquet was filled with 80 other attendees all coming to celebrate the New Year and commemorate the losses of 2011. During the event, the journalist Jiang Feng, who had been on site immediately after the disaster, recounted to all the attendees his interviews with the survivors, and gave special mention to Satou Mitsuru, stating that his actions represented friendship between Chinese and Japanese people and would be “engraved in the memories” (CHN: ming Ji) of Chinese migrants in Japan forever.

The billiards championship and New Year celebration may only represent the formal and official faces of Chinese migrant lives in Japan. However, the slight changes in the attendees and the content of their celebrations implies to me that there is a gradual dialectics between solidifying migrant identifications and a willingness within the Japanese community to listen to the voices representing this identification; signifying hopes for an increasingly diverse Japanese future. Miyazaki Hirokazu, in
positing an anthropology of hope, has demonstrated the ways that hope is “produced and maintained in concrete processes of knowledge formation” (Miyazaki 2003: 31). Focusing on the ways Japanese workers in finance materialize their “unrealized expectations” he argues for more anthropological focus on hope.

What is needed in order to re-generate hope and hopefulness is not an effort to contemplate the proper content of hope. Like the production of hope in financial knowledge, the production of hope in progressive thought is also predicated on the possibility of radical reorientation in its direction. For anthropologists, likewise, I wish to suggest, the subject of hope is important not because it has not been thoroughly investigated and theorized... but rather because it demands radical reorientation of anthropological knowledge and hence generates hope for anthropology. (Miyazaki 2003: 31-32)

Henrietta Moore (2011), heeding Miyazaki’s call and extending it into a broader focus on how the “ethical imagination” is produced, has similarly argued for more focus on the hopes, desires and satisfactions people face in an increasingly mobile world. She proposes that culture is a means to deal with the “alterity of the future” rather than merely a source of tradition (2011: 14). She states that the “forms and means... through which individuals imagine relationships to themselves and to others”
inform this imagination and allow for cultural invention and innovation (2011:16). In this sense, an “art of the possible” is represented in hopes, desires and satisfactions.

These approaches, although they do not rely on notions of ‘being-with’ or Jackson’s existential anthropology, share the common belief that a focus on the affects, materialities and experiences that situate us in the world is an important part of the anthropological project. This ethnography explored the disjunctures, tensions and convivialities Chinese migrants in Tokyo experienced when seen from a state of ‘being-with.’ Their hopes were often unclear and were yet to involve a sense of shared identity or subjectivity. Nonetheless, they represented a liminal kind of ‘being-in-common’ that may still be a precursor to a sense of shared hope for Chinese migrants in Japan.
Bibliography


Huang, T. (2004). Walking between slums and skyscrapers: illusions of open space in Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Shanghai. Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press.


Williams, R. (1976) Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society. London: Croom Helm.


Xiang, B. (2003). Emigration from China: a sending country perspective. International Migration. 43(3)


