

Individual life of work, family relations in the eyes of the Post-90s generation in China

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Abstract

The modernization of China comes as one of the most interesting topics not only at this moment but also has been researched for a long time. The individualization theories come as a result of modernity. This thesis draws on ten in-depth interviews in order to analyze the individualization among the educated, middle-class young people who were born in the 1990s by testing Yan Yunxiang's theories of individualization in China which derived and enlightened by the western European theories of second modernity and individualization. It focuses on the way the post-90s generation coping with career choice and family relations and examines what works as the major consideration when addressing the problems. By conducting qualitative research and discussing concrete questions under the individualization framework, this study could contribute to the big picture of modernization in China, specifically on educated young people from the middle class.

The research argues that Yan Yunxiang's theories about individualization in China can be pretty much applicable to the post-90s generation in China. However, post-90ers also DIY their biographies by managing their life and career proactively to be able to achieve the lifestyle they want.

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1. Introduction

I did my bachelor's degree in Beijing, one of the biggest cities in China. I've graduated for three years. Many of my friends like me who come from the second-tier cities or less developed urban regions of China are facing the choices of study, career, and choosing a city to stay. These seem like some common questions about people in their twenties. The thing is I just gradually found out that contradictions happen between parents and us often. I've heard a lot of stories from my friend about how they confront their parents' wishes when it comes to life choices in their twenties. Some of their parents use "xiao" (filial piety), which is a typical traditional Chinese ethic concept to judge their choice, which makes them feel quite uncomfortable.

I put my attention on this question because it is somehow relevant to the development and modernization process of China. Especially when I got to know the individualization theories of Ulrich Beck and how Yan Yunxiang applied it to the situation in China. I attempted to understand the changes that happen in Chinese society, primarily how it works on young people's life by focusing on the features of individualization. The individualization, the rise of individuals, comes as one of the outcomes of modernization. By researching a small case but based on a big modernity picture, this thesis would contribute to the modernization process in China empirically.

It would be too much for a master's thesis to discuss everything in the individualization theories. Also, Yan Yunxiang has done his work on applying the individualization theories before to the Chinese context, especially in the rural area Xiajia village from 1989 to 2008. What I would do in this paper is to apply his findings and conclusions of individualization in China to the group of post-90s.

My research question is:

Is Yan's theory about individualization in China applicable to career choice and family relations for urban people in China who were born in the 1990s?

My research process is as follows. First, I'm engaging with the previous theories of individualization based on the modernization of Western Europe. Then, I would try to explain how Yan Yunxiang has used these theories to the Chinese situation. By doing that, I could figure out the relationships and connections between the theories and Yan Yunxiang's empirical work. Based on the work he has done, I decided to choose a semi-structured interview as my method to do the research. The idea of the two empirical chapters of this thesis (career choice and family relations) and the interview questions come from Yan's findings and conclusions. After I formulated the interview questions and did the interview, I collected the data under the ethical rules of guidelines from the center for east and southeast Asia. The empirical chapter examines the findings from the interviews. And the last section concludes the thesis and suggests further discussions.

2. Literature review

This chapter presents the literature in the study of individualization in China. Before I start with tracing back to traditional Chinese society, what has to be discussed, first and foremost, is the multiple aspects of individualism. Yan Yunxiang argues that the core messages of individualism probably have never got introduced into China such as equality of human beings, either in the front of god or the law and also the emphasis on liberty or privacy (Yan, 2010a). When we discuss individualism in China, equality, liberty, and privacy are left behind or less emphasized. Instead, individualism in modern China refers more to the concern of productivity and personal responsibilities (Yan, 2010a). From my point of view, this emphasis was more prominent after the 1950s.

Based on this opinion, I would first talk about the individual in the traditional Chinese family, along with individualization at the beginning of

the twentieth century, followed by the top-down family changes and individualization conducted by the state in the People's Republic of China.

2.1 The individual in the traditional Chinese family and the individualization at the beginning of 20 century

How can an individual be located in the traditional Chinese culture especially in a family relationship? When reviewing the individualization in China, Yan Yunxiang said that,

‘(In the pre-modern period) Chinese individual was weak, not being able to compete.’ (Yan, 2015)

In Feixiaotong's book *Xiang tu zhong guo*, he points out that the essential quality of Chinese social structure has been called *renlun* (human relations). Based on this rule people know the distinction of interacting with different people and creating social organizations in traditional society (Fei, Hangeli and Wang, 2012). In a very long pre-modern period in China, people follow the rules based on rituals. Those rules are granted since childhood which has become people's interior habits. A person who breaks the rules for a selfish reason would be regarded as the scum of the community (Fei, Hangeli and Wang, 2012). Under this pattern, individuals are usually restricted under the rules. What's more, when it becomes a pattern, everyone would put pressure on others surreptitiously. Individuals' voices and needs usually submit to the ritual rules for human relations, which is one of the characteristic features of a patriarchal society.

China's first modern short story *A Madman's Diary* written by Lu Xun is talking about "eat people". Qian liqun interprets that "eat people " is a myth. In that book, people eat each other and no one can be the exception, even the kids. Qian argues that "eat people " is not about cannibalism in China but about attenuating individuality by using the *renlun* (human relations) and *lizhi* (ritual rules) as invisible pressure. Children are not only taught to follow *Renlun* and *lizhi* but also acquire them from everyday life(cite). Kids have to give up part of their individuality as they have no voice in a family. After they grow up and become the patriarchs or even the ancestors of the family they can get delayed gratification. Consequently, in this

system, everyone would finally become part of the pressure to force other people (mostly the next generation) to give up their individuality. As Luxun wrote at the end of *A Madman's Diary*,

When I open the history book to check, this (Chinese) history does not have a timeline. Every page of it has written the same words "ren yi dao de (human relations and ritual rules)". I couldn't sleep at all, and it was only in the middle of the night that I read through the book. There were two words written everywhere: eat people.

There might be someone who hasn't eaten other people's kids, might be. Save the kids.....

What Luxun tries to convey to people in the 1910s in a metaphoric way is that China has a long history of forcing people to "eat" each other's (especially kids') individuality, which is disciplined by "ren yi dao de (human relations and ritual rules)". Time and generation changes have never built any difference in the whole history.

Correspondingly, Hegel has his famous quote written in his students' note that "China has no history." Because Chinese ethical substance has not differentiated for a long time, the history in China is essentially static (Lo, 1994). This "ethical substance" can be interpreted into human relations and ritual rules under strong patriarchy. Individuality has been suppressed and limited within a traditional family structure that has been existing in the whole pre-modern Chinese history.

Luxun's short story was published in 1918 just one year before the May Fourth Movement. Start from the end of the Qing dynasty, a couple of elites tried many ways from political to industrial to reform the country while they all failed. Those elites look inward and see the weak Chinese individuals under oppressive Chinese families. Since only senior people's voices are accounted for in a family or in a country. Juniors lose their competence and pursuit of individualism. The elite members of society pushed some revolutions to change the family institution fundamentally. For example, May Fourth Movement has the slogan "da dao kong jia dian (Down with the Confucious) " The intention of this revolution and the meaning between the lines of the slogan is to challenge the parental

authority power and by extension, the institutional power of senior in social rank and state leaders(Yan, 2015). This family revolution can be seen as the start of the individualization of modern China. In that period, the elites led the individualization mostly reflected on changes in the family and patriarchy structure of the state. From the 1920s to the 1950s, individualization continued being pushed to challenge the traditional social order. However, it didn't go very far though (Yan, 2015).

2.2 Individualization in the collective decades

When it comes to the 1950s, along with the Marxist and Communism ideas, the Chinese government tried to build an egalitarianism and politically progressive society (Yan, 2015). Davis and Harrel argue in Chinese families in the Post-Mao Era that the communist leadership in China in the collective period realized a large portion of Marxist ideals about communist society. For example, within the first ten years of the People's republic of china, urban families enjoyed free primary education, free basic health care, and very inexpensive housing (Davis, D.; Harrell, S., 1993, p.17). More important, by doing the state-level institutional change and political campaigns, in that period, parental authority was one of the targets (Yan,2015). However, some of the changes strengthen the traditional family structure, like the health care level for old people and internal migrant restriction for young adult men. It's not simply that we can say communism destroyed the traditional Chinese family (Davis, D.; Harrell, S., 1993, p.3).

Even the family structure was being kept or extended during that period to some extent. One of the major changes in family life, which Yan Yunxiang mentioned is that, as the state was doing a top-down socialist economy, the Chinese family lost its function as an economic and business union and transfer to private haven (Yan, 2015). Davis and Harrel also claim that the traditional Chinese family model was a system that not only supports the patriline but also takes care of the young and the vulnerable (Davis, D.; Harrell, S., 1993, p.17). These strong intergenerational interdependencies make a traditional family more like an organization to support each other (Davis, D.; Harrell, S., 1993, p.17). With the loss of its major economic function, individuals working for the collective and family life withdrew

to a more private area. Notwithstanding, the national socialist economy and collective process collapsed after the most radical years (1966-1976) being politically progressive (Yan, 2015).

2.3 Individualization after the reform

‘The reform noticeably reduced collective responsibility for care of the young, the sick, and the needy, and increased the financial burden of illness and disability on individuals and families (Davis, D.; Harrell, S., 1993, p18).’

Davis and Harrells added that as the structure of public welfare departed, fees for public service rapidly multiplied. At the same time, urban wages trebled and consumer items became commonplace between 1978-1989(Davis, D.; Harrell, S., 1993, p.3). These are the changes that happen in the economic area. At the same time, the product of capitalist culture, for example, soap operas from HongKong and Taiwan, movies from America became available to ordinary people’s life (Davis, D.; Harrell, S., 1993, p.3). Yan also said in his book *Private life under socialism: love, intimacy, and family change in a Chinese village*:

‘1980, the state has loosened its control over ordinary people’s private life but not public life. The globalization consumerism and market economy have become the new dominance of everyone’s family life (Yan, 2003, p233)’

Yan thinks, in the first 30 years (collective period) of China, young generations were encouraged by the state to join the campaign to fight against patriarchal power and traditional values in private life while they don’t have much true autonomy and independence in public life, for example, individualism and self-organization by the mass were not allowed(Yan, 2003, p.235). After 1980, taking the example of Xiajia village, Yan finds out the state became less intrusive in the post-collective ear, with the blossoming of private life and the decline of public life caused by the destruction of local societal forces (Yan, 2003, p.235). However, the growth of individuality where individualization in China has long since been confined mostly to the private sphere (see Davis, D.; Harrell, S., 1993, p5; Yan, 2003, p.235). Like I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the discussion of equality, liberty, and privacy has not been prominent

during the process of individualization in China. Individuality is not allowed to grow in public life.

In conclusion, as Yan discussed before, the individual was weak under traditional Chinese family life, in other words, parental authority, rituals rules, and family relations. At the beginning of the 20 century, elites tried to push individualization and bring China to modernity, through diminishing the patriarchal power and traditional values in private life (Yan, 2003). This trend has been keeping pushing and enhanced in the collective period of China. After the reform, especially from the 1990s, the institutional change opens the gate to western values, which include market economy, globalization, consumerism, capitalist lifestyle, which have become the dominance of people's private life (Yan, 2010a, p.xxxvii). In other words, individualization happened but being confined in the private sphere and absent in the public area.

Under this circumstance, Yan and some other researchers have been studied individualization in China in a more micro and private sphere, which have been collected mainly in the books *iChina The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society and Private life under socialism : love, intimacy, and family change in a Chinese village, 1949-1999*. Among them, Yan Yunxiang's research about individualization in China has been both broad and elaborated. Although, his major fieldwork and examples were taken from Xiajia village during 1989-2015. Also, Mette Halskov Hansen and Cuiming Pang adopted interviews and observations to explore individualism among rural young people from 2004-2006 (Mette.H; Pang.C, 2010).

2.4 Previous literature on individualization on Post-90s generation in China

Regarding the post-90s generation in urban China, individualization had not been researched under a framework of second modernity and the important aspect of productivity.

However, there are a few articles that discussed the individualism of post-90s generations in China. Wang Kund describes the post-90s generation

who was born with a relatively stable and affluent life and has grown up with the internet. While his discussion about the individualism of the post-90s is limited in the uniqueness aspect which we often consider as the representative of individualism. Apart from that, Koetse's article focusing on a phenomenon showed on the statistics from mycos.com that the 1990ers tend to change jobs frequently. Along with that, this article also shows that the 1990ers are more concerned about their feelings and sensitive to the discomfort in their jobs.

Showing some kind of individualism of post-90s, these two articles are in line with the typical opinions, or, in another word, stereotypes going on in China towards post-90ers. Nonetheless, despite these two pieces of literature have studied individualism of the post-90s generation, they are not under the same framework of this thesis. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim emphasized the basic concept of individualization: individualization is virtually institutionalized individualism and it has its social and political Consequences (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), which means that the individualism is not happening spontaneously from every individual. To analyze this phenomenon, the institutionalization in the social and political scenes should always be considered.

There is a lack of studies that would examine how individualization happens among those people born in 1990-1999. As they have all reached their 20s age and launch their voice in both private and public life, it would be necessary to apply a new aspect of individualism (institutionalized individualism) to the research of individualization in post-90s in China, which also, would contribute to locate the Chinese post-90s generation in an international environment.

Besides, this thesis can also contribute to the study of the individualization process in middle-class families in China. Nine in ten of my participants' parents (at least one) are working in or retired from state-owned companies, which mostly makes the family income meet the middle-class criteria in China. As the giant middle class in China is still growing and attracting attention around the world, this thesis provides a perspective of the features of this growing group.

To sum up, there are three patterns of individuals and individualization discussion of China existing in the previous literature. These three patterns are also following a time order approximately.

Firstly, the individualization in China had been discussed since the early stage of the republic of china. A general way to discuss Chinese traditions and ethical problems like Lu Xun, Fei Xiaotong, and Hegel, which were the major resources about this question before the People's republic of China.

Secondly, taking a family as a minimum unit, Davis, D., and Harrell, S had their discussion about individualization before and after Mao's era. By tracking down and elaborating the state policies with the evidence from the Chinese family's life, they studied the individualization from both macro and micro perspectives. Yan Yunxiang has done his work in a similar way to sort, compare, and present how individualization goes on in China from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 2010s. This work has been organized chronologically and showed on his lecture Intergenerational Intimacy: A Redefinition of Filial Piety in Rural North China in 2015. Davis, D., Harrell, S, and Yan Yunxiang's work can be representative of this pattern.

Thirdly, the recent studies of this individualization question in China are more based on fieldwork and interviews, like the studies of Yan Yunxian, Mette.H, Pang.C, etc in the first ten years of this century. These studies are updated and presented to people who want to go in-depth and in detail how individualization happens in China.

This study would first put up questions based on the existing conclusions given by Yan Yunxiang from the third pattern:

Is Yan's theory about individualization in China applicable to career choice and family relations for urban people in China who were born in the 1990s?

To answer this question, Yan Yunxiang's theoretical framework would be first explained in the next chapter and later be tested in the findings and analysis part.

As a post-90er myself, I hope to provide a way to understand and analyze the problems and pressures going on in our lives right now.

3. Theoretic framework

The individualization theories are derived from the modernization theories mainly from Ulrich Beck(1992), Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E(2002), Anthony Giddens(1990), and Zygmunt Bauman in western Europe. It is very hard to skip discussing western individualization theories and only focusing it within the Chinese context. Moreover, this thesis is built on Yan Yunxiang's research which is also under the theoretic framework of individualization theories from western Europe. Thus, this chapter would divide into two sections. The first section is mainly interpreting the correlation between modernization and individualization in the Western European context. Then, the second section is mainly about Yan Yunxiang 's adaptations of these theories in China.

3.1 Second modernity, risk society, and individualization

To research individualism among the post-90s generation in China I need to first review individualization theory under the theories of second modernity and risk society.

In Ulrich Beck's book Risk Society: Towards a new modernity, Beck defined the classic modernity as the production and distribution of wealth, reasoning the industrialization (Beck and Ritter, 1992). While that period has passed. And now we are in a new phase of modernity which Beck called it second modernity. He points out that in the second modernity, the development of science, technology, globalization has created risks, which has made our society a risk society (Beck and Ritter, 1992). The concept of risk society draws our attention to unintended and radicalized consequences (Beck, 1999, P3, Giddens, 1990, P.3). To handle those less controllable consequences, society as a whole and individuals are required to react, to organize, to actively manage the risks created by ourselves. Life becomes a collection of everyday reflexes and decisions (Beck, 1999, P.3).

‘The life of one’s own is a reflexive life. Social reflexion – the processing of contradictory information, dialogue, negotiation, compromise – is almost synonymous with living one’s own life. Active management (and that does seem the right word) is necessary for the conduct of life in a context of conflicting demands and a space of global uncertainty.’ (Beck, 1993)

The reason why it matters talking about individualization under the risk society theoretical framework is that, as Bauman discusses, people have to take the duty and responsibility to cope with risks and consequences in everyday life, which as a process makes them being individualized (Bauman, 2013, p.47). Beck has the same thoughts about this process that people has to cope with everyday risks and consequences that lead to the individualization:

‘By all these requirements people are invited to constitute themselves as individuals: to plan, understand, design themselves as individuals and, should they fail, blame themselves.’ (Beck 1999, P.9)

3.2 Disembedding and detraditionalization

Disembedding and detraditionalization give modernity dynamism, according to Giddens and Beck.

‘Disembedding: ‘lifting out’ of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across an indefinite span of time space.’ (Giddens, 1990, p.21)

In pre-modern culture, kinship relations, local community, religious cosmologies organize and tie up people. However, when it comes to modern times, disembedding loses the grasp between social relations and the local context. ‘Modernity is inherently globalizing’(p.63), ‘The local and the global have become inextricably intertwined(p108)’ people have to reconstruct their social relations based on globalization and disembedding of the original environment.

Detraditionalization should also be discussed along with disembedding under a modernity and globalization background. Giddens writes that

‘tradition is routine’, which organizes our beliefs and practices especially in relation to time(p.104). Nonetheless, in modern times, detraditionalization makes people live ‘a life of one’s own’ as ‘there are no historical models for the conduct of life’ (Beck, 1999,p.26). Further, Beck illustrates how traditions work in modern time:

‘This does not mean that tradition no longer plays any role – often the opposite is the case. But traditions must be chosen and often invented, and they have force only through the decisions and experience of individuals (p.26)’

While engaging in the analysis of my data, I will pay attention to how people in China consider the old ritual and traditional family pattern as well as how they work in nowadays individualization process in China.

To illustrate the individualization model discussed by Beck, Bauman, and Giddens, I draw the following diagram to show the relationship between the key concepts:

From the chart, we can see that, in classic modernity/ first modernity, society generates and distributes wealth which makes a country build its social welfare system. Institutional support and protections provided are mostly designed for individuals rather than families (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.3). The benefit for individuals helps them against their family cohesion, also at the same time enforcing people to organize more and more of their own lives (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.23). Nonetheless, in second modernity, the principle of the society is distributing ‘bads’. As the unintended risks and consequences happen sometime, it becomes harder for people to understand and respond to their life as before. Restrictions and bias of our understanding require the whole society and individuals to reflect on the uncontrollable changes again and again, which also contributes to individualization as individuals have to design and manage their own lives in the risk society. In the middle part of the chart, globalization works majorly on the other side of detraditionalization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.23). As people can travel through transportation and mass media as often as they want, inherited ways for living to fail to conduct people in daily life. Individuals

have to find their own way to live their own lives. This disembedding also works as one of the key points of individualization.

3.3 The Individualization in China under second modernity theories

The individualization theories are mainly developed by Zygmunt Bauman, Anthony Giddens, and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim. One thing that should be highlighted is these individualization theories, which I've elaborated above, were mainly designed to capture the features of Western European societies. The premise of my research is if there is individualization in China?

To answer this question, Yan Yunxiang claims that "Chinese society has never stopped changing and a transition perspective is frequently examined in studies of contemporary China. The rise of the individual is one such transformative change (Yan, 2010b, p.1)." He also mentions that according to a number of empirical researches from him and some other researchers which can be seen from the book like *The individualization of Chinese society*[1] and *Ichina the rise of the individual in modern chinese society*[2], there is ample evidence showing the rise of the Chinese individual (Yan, 2010b, p.15). Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim also argue that based on some empirical material and rigorous analysis, there is significant proof to show that 'the individual has become a basic social category in China'(Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2010,p.xiii). They demonstrated that even that is even the theory of individualization, which they and others developed, is based on the European modernity. However, the individualization theories are also open in principle to different 'historical constellations'(Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, 2010,p.xiii). In their opinion, there are four basic types of historical constellations of modernity: European modernity, US American modernity, Chinese modernity, and Islamic modernity (Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, 2010, p.xvi). As the individualization theories are one part of the theories of second modernity. A Chinese path towards individualization should be explored on the foothold of the Chinese type of modernity to a large extent.

Yan Yunxiang discusses the process of individualization in the Chinese Context. He applies Risk society and individualization theories into

Chinese society in his book *The Individualization of Chinese Society*.

Yan Yunxiang argues that under the second modernity framework of Beck and Giddens, individualization in China has the features of both the classic modernity and second modernity. Meanwhile, there are also some traditions and customs from pre-modern eras undergoing (Yan, 2010a, p.291). To examine the individualization in China, especially regarding the post-90s, theories for the first modernity (industrialization, distribution of 'goods') and the second modernity (risk, technology, distribution of 'bads') should both be paid attention to. Globalization and detraditionalization as the feature of modernization happen in both classic and second modernity (Yan, 2010a, p.287).

He importantly remarks that comparing the individualization in Chinese case and Western Europe, globalization and detraditionalization, the creation of a life of one's own works have similar impacts. However, there are some differences between the model of individualization in the West and China (Yan, 2010a, p.287).

First, in the west, disembodiment happens in how individuals define their identity and reconstruct their social relations through institutional mechanisms like education, career, or lifestyle since social groups lose their capacity of sorting individuals to different categories (Yan, 2010a, p.287). When it comes to China, Yan writes that,

'The individual effort of DIY biography is first and foremost about the improvement of living standards and social status. Personal identity does matter, but it matters mainly because it affects one's life chance. As a result, mobility, which seems to be merely one of many factors in the western European case, plays a pivotal role in the Chinese case of individualization (Yan, 2010a, p.288).'

By addressing the importance of improving living standards and social status in self-identify and DIY biography, Yan points out that individualism in contemporary China refers more to the concern of productivity (Yan, 2010c) instead of the concern of equality and being

modern citizens in the western world. In short, in Yan's opinion, disembodiment works in different ways in individualization in the west and in China.

The second difference lies in the institutional support from the state and the following consequences. Western European countries, as welfare countries provide individuals with education, social security, medical care, employment, and unemployment benefits which cannot or are very rare to find in China after the 1990s (Yan, 2010a, p.288). Those benefit designs for individuals rather than for families (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.3), which work for the generation of individuals. Nevertheless, since the 1990s, the Chinese government withdrew from the socialist welfare system and people gradually lost institutional protection and state support. Although people are allowed to move to form their birthplace, they have to rely on their family support from the economy to the personal network (guanxi) to be an individual which can be seen as a back to the premodern time (Yan, 2010a, p.288). Also, without the welfare support to individuals, social-economic differentiation comes as an outcome to some extent. People are sorted out into different categories according to economic standing and social status (Yan, 2010a, p.289).

Third, not like welfare countries where social relations are disembedding from old social groups and people have to choose and create their own biographies, the individuals in China identify themselves most refer to the family even they have gained the opportunities to physically leave the family after 1990s(Yan, 2010a, p.289). It becomes hard for the individual to reach self-consistent psychologically as they have to cope with the Globalized individualization process and the self-identity based on their families (Yan, 2010a, p.289).

Finally, Yan points out that the difference between the primary mover behind the rise of the individual in the western European countries and in

China is that the market works as the main impetus in western society while the institutional changes conducted by the party-state is the driving force in China, which he called state-managed individualization (Yan, 2003).

‘The party-state in China also directs the flow of individualization by soft management (as opposed to control) of the interplay among the players: the individual, the market, social groups, institutions, and global capitalism. (Yan, 2010a, p.290) ’

By doing so, the party-state restricts the development of civil society and its related ideas like equality, liberty, privacy, etc. Instead, being more productive, more self-reliant, taking more responsibility are allowed or even emphasized in the context of the political authoritarianism of the party-state. There is a clear boundary of which aspects of individualization the party-state favored and which, in the country, are clearly not.

Yan finally concludes the Chinese model of individualization that Chinese individuals must deal with the complex conditions from pre-modern, modern and post-modern times simultaneously, the individualization in China has multi-layered and multi-temporal characters¹(Yan, 2010a, p.291).

After the brief review of Yan’s conclusion, I wonder how these conclusions work in post-90s urban areas nowadays (ten years after Yan’s book *individualization of Chinese society*. As we’ve discussed above, my research is based on the assumption that there is an individualization happening in Chinese society. I intend to see how this process runs in the post-90s life. Based on Yan’s conclusion: complex conditions and four differences between the west European model and the Chinese model, I separated my job into two parts. One is about career choice, and another is about family relations. And, I’ve made the following series of interview questions for my participants:

1. What is the job you want to do shortly? Do your parents have their opinions about that? How do those opinions affect your choice?
2. How is your financial state since 18? Who paid your University tuition fee and living cost? How long do you think this financial situation would continue? If your parents have kept financially supporting you until now, do you think that would be any influence on your daily life?
3. Do you have different opinions about life choices from your parents in general? If so, what are they?

Question series one is mainly being set to explore how much freedom of job choice post-90s have? As we've reviewed before, second modernity asks people to be highly responsible for their life. People are forced to make decisions and take the consequences. By asking about these questions, we can see if Chinese individuals have the features of the individualization in the second modernity.

Question series two has been designed for two intentions. First, Beck has emphasized the importance of the welfare system in the western European, by asking these questions, we can see how post-90s deal with it without an underdeveloped social support system. Second, as far as I know, most of the people in my focus group are sponsored by their parents commonly until they get a full-time job or even sponsor them to buy a property. These questions share a background of Chinese traditions which can help me learn more about how traditions work in post-90s daily life and if there are disembedding and detraditionalization processes in the post-90s.

Question series three is also related to the individuality of the post-90s in China but I draw it in a more general way. By asking these questions, I tried to figure out if the family works as a key factor in the individualization process of China in the post-90s. If so, how does it work?

Note

As my research is to study the individualization among post-90s, I would mainly build my work on Yan Yunxiang's research. In his research, he only compares the Chinese model of individualization to the western European model instead of the American model, which would continue to be used in my thesis (See four basic types of modernity in *Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2010, p.xvi*). Concerning that, in my thesis, when "the west" has been mentioned, it means the western European countries.

[1] Yan, Y. (2010). *The individualization of Chinese society*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.

[2] Hansen, M. and Svarverud, R., 2010. *Ichina*. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

In Feixiaotong's book *Xiang tu zhong guo*, he points out that the essential quality of Chinese social structure has been called renlun (human relations). Based on this rule, people know the distinction of interacting with different people and creating social organizations in traditional society (Fei, Hangeli, and Wang, 2012). In a very long pre-modern period in China, people follow the rules based on rituals. Those rules are granted since childhood which have become people's interior habits. A person who breaks the rules for a selfish reason would be regarded as the scum of the community (Fei, Hangeli, and Wang, 2012). Under this pattern, individuals are usually restricted under the rules. What's more, when it becomes a pattern, everyone would put pressure on others surreptitiously. Individuals' voices and needs usually submit to the ritual rules for human relations.

China's first modern short story *A Madman's Diary* written by Lu Xun is talking about "eat people". Qian liqun interprets that "eat people" is a myth. In that book, people eat each other and no one can be the exception even the kids. Qian argues that "eat people " is not about cannibalism in China but about attenuating individuality by using the renlun (human relations) and lizhi (ritual rules) as invisible pressure. People have to give up part of their individuality, at the same time, they become part of the pressure to force other people (mostly kids) to give up the same thing. This book was published in 1918 just one year before the May Fourth Movement. Anti-traditions and modernization started rising on a large scale.

In Beck's book *Risk Society: Towards a new modernity*, Beck defined the classic modernity: the production and distribution of wealth reasoning the industrialization. He points out that in the second modernity, the development of science, technology, globalization has created risks, which has made our society a risk society. People are constantly required to respond and take action to minimize the risks. We can see a decline in traditions and customs and a growth in individualization under this reflexivity (Beck and Ritter, 1992).

Yan Yunxiang argues that under the second modernity framework of Beck and Giddens, individualization in China has the features of both the classic modernity and second modernity. Meanwhile, there are also some traditions and customs from pre-modern eras undergoing (Yan, 2010a). He argues that the difference between the primary mover behind the rise of the individual in the west and in China is that the market works as the main impetus in western society while the institutional changes conducted by the party-state is the driving force in China, which he called state-managed individualization (Yan, 2003).

He also discussed that there is a Chinese understanding of Western individualism from the Maoist era that formed the concept of individualism of some generations in China (Yan, 2010). The Maoist era has passed many years and generation changes, how's the individualization going on in China especially in the post-90s generation?

The research tends to study individualization in Chinese society by analyzing post-90s' biographical narratives towards career (study & work) and family relationships.

Researching individualization is a big and broad job. I would narra it to the life experience and opinions towards the career and family of urban, well-educated young people.

Interviews may seek knowledge of a social situation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). To study individualization in a certain period of time, the hypothesis is that there is an individualization process happening in China now. Post-90s are practicing individualization in their own way.

The semi-structured interview has its capacity to provide insight into how interviewees view the world (Bryman, 2015). Therefore a semi-structured interview that is more open-ended allows me to collect data from the interviewee's point of view towards individualism.

However, to what extent the questions should be preplanned is another challenge. For the exploratory purpose, the interviews can be quite open and conducted following the subject's answers. The thematic focus can help formulate the research questions and clarify the theme during the interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Notwithstanding, "interviews that test hypotheses of group differences tend to be more structured (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.106)." The word, context, and sequence of questions should be more standardized in order to compare the interviews from the groups. I want to collect data about the subject's perception and opinion about the lived world. I would conduct a semi-structured interview with a thematic focus, while this should be within one age group. When it comes to comparing the differences between the two groups, I would design the questions in a more structured way. The two groups would be given the same context on the same questions so that their answers could be compared easily and show the test result of the hypothesis.

Purposive sampling was selected as a strategic way to ensure that the sample is relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2015). The two subjects I choose would represent two different eras. In Yan's opinion,

individualization in China is mostly driven by party-state institutional changes. Thus, people born in the 60s were growing up in the Maoist era and collectivist period. They've experienced the changes before and after the reform in 1978. I choose this group because I want their voice about individualism. Also, as the older generation in Chinese modernity, I want to see how traditions work and remain in their stories and narratives. At the same time, I choose post-90's as my other group of subjects also because I want to test some hypotheses from Beck's theory and Yan's study. As one of the post-90's, we were born in a market economy period which started in 1992 in China. We group up in the rapid development of science and information technology. I want to know more about how individualization happens to people in my generation and the conflict and dispute between our parents and us when it comes to the individualism discussion. That's why I choose these two groups of people as my samples.

The semi-structured interviews would be conducted by WeChat voice call as the cost is much cheaper than traveling a long distance to China. At the same time, I would record the phone calls and transcribe them later. "Qualitative researchers are frequently interested not just in what people say but also in the way that they say it (Bryman, 2015, p.479)." It is obvious that the content of the answers is very important. The narrative way and discourse reflect in the interviews also values. In Yan's study in Northeastern China, he has analyzed the way people there call their wives which may imply the rural traditions from the pre-modern era (Yan, 2010a). That's a good example for me to analyze the different ways people talk about the same things. Transcriptions allow a more thorough examination of interviewees answers (Bryman, 2015, p.479). By doing that I can analyze and examine the expression ways of two groups of my subjects.

Apart from the transcriptions, an audit trail would be implemented to show how I reach my conclusions. An audit trail would include the actual data I have generated and the information about how I've analyzed the data (Thomson,2014).

4.2 Data collection and interview information

The data was collected online from March 2020 to April 2020. This study was mainly a semi-structured interview as the primary research method. There are three major topics in my interviews: career choice, life, and work experience in big cities, and family relations. My purpose is to do research on post-90's life experience and explore if the data is consistent with the existing theoretical analysis mainly with Yan Yunxiang's individualization model in China.

There were three criteria for selecting the sample. First, they have to be born in 1990-1999. Second, they must obtain at least a Bachelor's degree. Third, they must have worked or have been working in first-tier cities in China but not born and raised there.

Born in the 90s and holding a Bachelor's degree shows that they are educated, young people. Having working experience in big cities but not originally from there showing a common situation that people in China migrate from less developed areas to relatively more developed areas. I intended to try to collect samples from two genders. The interviews are conducted in Chinese and via WeChat, which is the most common way they use to contact their family and friends. This makes participants feel at ease and willing to open to talk and even share some personal information including their financial conditions.

4.3 Ethical consideration

As I've chosen a semi-structured interview as my method, there are a few ethical things I need to take into consideration which include store, work on, and publish the data.

First, the data is collected by recording and stored on my phone first. Since there are financial pieces of information and information about people who work in the public office, I considered that information as sensitive information that should not be connected to the personal information within the recordings. Data on a phone is easy to be reached and taken for another purpose. I transferred data to a flash disk so that they are being kept in hardware only, after my working process.

Second, when I was working on the data, I used my phone to play the recordings and, at the same time, I was doing a transcript and taking notes on my computer. This stage is happening without connecting to the internet, neither my phone nor my computer. After that, I analyzed the data in my thesis. All of my interviewees are anonymous in the transcript, notes, and my thesis to make sure that their personal information and sensitive information are being kept and processed separately

Third, even if the participants are anonymous, there is still some information about them in this thesis. For me, as a student from the center of East Asian and Southeast Asia, I would follow the rule for students doing research. That means the data I collected would only be used for this research. I would not talk about their personal information and sensitive information at the same time with others to let other people have a chance to identify them and cause trouble, which includes in the thesis seminar or in other cases.

4.4 Limitations and Demarcation

First, the data collected does not represent all the post-90s generation in China. As qualitative research to understand the living situation and perception of a group of people, the sample selection has been well considered and defined. The portrait of my focus group would be those who were born in the 1990s in the cities of China. He or she has got at least one bachelor's degree and has had working experience in big cities in China. In my thesis work, these big cities include Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Chengdu, however, my participants are not originally from there.

The findings here can be quite specific about the group of people who meet the criteria above. There are approximately 170 million people born in China in the 1990s. According to the statistics 2018, 18.09% of the post-90s generation have bachelor degrees. Despite the small scale, this study can still provide an insight into how individualism going on among the post-90s generation we have studied - reflected in their career choice, family relations, and financial state.

Besides, this thesis can also contribute to the study of the individualization process in middle-class families in China. Nine in ten of the participants' parents (at least one) are working in or retired from state-owned companies, which generally makes the family income meet the middle-class criteria in China. As the giant middle class in China is still growing and attracting attention around the world, this thesis provides a perspective of the features of this group.

5. Findings and Analysis

5.1 Nine in ten, iron rice bowl jobs are preferred by parents.

The “iron rice bowl(铁饭碗)” is translated as ‘tie fan wan’ which means a job with a stable income and relatively good benefit. Usually, people in China can have it for a life as long as no accident. That’s why people describe this kind of job as being made of iron. People work for the civil service, education, health care system, and state-owned enterprises are regarded as having ‘iron rice bowl’ jobs.

Nine participants (total 10) from my interviews said their one or both of their parents want them to have an iron rice bowl job. Among all of them, most (5 in 6) girls’ parents want them to become a teacher. No matter what they’ve studied in college, teacher certifications seem like something that makes them feel secure.

‘My parents strongly recommend me to have a teaching certification. After I got my master’s degree in Global Journalism and went back from the UK, my parents pushed me to get a teaching certification. First, they think this job is stable. If I can get one, that means I will not have to change jobs frequently. Second, they think teachers have a good social status, which is very important for a girl. Third, they believe benefits like two paid vacations and a relatively good salary would make my life easier. Fourth, they think being a teacher in the education system would make my child or my children get a better education chance. (Yu)’

Opinions from her parents are representative, especially among the daughters' parents. For Wan and Ying, their parents have similar opinions.

'My parents are both working for the tax bureau. They had a very good benefit from their 'danwei 单位' when I was young. They want me to prepare for the exam and get a teaching certification, which would become one of my career choices. However, for me, I would like to become a teacher in a college or university. So that I would prepare for a Ph.D. entrance exam instead of a teaching certification in high school (wan).'

'I already got a teaching certification because I've graduated from Beijing Normal University. In contrast, I would like to consider the teaching job as my last choice. I want to start my own business first since I'm young, and I don't want to do a job from which I can see what my whole life looks like. My parents think I was too ambitious that they don't understand. They think I need to have my feet on the ground. That is becoming a teacher with a quiet table job (Ying).'

Another girl Sai, her parents would have a chance to get her a job in one of the central enterprises.

'My mother used to work in a state-owned tobacco company. After she retires, she can get 500 RMB as a pension every day now. My family benefits a lot with a member of a state-owned enterprise. We don't need to pay if any of us get hospitalized. Meanwhile, my dad has his own business selling computers. My parents think it's good to be a couple like them, the girl has an iron rice bowl job, and the guy can start his own business. The family can be stable in this way. Considering that, they would help me get a position in one of the central enterprises (Sai).'

Apparently, not all the girls' parents have this kind of relations ('guanxi' 关系) to get their child a quite decent job in the central state-control system. To have an alternative stable job, a teaching position in public school seems approachable for my well-educated female participants, or at least in their parents' eyes.

However, the guy's parents show a less strong comment on it. One of them is Dong's father,

'My father wants me to work for a state-owned TV station so that I can get a job that many people, including relatives and friends of my family, would admire me

as well as my family. Also, he thinks that the jobs of a state-owned TV station are more stable than many other jobs in private enterprises (Dong).’

Kang’s parents have got him a job position in the department of a national news agency in his province in Neimenggu. He turned down that since he doesn't want to go back to his hometown.

‘My dad is quite tired of being a self-employed entrepreneur. He has changed his small business area many times since I was young. Now he is nearly 60 but he still needs to pay for his pension. If he has an ‘iron rice bowl’, he doesn’t need to pay it himself or spend his life drifting. That’s why he strongly recommended me to work for a local news agency owned by the state (Kang).’

While Wen’s parents have a different opinion.

‘My parents both work as skilled technical workers in a state-owned company. Although they get good pay, they work six days a week. I’ve studied in boarding schools since I was seven, mainly because they can’t take good care of me. Because of that, my parents think not all the iron rice bowl jobs are equipped with big money, less work stress, and close to where you live ‘qian duo shi shao li jia jin’(钱多事少离家近). They only suggest my work should be close to my hometown, but they don’t think I need to have an iron rice bowl job (Wen).’

Yan Yunxiang claims that after the revolution, individuals in China re-embedded into ‘danwei(单位)’ in the cities and ‘gong she(公社)’ in the rural areas. Every individual is a part of a work-unit in the cities (Yan, 2010, p280). I design this question of the post-90s’ parents opinion towards ‘iron rice bowl’ because my participants are all from an urban area and eight in ten of their parents used to or now still working as long-term urban workers in ‘danwei(单位)’ which means or when used in the context of one of the state-owned enterprises. Because my participants’ parents have been involved in the collective and stable lifestyle of ‘danwei (单位)’ system more or less, they have got, or they have seen others around them getting those benefits and stable lifestyle from the state-organized system. Most of them want their children to have a stable lifestyle in this way.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim think that individualization in countries like China, also means ‘the collapse of state-sanctioned normal biographies,

frames of reference, role models. (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001,p2)' They argue that 'iron rice bowl' - the state take care of those people in 'danwei'(单位) from cradle to the grave is now breaking up and being taken place by contract-based income and job security, according to the personal ability and performance (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001,p1). Born in the mid and late 1990s, all of my participants grew up in the Socialist market economy era (since 1992). In the next part of this chapter, I would show the opinion of my participants to see their opinion of a career choice as well as their opinions towards 'iron rice bowl.'

5.2 'Iron rice bowl' in post-90s eyes - more than a job but a lifestyle

Following, my participants explained their opinion for or against their parents when it comes to 'iron rice bowl.' People who against it as:

'I don't want to be a teacher, at least not now. I can see that my life would be pretty much the same until I retire if I become a teacher in a public high school now (Xin).'

Becoming a teacher would be my last choice. I've already done some teaching internships, and I know I can do it well. I would like to consider it as a guarantee of my future life if I can't succeed in other work (Ying).

'I think 'iron rice bowl' is not as appealing as before. I work as an investigative reporter and a video producer. As the way corporations developed today, I can work with many different individuals and organizations as I want. But if I enter a department of a national news agency as my dad wants me to, my topic towards news or videos would be relatively limited to some certain fields (Kang).'

People who are up for it think that:

'My dad told me that I could only get one chance to get into one of the central enterprises. I have been entangled in my mind causes I've been going through a tough time living alone in Shanghai with long commute time, bad accommodation, and very high pressure. Despite the job I really enjoyed doing in Shanghai, I also want a job with more leisure time and a more stable lifestyle, especially considering I'm going to be married soon (Sai).'

Wen got a similar opinion. He wants to work as a college counselor because he wants to have more leisure time after work so that he can do part-time jobs related to his interest.

Meanwhile, there are also some participants who have no strong opinion towards that:

‘I work mainly as a cameraman. I can work at a flexible time, and I want to make my own documentary in the future. I can work with many kinds of companies, but I don’t mind if it is a state-owned company or not. I’ve argued with my dad, but since I was still financially dependent on him, I couldn’t go against him for a long period of time before (Dong).’

‘my parents used to recommend me to be a teacher in public schools strongly, but now they stop pushing me because they have seen that I’m doing the job I like in a private company. I have a stable income and in a good mood every day at work. I think what matters isn’t whether it’s an ‘iron rice bowl’ or not; it’s whether my present mental and physical state fit the position (Hong).’

From my participants' narrative, we can see that even their parents show a kind of close opinion towards ‘iron rice bowl’ that is most of them want their children to have a position in the state-organized system, voices differ from person to person among my post-90s participants. Considering both the lifestyle behind a specific job and the job content, each of them has their own answer about that.

5.3 Life in big cities - individual choices or chosen individuals

This section explores real-life experience and practice from the perspective of how the participants perceive life in big cities. These five cities are Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Chengdu. Each of them has more than 15 million population regarding the statistics of 2019.

Living alone with no families, living in big cities of my participants are mainly about their work or study experience. I started by asking my participants about why they chose those big cities and what their life looks like there.

The main reason my participants have chosen before or tend to choose to work in big cities turns out to be job opportunities there. Wen expresses his opinion as:

‘I think young people tend to migrate following job opportunities. There are many exhibitions in Shanghai every day. I work as a junior curator during the weekend, through which I can earn more money than my full-time job in a college (Wen).’

Xin talking about her experience as

‘My background is Journalistic & Communication, which is more developed in Shanghai. I would have more choices to work there (Xin).’

Xin also mentions that even is the same job as a journalist of a media company, working in Shanghai is quite different from working in her hometown Kunming:

‘There are a lot of exciting events and stories happening in Shanghai. As a journalist, I get a lot of news to report every day. Also, there are many diversified and competitive people there (in Shanghai). Not only my colleagues at work but also my interviewees from all walks of life. Life is busy and hard for most hupiao (People who live in Shanghai but not originally from there). Only those who are relatively competitive in society and could work under pressures can eventually settle in Shanghai. I’d love to be around those great and hard-working people. I don’t think I can meet many people like them in my hometown Kunming. (Xin)’

Wen and Xin, they chose Shanghai first, and then they started looking for opportunities there. Kang also chose Beijing for job opportunities.

‘I have worked as a freelance writer in the past several months. I think Beijing is the best place for people who are working as literary and art workers (Kang).’

Not like them, Wan, Hong, and Lian, they chose their job first and end up living and working in big cities currently.

‘I’ve studied English Literature in the UK, and I want to work as a scriptwriter. My last job was as a scriptwriter for a small theater in Guangzhou. While it turns out the job content is not like what I’ve expected before. I quit that job very soon. Even though I would probably go back to my hometown to prepare for a Ph.D. exam and maybe, if everything goes well, become a college teacher in the

future, I would stay in Guangzhou to find a real scriptwriter job that I would like to do now. I'm only 22 years old. I don't want to restrict myself (Wan).'

Apart from them, Lian, a 21-year-old college student said:

'I want to work in Shanghai cause I'm keen to work for the public benefit. I used to work in a public benefit start-up in Shanghai, aiming at helping children with articulation disorders. I worked as a team leader and led my team to take part in some venture contests. I enjoy building up and running a team. I think the best thing was that everyone in our team works for the same goal——helping children with special needs. I would go back to Shanghai to rejoin the team I've led after my graduation. I think working in big cities like Shanghai can fulfill my multiple mental needs (Lian).'

Hong has a similar answer to:

'I first got my job in my province Yunnan. The job rotation brought me here (Beijing) two years ago. I'm quite satisfied with my current job, or, pretty much 95 percent of my life now, since I work 6-7 days a week. I probably can't settle in Beijing because neither my boyfriend nor I have a Beijing hukou(户口) or the ability to buy a property here. I plan to invest in a homestay with my boyfriend after he finishes his military service. Until then, I would keep doing my job in Beijing. I like my fulfilling life now (Hong).'

People like Wan, Lian, and Hong n didn't choose to migrate to big cities at the beginning. Nonetheless, the job opportunities brought them there. Big cities then became their ideal choices at the moment.

5.4 Ideal Job——proactive management

The analysis presented in this section about my participants' opinions toward ideal jobs.

Mushroom, who studied Chemistry during his bachelor's and master's time, chose to turn down his Ph.D. offer and start his company providing guiding service to students who want to study abroad. Nonetheless, this big shift turned out not to be his ideal job, either.

'My ideal job is a job that I can keep studying and improving myself. Venture capitalists seem like an ideal job for me. I mean, to be deeply involved in the rule of the circulating of each industry, I can continue studying and improve myself (Mushroom).'

‘I didn’t give up my previous work for investigating Beijing college sexual harassment, but currently, I don’t have enough money and resources for that. Including my full-time job and a part-time job, now my salary is about 20 000 RMB per month. I plan to spend less and save more money for my own TV program related to my previous work (Kang).’

I think that the job that I want to do and the job that is ideal for me is different. I want to be a documentary producer. That's the job I really want to do. Considering the current situation, a cameraman with a stable income would be an ideal job for me (Dong).

‘I want to work in a college as I did before. Cause this kind of Job in a Danwei(单位) would let me have my personal time. I can get off work every day at 5 pm, and spend time for personal improvement or a different part-time job (Wen).’

‘Based on my personal experience, rather than a job, the ideal job is more about a lifestyle you can enjoy. As I work almost 996 (9 am-9 pm, six days a week), my work is 90 percent of my life. I like this job because it pushes me to reach my full potential (Hong).’

Hong thinks that before someone starts a job, he or she can’t imagine it truly.

‘People should be involved in the job so that they know if that is what they want. Like myself, I didn’t expect much when I started this job, but I enjoy it now when I experience it (Hong).’

Apart from that, Yan has a dream to invest in a homestay with her boyfriend in a few years.

‘I didn't think about what would be an ideal job for me. I feel like I just don’t want to work in my hometown and probably work as a high school teacher. Before that, I want to spend more time in Shanghai working as a journalist or something related. I would see what happens, and I’m open to opportunities both in Shanghai or in my hometown (Xin).’

One of the features that I can see from my participants' answers is that the ideal job is not just a concrete job for them, rather it’s about a sort of career and time management. For example, some of my participants know they are doing a job temporarily for the purpose of looking for another job. That’s quite different from many of their parents' lives - to have an iron rice bowl.

Another example is that all ten of my participants have or had at least one part-time job apart from their full-time job or studying. Sai continues doing her job online as one of the organizers of an NGO in China; at the same time, she is doing her full-time master's degree in Europe. Wen got more money from his part-time job than his salary from a college in Shanghai. Kang writes for a news and comment platform to earn extra money in his free time. He said he spent his time playing video games before that, which he didn't want to do anymore. Zhou hasn't stopped writing for social media when she was in school and when she was looking for a job.

More jobs at the same time usually refer to more abilities to earn money and more possibilities to work to some extent. In the internet age and internet economy boom in China, this group of well-educated young people usually can do more kinds of jobs both online and offline, on weekdays or on the weekends. It seems like they have more options than their parents' generation had when they were young.

When they're talking about their ideal job, they're talking about a lifestyle, a different job combination, or a current compromise for the future. There is a strong sense of personal responsibility, which we can see from their answers towards their ideal job. Most of them can get a job because of their parents' 'guanxi(关系)'. In other words, some of their parents had planned for them and had the ability to conduct their plans. However, at least now, no one seems in the way their parents have chosen for them. This may be because of the age group of my participants who are in their mid-20s and still looking for exploring the possibilities. But we still can see the value of self-management, personal choice, and personal responsibilities.

Research about the job choice of rural young Chinese in 2010 shows that young people hold negative thoughts about their future career development in their 20s. Ten years later, in my research, most of my participants

express positive attitudes toward their future. Even some of them are unemployed with little income and know that they will finally leave the big cities, at least they hold a good wish for the future at the moment.

Beck demonstrates that individualization requires people to see themselves as individuals, “to plan, to understand, to design themselves as individuals.” (Beck, 1999, p9) Beck and Beck Gernsheim call individualization “a life of one’s own”. Further, they elaborate that ‘life of one’s own is a reflexive life’, which means that contradictory information, dialogue, negotiation, compromise is always alone with one’s life.

If ‘Iron rice bowl’ and collective lifestyle can be seen as a way that a collective takes responsibility for individuals, individualization, and post-90s biography exhibit that individuals should be “mature and responsible (Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1997, p26)” and in the end take responsibilities of their own success and failures. Thus, ‘active management (Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1997, p26)’ is needed in individuals’ life choices, especially from career choice. The linear career plan, the ongoing part-jobs, the compromises of the current time, the self-analysis, and they contradict with their parents all illustrate us a positive attitude towards self-management and self-fulfillment. A process of individualization is undergoing in the post-90s life.

5.5 Financially independent - The economic base determines the superstructure

One of the issues I wanted to study during my research was how post-90s opinions towards financial independence are. One thing very prominent in my interviewees is that they are eager to be financially independent. What does financial independence mean to them, specifically to these young people with a city background, good education, and just about entering society?

In my case, all of my participants share the same situation as they are all sponsored by their parents both in the undergraduate years, postgraduate years (both in and outside China), and often until they get their first long-

term job. If they change their jobs, during the unemployed period, they usually have their family to fall back on when the living gets tough.

I got support from my parents when I was doing voluntary teaching, while I was reluctant to take the money. My dad is a typical male chauvinist. He sees himself as the dominant of the family and I am the subordinate. I don't want to be controlled by him. He has his experience, of course, but I don't conduct his plan in my life. Unfortunately, I could not support myself at that time, I need support from him, that's not pride.

'Financial independence is very important for me mainly works on the pressures. It is not my family that can't support me, more often I want to unload my mental stress. I would have less pressure and feel less guilty if I can support myself (Lian).'

'I negotiated a lot with my parents before I can support myself by the part-time income. I used to receive money from them every month when I was studying at university. They support me a while after I graduated. They said they want to live a traditional life that at least two generations live under the same roof, so they asked me to come back to them after my study. I understand that I'm the only child of them and they didn't expect that I would not live with them, ever since I was born. I just don't want to compromise with life easily. I stopped getting support from them and do more part-time jobs to support myself and that works. Now they don't push me as they did before. I believe, the economic base determines the superstructure (Ying).'

'My parents stopped supporting me since I give up my PhD offer. Just because I didn't do what they think is right for me, they cut off my financial support. Well, that is fair. They have the right. It's their money (Mushroom).'

Originally from Marxism, "The economic base determines the superstructure" was in the political course of the post-90s generation. It also works as a key point of an individual's self-expression and life choices within the family of the post-90s generation. The less support they need from the family, the more voice they get for the personal choice. That could be a reason for post-90ers to make financial independent one of the top priorities of them.

Moreover, superstructure means everything not directly to do with the production. Living with money comes with guilt for the family and

pressures from compromising to life choice. Individual economic bases work on the mental health of the post-90s. Individuals need to not only earn their living but also earn the freedom of choice and pride.

6. Conclusion

In this study, I attempted to explore how individualization happens to post-90s generation in China under the framework of the western European individualization theories and Yan Yunxiang's studies of the Chinese model in individualization. I aimed to find out how much the problems that post-90ers in China are facing now, regarding the career choices and family relations, can be analyzed under the two frameworks. And, how is Yan's theory about individualization in China applicable to career choice and family relations for urban people in China who were born in the 1990s?

Yan concludes four major points about individualization theories of Chinese model:

First, Yan thinks that 'disembedding' and 'individual work for a DIY biography' lie more on earning life chances instead of doing life politics. Things like mobilities and personal identities matter because it has affected people's productivity (Yan, 2010a, p.278). It is not like the Western Europe, people remake themselves by education, career or lifestyle (according to Yan, 2010a, p.278), these post-90ers in my study remake themselves also by achieving financially independent or not, by if it's able to settle in megacities or not, by if their families can support them or not. However, the opinions towards 'iron rice bowl' show that post-90ers also looking for a lifestyle differ from their parents. They are looking for a more flexible life with multiple choices by considering an 'iron rice bowl' but choose not to do it right now, by managing time and doing more than one job or by just enjoying a job but don't care about the future plan right now. This finding can challenge Yan's argument that Chinese people don't remake their identities with career or lifestyles like people in Western European.

Second, the welfare state is a very important foothold of second modernity and individualization theories which is not applied to the situation of China now. Yan believes that, due to the reforms that happened in the mid-1990s, Chinese people have got little support from the state. The result of that is people fall back to the family and personal network *guanxi*. In my study, young post-90ers are all provided by the family before they get a long-term job, which means that, if they come from a family with more wealth and more powerful *guanxi*, generally, they can get better education chances, job positions and they can afford to be out of work longer with more risk resistance and more relaxed mood in their life. Without welfare support, people who were born in the 1990s differentiated by economic standing and social status (which usually lead to more powerful *guanxi*). Yan's second point of individualization in China could be testified here from my study. As for his point that without institutional support, the individualization in China would lead to a polarized society magnifying the gap between the rich and the poor, the high social status and low social status, can't be seen in this study.

Third, Yan argues that, differ from the current wave of individualization in the Western Europe which is the reflexivity of first modernity(industrialization, urbanization, and liberalization) with well-developed individualism, the individualization going on in China now is based on complex conditions where the pre-modern, modern and postmodern features coexist with a premature individualism(Yan, 2010a, p.291, 289). This character of the individualization happening in China now causes the psychological inconsistency of individuals together with family disagreement within each individual.

In my study, it is very often, my participants have different opinions towards life choices from their parents. Having the different preference of 'iron rice bowl', post-90ers and their parents usually need to negotiate. One the one hand, the post-90s generation think they are free to choose what kind of job they want to do and what kind of lifestyle they prefer to perform, often with the argument that they are adults and individuals who shouldn't be restricted and follow the orders from parents. One the other hand, as we discussed above, post-90ers rely on the family financially and even get

identified by the family's social status, which results in less say for these post-90ers in terms of future choices. The more their family supports them, the more voice is forced to be given. The economic base determines the superstructure, which can be seen in my study. Also, the chaos in the values and ethics also works as an individual problem. As we discussed in the Literature reviews part, the traditional Chinese society has its rules towards individuals in the premodern time, which is to some extent, the opposite of individualism came from the west. Every individual needs to cope with the conflict of values, because that may cause psychological inconsistency or moral challenges(see the further discussion in the next section). In short, the findings of my study could provide micro cases for his point.

Finally, Yan points out that the impetus behind the rise of the individual in the western European countries is the market while in China the institutional changes conducted by the party-state are the driving force, which he called state-managed individualization (Yan, 2010a, p.291, 289). The discussion part of the *hukou* system could provide us a way how the party-state encourages the rise of individuals by loosening the registration system, which can be seen as an evidence of Yan's points. However, there are three sub-points under this argument: Yan claims that the party-state encourages the individual to grow in the economic and private life but not the public life especially not in the political field (Yan, 2010a, p.290). Considering the points in economy and family life we discussed above, we can see a growing individual of the post-90s generation. However, since my study is not related to political rights, we can't conclude if the claim of political rights has been exempted from individualization. Moreover, Yan's argument that privileges and opportunities of self-expression are granted to some people but not the others and people are not allowed to pursue self-interest as a collective in China beyond the scope of this thesis.

This thesis is mainly focusing on urban post-90s generation with small cases, there are more topics under the western theories of individualization and Yan Yunxiang's theories of individualization in China which cannot be explored and discussed. While this thesis is an in-depth study for the post-90s generation which can be used to support similar topics.

To sum up, Yan Yunxiang's theories about individualization in China can be pretty much applicable to the post-90s generation in China. However, post-90ers also DIY their biographies by managing their life and career proactively to be able to achieve the lifestyle they want. The productivity and life chances are not the only thing post-90ers use to re-embed themselves within the current wave of individualization.

7. Discussion

7.1 Hukou system and mobility

It is not long for Chinese people to easily get permission to leave their birthplace and work far away from home. According to Yan, Chinese citizens get their identity cards from 1985, and they were physically set free from the household registration system '*hokou*' (Yan, 2010a, p.278). This pretty much in line with one of the important concepts of modernity: disembedding.

Giddens thinks that one thing that includes in the disembedding is that social relations have been sort of changed or removed from the local context which has expanded the space people used to interact with others (Giddens, 1990, p.21) In the People's Republic of China, this physical disembedding happened in the 1980s. Starting from then, many people are legitimized to live and work outside their local communities(Yan, 2010a, p.279).

In Yan's opinion, urban people have a higher degree of mobility. My participants are all from the urban area, but they seem like they are still restricted by the '*hukou*' system. In Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen, people who are not registered in the '*hukou*' system need to pay social security insurance for five years to get permission to buy a property. Of course, hukou is not the only reason for keeping young people away from big cities, the housing prices also count a lot. However, *hukou* system is a very obvious '*visible hand*' to control mobility.

In my studies, my interviewees were all showing a big interest to live in the megacities in the future. But from their expressions, some of them are not sure if they actually can achieve that. Living in a city for a long term usually means planning to have a family, to raise a child, to buy a property, etc. These are all related to the hukou system. Even my participants are relatively well-educated, probably can get financial support from families, and also with a promising future in many people's eyes, they still can't live and work in the place where they want to, not mention those low income and less-educated people.

As the post-90s generation, my interviewees were born with the mobility that comes from the loosening of the *hukou* system. However, the invisible hand market of the housing price and the visible hand hukou restrict the mobility of them. As Yan said, in China, the party-state is the major driven force of individualization (Yan, 2003), which can be interpreted from this hukou system.

7.2 Personal ethical framework

The individualization in China has caused a lot of new changes in the intergenerational relationship. The old don't expect the traditional culture family pattern as they used to (Thøgersen and Ni, 2010), which means that they are not asking for the same pattern of living and being provided by their children as before. In my study, the post-90s often negotiate the way of living with their parents. The traditional intergenerational pattern fails to structure the relationship. It's not that post-90s don't want to live with their parents and provide for them, more often, it's the young people with mobility who try to pursue more chances and opportunities. Also, these post-90ers are all from urban middle-class families whose parents often have pensions to live by themselves and keep providing for their children in their adult lives.

This problem is not only existing in the intergenerational relationship. In the context of disembedding now, as the local communities and the cultural traditions that go with it lose its functions to guide people

to interact with others, friendship, the relationships between teachers and students, colleagues, higher degree and lower degree, boyfriend and girlfriend all need to be explored and reconstructed by an individual. It is not like the pre-modern time, when people are clearly guided, when all the relationships are shaped and regulated by religions or local rules and traditions, with the atomizing trend in this modernity, every individual need to construct a personal ethical framework.

Unfortunately, in China, for the vast majority of people, there is not an overall ethic plan which is widely recognized, self-consistent, extendable, and also compatible with the party-state design for the residents. Yan Yunxiang takes the individualization in China as a state-managed individualization (Yan, 2010a, p289), however, the compatible ethical framework of which has not yet been established and works well.

It takes time and energy for people to figure out how to be a friend, a subordinate, a boss, a student, a teacher, a colleague, a lover, a man, a woman, a father/mother, a son/daughter, an old or a young. A set of values and expectations of relationships is needed.

A Life of one's own is also a process of individual conformity (Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 2002, p151). As an inescapable personal responsibility, an ethical framework needs every individual to construct and refine.

Note that this absence of an ethical framework is not only existing in China. With the economic base changing rapidly since modernity in many countries around the world, the traditional ethic versus new values like liberalism/neoliberalism challenges the previous patterns of social interaction model. For every individual, working on a personal constructive relationship and achieving harmonious coexistence with others could be both freedom or a burden in modern society.

Appendix-information of the participants

No.	Name	Gender	Born Year	City living currently	Monthly financial situation (RMB)	Education	Current situation
1	Sai	F	1995	Lund	-4000	Master candidate in Sweden	Master candidate & part-time job
2	Dong	M	1994	Chengdu	+4000	Bachelor	Full time job & part-time job
3	Wan	F	1997	Guangzhou	-3000	Bachelor	Graduate looking for a job
4	Hong	F	1995	Beijing	+6000	Bachelor	Full-time job (996)
5	Wen	M	1994	Shanghai	+2000	Master in Sweden	Full-time job
6	Lian	F	1998	Kaifeng	-2000	Master in the UK	Preparing for the postgraduate test at home
7	Kang	M	1993	Beijing	+12000	Bachelor	Full-time job & part-time job
8	Xin	F	1995	Kunming	-3000	Master in the UK	Graduate looking for a job & part time job
9	Mushroom	M	1994	Shenzhen	+4000	Master in Hongkong	Self-employed, own a start-up company

10	Ying	F	1996	Shanghai	-4000	Master in Shanghai	Graduate looking for a job
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Note:

1. All the participants have bachelor degrees in China.
2. All the names are nicknames chosen by my participants and I to make sure the personal information would not be connected to the real people in life.
3. All the participants have working or full-time internship experience in the first-tier cities (according to the new China city level from China Business Network Co.,Ltd 2019.5.) in China including Beijing, Shanghai, Gangzhou, Shenzhen, but they are not originally from these cities.
3. This Interview is conducted in March and April 2020.

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