

UCLA

UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Collective Individualization: Co-living Among Youth in Contemporary China

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/47g0w309>

Author

Zhuang, Haoyan

Publication Date

2024

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Collective Individualization:

Co-living Among Youth in Contemporary China

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Anthropology

by

Haoyan Zhuang

2024

© Copyright by

Haoyan Zhuang

2024

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Collective Individualization:
Co-living Among Youth in Contemporary China

by

Haoyan Zhuang

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2024

Professor Yunxiang Yan, Co-Chair

Professor Nancy Levine, Co-Chair

Co-living, an emerging living arrangement embraced by Chinese youth in urban areas, embodies self-determination, sharing, communication, and intimacy among residents. Through extensive year-long ethnographic fieldwork conducted in two co-living houses in Shanghai, this dissertation illuminates the collective lifestyle established by residents and the challenges they encountered. Residents devised democratic mechanisms for discussing collective affairs, fostered quasi-familial intimacy, and organized public activities in shared spaces to cultivate social connections. The co-living experience is shadowed by gender conflicts, state

surveillance, and national risks like the lockdown during COVID-19, and residents collectively navigate these challenges. Through the exploration of co-living life in urban China, I argue that the collectivity co-living residents established is underscoring the collective coping mechanisms inherent in co-living amidst the material and psychological pressures of urban life, including soaring housing costs and social isolation. Here, the collective life serves as a tool for pursuing individual interests. Such interplay between collective life and individual interests sheds light on a special re-embedding mechanism of the individualization process amongst Chinese youth, highlighting the concept of "collective individualization" within Chinese society. This study argues that Chinese youth engage in co-living as a strategic response to societal pressures, representing a unique re-embedding mechanism amidst the broader process of individualization. Unlike a return to socialist collectivism or complete atomization, co-living reflects an intricate interplay between individual agency and cultural norms. This phenomenon demonstrates a nuanced pathway of individualization deeply rooted in Chinese culture and society. Furthermore, this research enriches the understanding of co-living practices by elucidating their complex interaction with local cultural norms such as family dynamics, gender relations, and youth culture in the Chinese context.

The dissertation of Haoyan Zhuang is approved.

Douglas W. Hollan

Andrea S. Goldman

Yunxiang Yan, Committee Co-Chair

Nancy Levine, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2024

To the Chinese youth, an emerging power

Table of Contents

Abstract of the dissertation	ii
List of Figures	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Vitae	xi
Introduction: By the Road I Walked	1
1 To the Collective We Belong: The Mechanisms and Life Experience to Establish the Belongings and Connections among Individuals	46
2 In the Family We Dwell: Familial Narratives in Co-living	82
3 To the Public We Open: Youth Space and Stranger Intimacy	108
4 With Mixed Genders We Meet: Sexual Harassment Issues in Co-living	139
5 Under the Challenges We Live: Neighbors, Authorities and the Rental Market	174
6 Through the Risks We Go: Collectivity during the Lockdown of Shanghai	207
Conclusion: Into the Future We Look—Understanding Co-living and Youth in Mobility	238
Bibliography	267

List of Figures

Figure 1: Residents of EHT during my fieldwork (2021.9-2022.6)

Figure 2: Residents of EHF living during my fieldwork (before 2022.9)

Figure 3: Xiangru's visualized personality

Figure 4: Liuzhi's visualized personality

Figure 5: Chansu's visualized personality

Figure 6: A corner of the living room of EHF

Figure 7: Financial conditions of EHT in Dec. 2021 (excerpt)

Figure 8: House structure of EHF

Figure 9: The activities held in co-living houses

Figure 10: Two dimensions of gender relations and crossroad theory

Figure 11: The division and sharing of one group purchase of vegetables

Figure 12: The division of labor amongst residents of EHT for one collective dinner

Acknowledgments

Embarking on the journey to this dissertation has been a profound odyssey, one enriched immeasurably by the collective contributions of mentors, friends, and family. As the title of my dissertation suggests, this endeavor epitomizes a process of "collective individualization," where the support of many has culminated in my individual achievement.

My heartfelt gratitude extends first and foremost to my esteemed advisors, Prof. Yunxiang Yan and Prof. Nancy Levine, whose guidance has been steadfast from the inception of my doctoral studies. Over the course of six years, their unwavering encouragement and support empowered me to navigate the rigors of doctoral research at UCLA. I owe not only my academic growth but also my scholarly identity to their mentorship. Their invaluable insights and patient feedback have been instrumental in shaping this dissertation. I am equally indebted to the esteemed members of my dissertation committee, Prof. Douglas Hollan and Prof. Andrea Goldman, whose expertise and constructive criticism have profoundly influenced my research and writing. Their mentorship has endowed me with the confidence to pursue my scholarly aspirations.

My profound appreciation also extends to the individuals who graciously participated as informants in my fieldwork, now cherished friends. Upon my initial arrival in Shanghai, I was fraught with nervous anticipation, uncertain of how my research would unfold. Yet, with remarkable generosity, my informants welcomed me into their lives with open arms, understanding fully the role I would play as a researcher observing their daily existence. Their willingness to share their experiences and knowledge, coupled with their eagerness to understand how their stories would be portrayed in my dissertation, is a testament to their passion and

kindness. I am profoundly indebted to them for their unwavering support, extending far beyond the conclusion of my fieldwork. Throughout the writing process, a myriad of memories flooded my mind—some joyous, others tinged with embarrassment. Yet, despite the limitations of my writing abilities to fully capture the vibrant tapestry of their lives, I am grateful to have forged genuine friendships with them. Even now, we continue to connect regularly, often convening over Zoom to share stories and experiences, both within and beyond the realm of co-living. Though the transient nature of co-living often sees individuals embarking on new chapters of their lives, my wish for them remains unwavering: may they be blessed with nothing but success and happiness in their endeavors.

To my family and friends, whose unwavering support has sustained me throughout this journey, I owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude. Their belief in me, rooted in the aspirations of my father since childhood, has been a guiding light, inspiring me to pursue excellence relentlessly. With words of Sushi, a famous literati in Chinese history, my father encourages me to “Determined to recognize every character under the sky, diligently reading through all the books in the world”. While the monumental task of reading every book in the world may be beyond reach, the sentiment serves as a beacon, inspiring me to ascend the academic ladder and ultimately attain my doctoral degree. I extend special thanks to Eric Sinski and Caihuajia, my steadfast companions at UCLA, whose friendship and support have been indispensable. I am unable to fathom the course my life would have taken without their presence. Their unwavering support has been instrumental in facilitating my adjustment to life in the United States, enabling me to navigate this new chapter with greater ease and confidence. Additionally, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to Cristal Wang for her steadfast emotional support throughout these years.

Her infectious smile and words of courage have served as a ray of sunshine, illuminating even the darkest of moments and bringing warmth to my journey, much like the radiant glow of LA's sunshine.

To the numerous individuals who have extended their assistance and encouragement throughout my journey at UCLA, I am deeply grateful. Professor Min Li from the Department of Anthropology offered invaluable support during my doctoral studies. Jennifer Banawa and Victor Sepulveda, the staffs of the Department of Anthropology, tirelessly provided assistance with daily and administrative matters. Your kindness and generosity have made a lasting impression on my path forward

Anthropology, as a discipline, embodies a profound sense of indebtedness to the communities it studies. While I may never fully repay the debts owed to those mentioned above, this dissertation stands as a humble tribute to their contributions. Indeed, the opportunity to collaborate with such remarkable individuals is the greatest gift of all, enriching my life in ways beyond measure.

I also wish to gratefully acknowledge the generous funding provided by the Chinese Scholarship Council, the Summer Mentored Research Fellowship of UCLA, the Dissertation Fellowship for International Studies of UCLA, the Dissertation Fieldwork Grants of Southern University of Science and Technology China, and the Dissertation Year Fellowship of UCLA for supporting my dissertation research and writing. I am deeply appreciative of the assistance and support extended to me by these agencies.

Vitae

EDUCATION

M.A. in Anthropology, 2017, Peking University

B.A. in Anthropology, with Honors, 2010, Sun Yat-Sen University

PUBLICATIONS

Haoyan, Zhuang. 2019. Encountering Pollution. In *Field Observation on Contemporary China*, edited by Social Research Center of Chinese Counsellor's Office of the State Council. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press. (in Chinese)

CONFERENCE ARTICLE

Towards the Public We Open- Co-living as a Youth Space and Stranger Intimacy, 2023, Produced an English report featured in the Annual Meeting of East Asia Anthropology Association held at CUHK.

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

2023 Dissertation Year Fellowship of UCLA

2021 Dissertation Fieldwork Grants of Southern University of Science and Technology China

2021 Dissertation Fellowship for International Studies of UCLA

2021 Summer Mentored Research Fellowship of UCLA

2018 The Second Prize of Fei Xiaotong Fieldwork Research Competition

2018-2022 Full Award of Chinese Scholarship Council

Introduction: By the Road I Walked

“What are your thoughts on co-living?”

Answerer 1: “At its core, co-living means living together and sharing the same space.”

“How would you differentiate co-living from joint rent (hezu)?”

Answerer 1: “That's a great question, and I don't have a definitive answer. Nowadays, it's more of a label... In co-living, people share life experiences and engage in various activities together. The co-living experience can be truly inspiring.”

“What inspires you about it?”

Answerer 1: “My life has been ordinary, following a step-by-step progression. However, interacting with a diverse group of people in co-living has brought about complex feelings. It made me realize that my thoughts were limited. I shouldn't be constrained by my limited thoughts.”

Answerer 2: “Co-living is like experiencing fragmented intimacy. Intimacy, in a broader sense, involves sharing everything. Like an octopus extending all its tentacles, in co-living, I reach out to each roommate like an octopus, feeling their connections simultaneously. I used to enjoy solo living, but my experience abroad, especially in Britain, changed me. Experiencing something as beautiful as snowfall, yet only being able to share it with friends through sparse online words felt too lonely. I don't want to live that way anymore in Shanghai. I desire co-living; I want my own tentacles reaching out to others. I want to be an octopus reaching for something, not a jellyfish drifting on water alone. Affording a house in this city is challenging, but I crave a home. I believe I'm someone others can connect with, and I want others to share their feelings with me.”

Answerer 3: “Summarizing what co-living is can be challenging. I’m an urban planner, and in my field, a good environment is a diverse one. In university dorms, students are assigned to stay together; yet there’s minimal communication. In Swedish corridors, similar to Chinese dorms, individuals have private spaces and bathrooms but share kitchens and common areas where they can interact while cooking. In practice, many people are too lazy to foster the collectivity of co-living. Therefore, the key to co-living is establishing interactions. Typically, there are leaders in public spaces who bind the co-living organization together in corridors (serving as a mechanism). In joint rent situations, people usually see it as a place for sleeping and eating, without active involvement in the collective life of the co-living space. Shanghai is an unfamiliar city for me, and I’m trying to find a place to settle down quickly. However, the frequent mobility of roommates has made it challenging to establish long and stable friendships. My efforts in building relationships felt futile, which was draining. But in co-living, residents share values and are willing to contribute to the shared space.”

Answerer 4: “My experience with different living patterns since entering adulthood has led me to voluntarily choose co-living for the sense of family and friendship it offers. Co-living is the choice of intimacy similar to family bonds. Additionally, due to my personality and profession, I enjoy hearing life stories from others. Therefore, solo living doesn’t suit me. I’ve tried various living patterns in recent decades and found that living with friends is the most suitable for me. These friendships aren’t like those developed through shared upbringing but more akin to familial connections.”

The preceding questions and answers took place during a co-living interview involving four applicants and three current co-living residents who served as interviewers. In the living room of

the house, four applicants were seated on different sofas, displaying a mix of nervousness and curiosity. Another three co-living residents were seated on a separate sofa, appearing more relaxed. Positioned behind the sofa where the co-living residents sat and alongside a table, I was recording the unfolding questions and answers, as a fieldwork researcher.

In the interview, co-living is portrayed as a deliberate lifestyle choice characterized by voluntary participation, quasi-family intimacy, and the cultivation of friendships among roommates. Additionally, it involves forging social connections that expose individuals to diverse perspectives, thereby expanding their personal horizons. In contemporary China, co-living is an emerging living arrangement amongst some Chinese youth. It is referred to as “gongju,” in contrast to mere joint rent arrangements. The key distinction lies in the self-organization, equality, communication and sharing of co-living residents, setting them apart from living situations devoid of interaction, commercial collective setups, or those linked by co-working relations. Moreover, co-living residents are self-organized based on shared interests rather than ties of consanguinity or regional affiliation, setting them apart from lineage-based structures and traditional workplace "Danwei" systems. While playing a pivotal role in alleviating the financial strain of urban housing rentals, co-living serves as an autonomous lifestyle choice where youth actively seek to manage their individual lives. Through co-living, they aim to establish emotional intimacy and foster social connections in large cities within a collective environment in order to release individual financial burden caused by high rental and emotional loneliness.

It seems paradoxical that these youth believe they can improve individual life through a collective way. Why do they think so? How do the residents, to some extent, pioneers of a co-living lifestyle, interpret their selections and lives in the co-living environment? What are the

social transformations in contemporary China that give birth to their thoughts on co-living, individual life and collectivity? How do we understand the behaviors, selections, and interpretations of co-living residents from an anthropological perspective? What are the implications of co-living in the understanding of Chinese youth, and more generally, the understanding of the transformations of Chinese society? This dissertation seeks to unravel the motivations, choices, and interpretations of co-living residents from an anthropological perspective. It addresses the implications of co-living within the context of Chinese youth and, on a broader scale, delves into the transformations unfolding in Chinese society. Before delving into these questions, the dissertation explores other forms of co-living in the West and China, providing a basis for comparison and contrast to contextualize the specific experiences of co-living youth in contemporary China.

Co-living all around the world

The concept of co-living encompasses various forms and interpretations on an international scale, often denoting intentional communities where individuals with shared intentions collaborate on housing and communal activities such as meals and discussions (Pepper and Manji 2019). The term is sometimes used interchangeably with communal living, communes, and co-housing. The spectrum of co-living extends beyond residential care for older individuals to include diverse settings such as community care facilities, boarding houses, guest accommodations, and even prison and penal institutions (Statistics New Zealand 2015).

Beyond serving as living arrangements, co-living institutions often assume social and political roles in contemporary society. For instance, certain co-living communities contribute to the recovery from substance abuse (Bishop et al. 1998; Ferrari et al. 1999, 2009; Jason et al.

2006; Mathis et al. 2009; Polcin 2009; Viola et al. 2009), resist government-led demolitions and removals of native communities in Taiwan (Jung 2020; Ng 2015), and facilitate the integration of refugees into local European societies (Mahieu and Caudenberg 2020). Historically, more organized co-living formats emerged in the 1960s in the United States, particularly with the countercultural movement, such as the Civil Rights Movement and the New Religion Movement, and the appearance of the Hippies and their commune-based living arrangements (Cornfield 1983; Jansen 1980; Miller 1992; Schulterbrandt and Nichols 1972; Shey 1977; Zablocki 1971, 1980). These hip communes, successors to earlier religious communities, were distinct in their open membership, use of drugs, flamboyant behavior challenging societal norms, and the abolition of restrictions on sexual behavior (Miller 1992). The commune movements that followed both in the U.S. and Europe were influenced by Marxism and the feminist movement of the 1960s, challenging capitalist values and patriarchal family structures (Lee 2016). Individual motivations for joining communes in the 1960s and 1970s varied, encompassing relational self-actualization, sociability, social reform, the pursuit of an open family structure, religious exploration, practical convenience, and sexuality (Jansen 1980). Communes were seen as an alternative living pattern and a rebellion against mainstream social systems, driven by the youth's desire to address psychosocial and interpersonal deprivation, increasing instances of child abuse, alcoholism, drug dependency among adults, and marital depression (Raskin et al. 1969; Schulterbrandt and Nichols 1972).

In the 1970s, as communes declined, another organized form of communal living arrangement—co-housing—emerged. Originating in urban areas in northern Europe, co-housing later spread to the U.S. in the 1990s and to the Pacific Rim, particularly Australia, in the late

1990s (Hilder et al. 2018; Jarvis 2015; Zhang and Zhang 2010). In Australia, unlike their European and American counterparts primarily situated in urban areas, co-housing projects are predominantly developed in rural settings. The key features of co-housing are collaborative, communal, and collective (Vestbro 2010). The term "collaborative" underscores the collaborative nature of housing objectives among residents, "communal" emphasizes the design of housing to foster a sense of community, and "collective" underscores the organized collective provision of services (Krokkfors 2012; Vestbro 2010).

Co-housing also exhibits other distinctive features that set it apart as a communal living arrangement. Firstly, the fundamental unit within co-housing is the family, rather than the individual. Typically, co-housing constitutes a community of several families, occasionally including single individuals, who share communal spaces and amenities like swimming pools. While each family maintains its private domain and leads independent familial lives, they actively engage in collective public activities and provide mutual support. Secondly, residents not only inhabit but also actively participate in the design and construction of the community (Korpela 2012; Sandstedt and Westin 2015; Williams 2005). Consequently, co-housing communities often function as autonomous, self-managed entities. Moreover, these projects tend to be extensive and enduring endeavors, involving intricate processes and substantial expenses in both design and construction. Thirdly, due to resident autonomy, co-housing projects typically entail multiple stakeholders, including local government, professional designers, and the housing market, as supported by empirical research across various countries (Ache and Fedrowitz 2012; Boonstra 2016; Bresson and Denèfle 2015; Dasimah 2008; Droste 2015; Karadima and Bofylatos 2019; Krokkfors 2012; Scheller and THÖRN 2018; Svistovski 2012; Tummers 2015,

2016). The government plays a crucial role by providing land and enacting regulations pertaining to co-housing. In return, the development of co-housing contributes to urban renewal and attracts a middle-class demographic (Krokkfors 2012). Additionally, co-housing communities offer basic social welfare services, such as elderly care, alleviating the burden on the public social support system (Ache and Fedrowitz 2012). Consequently, while co-housing often emerges as a grassroots initiative, numerous projects are instigated by local governments and the housing market (Hoppenbrouwer 2019; Dasimah 2008). The establishment of a co-housing community typically involves negotiations among various stakeholders, especially between residents and local governments, addressing concerns related to rights, costs, and regulations (Boonstra 2016; Scheller and THÖRn 2018).

Distinguishing itself from hippie communes, co-housing primarily arises from social and economic motives rather than religious or ideological ones. From a social perspective, co-housing emerges in response to urbanization, increased mobility, market dynamics, soaring housing prices, the evolution of the sharing economy, and shifts in the labor market, such as the rise of freelancers and flexible working conditions (Corfe 2019; Heath 2004; Pepper and Manji 2019). From a familial standpoint, co-housing evolves to provide a social network and mutual support among families concerning childbearing, elderly care, social activities, and a sense of community. Individually, factors such as loneliness, psychological pressure, and the need for socialization propel people toward co-housing. Consequently, the development of co-housing reflects the impact of modern crises on individual lives, including economic inequality, unfulfilled aspirations, and a loss of well-being, emphasizing individual self-management. Co-housing, correspondingly, satisfies the need for physical proximity, economic sharing, and social

interaction among individuals at different life stages to navigate life crises through family and collective lifestyles. Another notable distinction between co-housing and communes is that co-housing does not challenge the concept of family; instead, it complements familial structures. Individuals establish families, usually nuclear ones in this context, and collaborate on family-related matters. The success of co-housing communities hinges on the harmonious relations within these families.

Presently, co-living has undergone a distinctive development, emerging as a noteworthy phenomenon within the millennial demographic.¹ These co-living institutions prioritize communication, sharing, and self-governance as integral components of their lifestyles. For instance, an exemplar in the United States known as Telluride House at Cornell University outlines "intellectual inquiry," "democratic self-governance," and "community living" as the cornerstones of its lifestyle philosophy.² Similarly, the German co-living institution, Mietshäuser Syndikat, articulates on its website a shared aspiration for a residence by saying that "Common to all is the collective desire for a house in which it is possible to live a self-determined life, without the Damocles sword of eviction or the wrecker's ball; with affordable living space that is not latently threatened by the sale of the house or the conversion of apartments into upscale condominiums, offices, etc."³ The principles of sharing and democracy emerge as consensual themes embedded within contemporary co-living institutions.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/sep/03/co-living-the-end-of-urban-loneliness-or-cynical-corporate-dormitories>

² The resource is from the official website of the Telluride House at Cornell University: <https://telluridehouse.org/about/>

³ The resource is from the official website of the Mietshäuser Syndikat: <https://www.syndikat.org/en/the-joint-venture/>

The sharing and collective living arrangements are not entirely foreign to Chinese culture. While bottom-up co-living initiatives were not prevalent in the past, various communal living practices existed in the everyday lives of Chinese people. Urban public housing programs, known as "gongzufang," and collective dormitories within socialist work units in earlier eras, encapsulating what Dutton (2009) termed as "a system of total services," were commonplace. These arrangements entailed concentrated housing provisions for workers, where independent families coexisted, sharing public facilities such as corridors, yards, and taps in urban areas. Similarly, in rural settings, communal living arrangements within lineages were traditional, with ancestral halls serving as public spaces for social and spiritual interactions outside or within individual houses. The foundational principle of sharing was inherent in these traditional co-living setups in China.

The co-living arrangement, colloquially referred to by the youth as "gongju," in my research, sets it apart from Western co-living and co-housing models, as well as from prior Chinese co-living structures mentioned above. The surge of co-living arrangements among Chinese youth is a phenomenon born out of a specific contemporary Chinese transformations. Chief among the transformations is the escalating housing prices resulting from urbanization and housing marketization in China over the past few decades. The exponential rise in housing costs has created a formidable barrier for young individuals seeking to acquire homes in major cities where they both work and reside. In the context of Chinese culture and familism, homeownership is crucial for establishing a family, no matter for bachelors or couples. Consequently, the unaffordability of housing presents a significant impediment to the aspirations of young people to lead a familial life, and even marriage, especially for men (Eklund 2018; Wei

and Zhang 2009; Zhang and Bélanger 2018), exacerbating the emotional strain experienced by them and influencing their life expectations.

Despite the challenges posed by soaring housing costs, young individuals are inclined to maintain a presence in cities for both structural and personal reasons. Structurally, the ongoing urbanization process in China has widened the gap between urban and rural areas, intensifying inequality as resources become concentrated in urban centers (Lu and Chen 2006; Park 2008).

Although the relaxation of household registration (hukou) restrictions and improved benefits for rural residents, such as enhanced access to public health services, have occurred in recent years (Chan 2019; Xia 2019), household registration remains a crucial determinant. Various privileges related to education, social welfare, and the housing market are reserved for residents holding household registration within the same city. Simultaneously, the allure of large cities has grown due to the potential for higher income, superior education, and increased entertainment options compared to mid-sized and smaller cities. Policy initiatives favoring professionals have further enhanced the appeal of large cities (Yang 2017). Consequently, young people, particularly those with higher education, are driven to pursue self-fulfillment by working, residing, and acquiring local household registration in major urban centers. On an individual level, the evolution of the market economy and increased investment influx have created job opportunities, attracting individuals, especially the youth, to migrate to cities in pursuit of self-actualization within the burgeoning individualization process in Chinese society (Rofel 2007; Yan 2009, 2010a).

Moreover, the one-child policy, implemented in 1980 and abolished in 2015, resulted in a generation of children becoming the "only hope" for their families (Fong 2004). Consequently, to avail themselves of urban privileges, young individuals strive to establish a firm footing in large

cities. This substantial influx into urban areas has intensified competition and the pressure associated with urban living, affecting a diverse spectrum of the young labor force, ranging from graduates of prestigious universities to manual migrant workers, all grappling with formidable work pressures and precarious power dynamics between employers and employees in an urban milieu (Bregnbæk 2016; Zhang 2001).⁴

With the tension between unaffordable housing and individual ambition to stay in metropolises, co-living in contemporary China is rising among a specific demographic—middle-class youth, characterized by high educational attainment and employment as white-collar workers. They have “urban dream” but are not rich enough to afford housing in the cities where they work. This specificity of co-living demographic does not imply an isolation of the co-living practices of middle-class youth from other co-living formats both within and outside of China. Instead, it reflects a nuanced hybridity, incorporating different elements from the diverse spectrum of co-living formats mentioned above. In the following section, I will compare and contrast the different co-living arrangements in order to discern and elucidate the specific features of co-living in the contemporary Chinese context.

First, co-living in China appears to share many characteristics with co-housing arrangements due to common socio-economic and individual challenges faced in modern urban settings. These challenges include issues such as unaffordable housing, mobility constraints, personal economic hardships, and emotional dilemmas. Both Chinese co-living and western co-

⁴ A precarious labor practice denoted as “996” is gaining prevalence among Chinese youth, signifying a work schedule requiring individuals to work from 9 am to 9 pm, six days a week. This work regimen subjects employees to an onerous workload without the safeguards provided by labor laws and lacks adequate economic compensation for overtime. The repercussions of prolonged working hours manifest in substantial physical and psychological strain, significantly impacting employees' work experiences. Furthermore, these adverse effects extend beyond the workplace, permeating into social activities, intimate relationships, and overall life expectations for the younger demographic.

housing emphasize collective ideologies, effective communication, self-management, and equality among residents. Nevertheless, co-living in China diverges from its European and American counterparts in two critical aspects. Firstly, owing to the absence of private land ownership in China, the younger population tends to prefer renting rather than constructing their own dwellings, distinguishing this practice from certain European co-housing organizations. Consequently, co-living spaces in China are often more compact and smaller in scale, resembling individual co-living houses rather than large communities. Secondly, co-living in China operates as a distinct entity detached from the traditional family unit, extending beyond a transitional phase between academic completion and marriage—commonly observed among Chinese youth. The demographic profile of co-living residents primarily comprises individuals in their twenties and early thirties, with their tenure within such arrangements often lasting until plans for marriage or partnership materialize.

Second, the socio-economic and individual causes of co-living in China set it apart from the hippie communes that originated from ideological roots in the West. Unlike the Hippies, who sought to challenge mainstream societal ideologies and practices, co-living in China does not function as an ideological movement. Instead, it presents an alternative lifestyle for urban youth. The objective is not to disrupt prevailing norms but to offer an unconventional living option that caters to the preferences and aspirations of the younger generation for a specific life course. In the sense of unconventionality, co-living in China, as an emerging and even avant-garde idea, provides new possibilities for living arrangements for urban youth. Those who choose co-living are typically individuals who have delayed marriage and family formation, aiming to keep their lives open to more opportunities and possibilities in their twenties and early thirties (as

elaborated further in Chapter 1 and the conclusion). Through co-living, they develop a new familial narrative based on the economic and social support received from their natal families, thereby broadening the understanding of family among youth (detailed in Chapter 2). In this sense, they represent a form of non-conformity in Chinese society, as they deviate from the standard life trajectory expected by society regarding marriage and childbearing, instead opting for a self-selected life trajectory. While not challenging the mainstream social structure, they do challenge the prevailing notions of marriage, family, and childbearing in the context of daily life.

Third, what distinguishes contemporary youth co-living with traditional co-living arrangements is the association of residents based on shared interests, forming what can be termed as an "interest group." This is a departure from traditional bonds formed through blood ties, geographical affiliations, or professional connections. Residents in youth co-living settings experience greater mobility and enjoy egalitarian relationships, thus marking a notable departure from historical co-living practices that were based patriarchal system and lineage or working affiliations in China.

Fourth, the middle-class co-living in my research is different from their lower-class counterparts in China regarding the co-living life quality. In the 2000s, a significant demographic of university graduates, grappling with low salaries while working in major cities, opts for communal living in densely populated residences along rural-urban continuums, which garnered considerable attention from both the public and academia. These groups, estimated to exceed 100,000 individuals in Beijing and substantial numbers in cities like Shanghai and Guangzhou (Lian 2009), have been termed the "Ant Tribe" due to their diligent work ethic and collective living, akin to ants. Despite sharing living spaces, members of the Ant Tribe often experience

minimal communication with their roommates, leading to severe mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression. This collective lifestyle also impacts their romantic relationships, with 93% of Ant Tribe members remaining unmarried, and 49% of the unmarried population being single (ibid). In recent years, another group of young individuals, identified as "Sanhe dashen," has attracted academic and public interest. As the second generation of migrant workers in cities, they exhibit a pattern of working one day and engaging in leisure activities for the following three days, spending their daily wages immediately (Tian and Lin 2020). Living collectively in compact lodges and sometimes even sleeping in internet bars, they foster more social connections than the Ant Tribe, yet harbor a sense of hopelessness and diminished life expectations for the future.

The middle-class co-living residents examined in this dissertation encounter similar challenges to their lower-class counterparts in China, including unaffordable housing, migration status that is full of uncertainty of settling down or citizen's rights, and emotional pressures associated with urban employment. However, in contrast to their lower-class counterparts, the middle-class individuals enjoy comparatively better economic conditions, albeit not sufficient to secure property ownership. As a result, they aspire to enhance their living conditions beyond mere survival by emphasizing self-governance, autonomy, and communication within their rented accommodations, thereby alleviating emotional pressures. Consequently, co-living among the middle-class emerges as a lifestyle choice among certain youth in China rather than forced collective living arrangements for survival.

Fifth, shared households or joint renting arrangements among youth are prevalent both in China and in other societies, with their prevalence increasing due to urbanization and the

heightened mobility of youth. In Australia, 21% of individuals aged 20-24 live with peers, and in the 2000s, 39% of youth who transitioned from familial homes to independent living opted for shared households, compared to 17.5% in the 1980s (Burke et al. 2002; Heath 2009). Similarly, in China, joint renting accounts for 27% in metropolises (Industry Council for China Rental Apartment 2023).⁵ This joint renting practice includes individual arrangements and housing facilitated by commercial companies such as Beike and Ziru. Co-living residents emphasize that their living arrangements are termed "gongju" (co-living) rather than "hezu" (joint renting) because they forge intimate roommate relationships through communication, interactions, and collective activities, distinguishing their experiences from the more detached roommate relationships found in "hezu." Therefore, despite sharing a similar housing format (i.e., multiple individuals residing under the same roof), co-living transcends mere living together, representing a pursuit of novel roommate relationships and living experiences.

In comparison and contrast with other co-living arrangements both within and outside of China, the co-living phenomenon among Chinese youth emerges as a unique hybrid, blending Western co-living ideals with the pragmatic realities of the Chinese rental market. The middle-class residents draw inspiration from the principles of communication, self-management, equality, and sharing found in Western co-housing and hippie communes, in order to enhance living conditions within the context of joint renting in China, setting them apart from other co-living arrangements prevalent in the country. However, due to constraints posed by the housing market in China, they compromise by establishing co-living houses rather than forming

⁵ https://www.sohu.com/a/674734063_120254018
scm=1101.topic:469364:110070.0.1.0&spm=smpc.channel_248.block3_308_sv3kiv_5_fd.1.1702149378
3526nJl4Ht_324

communities. This distinctive approach is exemplified through the experiences of individuals like Jingmo, who embarked on the establishment of EHT.⁶

I faced financial struggles during my undergraduate studies in Sydney, grappling with persistent foot pain that led to a sense of depression. Seeking relief, I turned to smoking and found solace in connecting with my roommates through this shared activity. Building friendships with them significantly improved my well-being. Later, during my time working in Canberra, I experienced a renewed sense of happiness when I successfully secured a spot in a co-op. The prospect of living with intriguing individuals excited me. Within the co-op, we implemented a division of labor, establishing various departments responsible for activities such as beer-making and vegetable cultivation. With over 20 residents, we took turns cooking for each other, fostering a sense of community.

Upon returning to Shanghai, I desired to maintain such a lifestyle, feeling uneasy about living in solitude. Yearning for shared experiences, whether through casual conversations, sunflower seed sharing, or the joy of playing mahjong, I applied to join an existing co-living arrangement. Unfortunately, there were no available rooms at the time. Undeterred, I took matters into my own hands and embarked on establishing a co-living space. Crafting an advertisement, I interviewed over 400 applicants. Originally envisioning a house accommodating more than 10 residents, I soon confronted the reality that most houses in China catered to nuclear families, typically offering two or three bedrooms. Faced with these constraints, I adjusted my expectations and aimed to find a five-room house, navigating the complexities of the Chinese housing market (interview with Jingmo).

⁶ In accordance with confidentiality considerations, all individual and co-living institution names mentioned in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

Jingmo's journey reflects his economical, emotional, and social motivations to live a co-living life, the situation shared by many co-living residents with international study experiences, as observed in earlier interviews with individuals who studied abroad in Sweden or Britain. At the same time, he is struggling with securing an ideal living space due to the prevalent structure designed for nuclear families in China and has to compromise to the reality.

The burgeoning phenomenon of middle-class co-living, serving as an experimental residential strategy for urban youth, offers valuable insights into ongoing social transformations within contemporary China. Central to this collective living ethos is the aspiration to enhance individual quality of life and alleviate personal challenges. Emphasizing emotional over economic considerations, residents articulate their motivations for choosing co-living arrangements. This prompts an inquiry into the nuanced interpretation of their motivations and the distinctive co-living lifestyle that sets it apart from other residential formats both within and beyond China. To theoretically comprehend co-living and the practices of youth in the contemporary Chinese context, the subsequent section will analyze co-living through the lenses of the individualization thesis, neo-tribe theory, and studies on emotion.

Co-living in an individualized society

The co-living arrangement in contemporary China is not indicative of a return to the collective era of the past, but rather represents an individualized strategy employed by residents to address personal challenges through collective ways. This phenomenon is a consequence of the ongoing individualization process within Chinese society over recent decades, functioning as a mechanism for the re-embedment of individuals. To comprehend the emergence of co-living in

this context, it is imperative to scrutinize the pervasive individualization process underway in Chinese society.

Ulrich Beck, in his systematic analysis of individualization as a distinctive feature of post-modernity, delineates three phases that individuals undergo: “disembedding, *removal* from historically prescribed social forms and commitments in the sense of traditional contexts of dominance and support (the ‘liberating dimension’); the *loss of traditional security* with respect to practical knowledge, faith and guiding norms (the ‘disenchantment dimension’); and – here the meaning of the word is virtually turned into its opposite – re-embedding, *a new type of social commitment* (the ‘control’ or ‘reintegration dimension’)” (Beck 1992: 128). This process liberates individuals from traditional categories, such as family, granting them the freedom (or obligation) to craft "a life of one’s own." (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 54) The disembedding and loss of traditional security do not eradicate traditional categories; rather, traditional categories become only an option rather than *the* option of individuals, contributing to the diversification of individual life in post-modernity. Importantly, “what is now establishing itself is not only diversity, but something much more than that: the *normalization* of diversity” (Beck 2007: 684).

Concomitant with the escalating diversity in the individualization process are the heightened risks associated with choices, borne by individuals without the protection of traditional security. Each decision leads to a divergent yet unpredictable way of life. Consequently, individuals must make decisions judiciously, continuously, and, crucially, independently to maximize personal interests. Concurrently, individuals assume responsibility for personal success and failure. Independent decision-making results in "compulsive and

obligatory self-determination." (Bauman 2001: 32) This underscores the dialectical nature of freedom in post-modernity, where freedom, in itself, is unfree, and its price is insecurity.

To navigate the risks posed by the individualization process, various theorists propose diverse orientations. Anthony Giddens adopts a positive and optimistic stance, emphasizing that individuals construct self-identity through self-reflexivity and trust in the "abstract system." (Giddens 1991) Despite the challenges posed by uncertainty, individuals, according to Giddens (1990), may grapple with the potential abandonment of their self-identity. However, this struggle does not inevitably result in a loss of personality. Instead, the cultivation of self-reflexivity and self-identity serves to channel efforts towards establishing trust within the public sphere. This, in turn, fosters the development of public life. The pursuit of trust in the public atmosphere and the engagement in "life politics" (Giddens 1992) collectively contribute to shaping and enriching the broader societal landscape. Beck advocates for "institutionalized individualism" from Talcott Parsons, as a solution to risks. According to Beck, the reembedding in institutions that have been reformed is a solution to the risks and uncertainty in post-modernity. Conversely, Zygmunt Bauman presents a more passive view, asserting that individuals have the obligation to select within the fluid nature of post-modernity, even as institutions are established on a liquid reality. "Living under conditions of insecurity is a *Risikoleben*, and it is the acting person who is bound to pay the costs of the risks taken" (Bauman 2001: 91). In addition, Bauman points out that "there is a growing gap between individuality as fate and individuality as practical capacity for self-assertion...and bridging that gap is, most crucially, *not* part of that capacity" (Bauman 2002: xvi-xvii).

Irrespective of the varied perspectives that theorists adopt in proposing solutions to risks within post-modern society, the role of institutions remains integral. Consequently, the nature and significance of the institutions to which individuals are re-embedded emerge as a crucial area for investigating the individuation process. This underscores the importance of understanding how individuals interact with and reintegrate into reformed institutions, highlighting the intricate interplay between societal structures and the ongoing process of individuation.

As individualization gains momentum in Chinese society, various components such as selection, risks, and individual rights emerge prominently. Yunxiang Yan (2009a; 2010a) extensively describes these social transformations in Chinese society, attributing the inception of the individualization process to state-driven efforts since 1949. The post-Mao era, marked by neo-liberal reforms, further accelerates individualization across various domains, including housing, education, and medical care, which reflects from daily communications remarkably (Hamamura and Xu 2015; Li and Yan 2019). This transformative process underscores the shift from familial loyalty to individual pursuits, leading to the advocacy of an "enterprising self" (Yan 2010a: 504) focused on calculated, proactive, and self-disciplined behavior. Consequently, Chinese individuals grapple with myriad choices, managing their lives to attain self-fulfillment within the evolving social context of a neo-liberal market and private life. Moreover, the influence of consumerism accentuates the rise of the "desiring self," (Davis 2005; Rofel 2007) where individual desires, needs, and wants are accentuated, fostering a pursuit of individual success and material self-fulfillment while simultaneously promoting the neo-liberal market and state development.

The individualization process in China is distinct from Western cases due to the absence of sufficient social security and the presence of an authoritarian regime lacking classic individualism, political liberalism, and public institutions for re-embedding (Yan 2010). Despite these differences, individuals in China have already placed their interests, rather than relational or collective interests, as the primary motivation for their actions. This shift has even led to conflicts with familial interests (Yan 2018). Scholars have extensively examined this transformation across various domains, including youth studies (Feng 2014), education (Hansen 2013), living arrangements (Yu and Xie 2015; Zhou and Xiao 2022), the labor market (Dong 2014; Kong 2012; Ren 2018; Wu 2013), dating practices (Wang and Nehring 2013), rural management (Xiang and Lu 2019; Zhang 2013; Zhou and Yang 2020), and religious contexts (Wu 2014; Yang 2015), among others. The individualization process, as explored in these diverse fields, significantly alters people's sense of values and orientations, thereby transforming the socio-cultural landscape in China. This multifaceted examination sheds light on the nuanced ways in which individual interests take precedence over traditional relational and collective considerations, signifying a profound reconfiguration of societal norms and values.

The ramifications of individualization in Chinese society remain a subject of contention among scholars. Some attribute various social issues, such as escalating distrust, growing indifference, moral decay in rural areas (Zhou and Yang 2020), and a disorderly cyber environment (Wang 2016), to individualization, expressing concerns about the potential emergence of an atomized society. Consequently, these scholars often advocate for the re-establishment of a sense of community and belonging, aiming to reintegrate individuals into social solidarity. However, it's crucial to note that individualization differs from the atomization

of society. As Caixia Xie (2018) analyzes, the individualization thesis originates from post-modernity theorists like Giddens, Bauman, and Beck, aiming to illuminate social transformations in the post-modern era. In contrast, atomization finds its roots in Georg Simmel's analysis of metropolis and mental life in modernity, particularly when rural individuals relocated to cities without sufficient institutional support. In the Chinese context, Xie argues that individualization better describes the reality than atomization. This perspective aligns with the features of individualization, which encompass the growing awareness of individual rights, the pursuit of personal lifestyles, detraditionalization, the reconstruction of self-identity, and notably, the reembedding in traditional institutions like family. As Bauman suggests, "While the disembedding was the socially sanctioned fate, the re-embedding was a task put before the individuals" (Bauman 2000: 32).

I contend that co-living arrangements embody a form of "collective individualization" among Chinese youth, wherein individual development is promoted and individual risks are mitigated through a collective framework. This concept underscores the pivotal role of institutions in shaping the process of individualization, as posited by relevant theorists. Furthermore, within Chinese society, the interplay between individual and collective dynamics is multifaceted, often characterized by hybridity. Many collective endeavors serve to promote individual aspirations and pursuits. For example, Mette Halskov Hansen (2013) reveals that individual awareness is cultivated within an educational system that promotes the ideal of individual achievement through a collectivistic approach. Students participate in myriad collective activities such as "large-scale motivational lecture", which purposely fosters their individual development (i.e., good performance in exams, entering top universities and therefore

promising careers in the future). Consequently, the state educates neo-socialist individuals who adhere to Party rule while also demonstrating innovation and creating economic value through self-assertive behavior.

My research will investigate co-living arrangements as a re-embedding mechanism in the Chinese individualization process. As more youth detach from traditional communities due to occupational mobility, they do not become atomized. Instead, they re-embed in peer institutions and establish social relations with strangers, likely defining future relations among youth. Simultaneously, they pursue individual development, prioritizing individual interests. This collective individualization facilitates individual self-fulfillment with the support of emotional and social mutual interactions in collective life. Through an analysis of the motivations reflecting the struggles and agency of co-living residents, this project aims to illuminate the Chinese path of individualization by examining a re-embedding mechanism.

Re-imbedded in neo-tribes

Upon the examination of the individualization thesis and its application within the Chinese context, I propose that co-living arrangements function as a mechanism for the re-embedding of individuals. This re-embedding mechanism accentuates the emotional bonds between individuals, aligning with the characteristics of neo-tribes that emerge as novel social connections within the individualization process.

The neo-tribe theory, initially was formulated by French sociologist Michel Maffesoli in his 1996 work, *The Time of the Tribes*.” But the concept of “tribus,” had been articulated in English earlier by Rob Shields in 1992 (Hardy, Bennett, and Robard 2018). Neo-tribes are “ephemeral, fleeting groupings of people that gather together.” (Hardy, Bennett and Robard

2018: 1). In contrast to theorists emphasizing individualization in postmodernity, Maffesoli highlights the sociality of humans in postmodern society. Maffesoli delineates a crucial distinction between "sociality" and "social." In this context, "social" aligns with the framework of modern, individual-centered political-economic organizations. Here, individuals, envisaged through the lens of Enlightenment ideals, engage in contractual agreements to establish a society founded on principles of freedom and equality. Conversely, "sociality" pertains to the post-modern realm of collective and effective neo-tribes. Within this paradigm, individuals occupying specific social roles in particular situations depend on one another to form organic structures (Maffesoli 1996). This dichotomy leads Maffesoli to draw a parallel distinction between politics and sociality. While politics rests on the premise of rational individuals and prioritizes rational judgment, sociality is rooted in the social roles of individuals, emphasizing the practical importance of collectivity and emotion. In actuality, each person is intricately woven into the fabric of collective memory and cultural cognition, existing within collectives and immersed in emotional atmospheres. Consequently, Maffesoli contends that sociality, as opposed to the more individual-centric notions of "social" and "politics," better captures the intricacies of social reality. What may outwardly seem highly individualized is, in fact, an integral component of a broader social symbolic system (Maffesoli 1996: 69).

In Maffesoli's perspective, sociality in modern society is founded on ephemeral and fleeting sentiments, but akin to the robust bonds observed in traditional tribes. In Shield's words, "The 'Time of the Tribes' is a time when the mass is tribalized" (Shield 1996: x). Despite their temporal and fluid nature, neo-tribes instill a stringent conformity among members, where self-identity and belonging derive from collective activities, fostering shared feelings. Following

Durkheim's thread of divine society, Maffesoli introduces the concept of "ethical experience" to describe the unique morality arising from these connections, elevating neo-tribes to a moral and ethical status transcending individuality (Maffesoli 1996: 16). The interconnections within the masses give rise to what Maffesoli terms "puissance" – a form of power emanating from ordinary people. Maffesoli expands the connotation of "puissance" in French to signify a bottom-up power distinct from top-down authority structures, such as the power wielded by the state. This intrinsic power is characterized by a focus on self-development rather than the exertion of control over others.

Emotion assumes a pivotal role in neo-tribes, evolving from Weber's notion of emotional community (*Gemeinde*) to Maffesoli's characterization of modern emotional communities. Described as flexible, fleeting, and de-centered, neo-tribes exhibit a unique "tribe aesthetic" manifested in diverse emotional expressions and versatile political ideologies (Maffesoli 2007). Maffesoli argues that people pursue rational and future benefits in modern eco-politics; whereas in postmodern, we return to emotional and present feelings as our ancestors in primitive society. In this sense, Maffesoli intertwines emotion, ethics, and aesthetics, asserting a connection between collective sensibility and ethical bonds (Maffesoli 1996: 18).

Paralleling the emphasis on emotion in sociality, co-living transcends economic considerations to encompass emotional support and interactions among residents. Expressions from co-living applicants underscore the significance of emotional connection, portraying co-living as a rational and sensational collective choice, providing companionship and support in large cities.

"I eagerly anticipate establishing a communal bond with like-minded individuals, fostering an environment where we can collectively contribute and exchange our insights about the world. Sharing our lives, advancing together—co-living represents a judicious and emotionally enriching collective decision. Over time, the distinction between roommates as 'you,' 'I,' and 'S/he' gradually dissolves, giving way to a sense of unified 'Us.'"

"To me, co-living is a transformative journey imbued with emotions like love, trust, and courage. It transcends mere shared space; it becomes a process through which profound connections are forged."

"Co-living, to me, is akin to having a supportive companion—a miniature family amid the vastness of urban life. These cohabitants become dependable family members, providing a sense of reliance and shared experience in the bustling cityscape."

"In co-living, roommates evolve beyond being mere strangers; they become friends with whom stories and meals are shared after work. The camaraderie extends beyond mere coexistence, creating a supportive environment where assistance is readily extended. Conversely, the absence of indifference among roommates alleviates the pervasive loneliness that can accompany city living." (excerpts from interviews of different informants)

Co-living relationships, lacking blood ties, embody flexibility, temporality, and emotional significance, aligning with the attributes of neo-tribes in contemporary China. In light of neo-tribe theory's proposition that these formations respond to the individualization process in post-modernity, the resonance with the circumstances of Chinese youth becomes evident. The co-living life also empowers individuals through the "puissance" of self-organization. Therefore, the neo-tribe theory depicts the "collective individualization" situation in China. Why can co-living

life, as temporal and fleeting relationships, provide emotional and social support for its members? How does emotion work in a co-living environment? Exploring the dynamics of emotion in co-living environments and its role in providing emotional and social support for members necessitates a review of pertinent studies in sociology and anthropology, with a particular focus on the relational orientation of emotion research.

Emotion in Relations

As a subject within psychology, the study of emotion in the 20th century was significantly shaped by diverse intellectual currents, including Wittgenstein's language philosophy, psychoanalysis, behaviorism, and social constructionism (Gergen 1995). Traditionally, emotion was conceptualized as a physiological and psychological experience—comprising inner feelings, psychological responses, animal impulses, mental disorders, and driving forces—often treated in isolation from societal influences. However, a notable shift occurred in the 1990s, marking the inception of a focus on social relations and the recognition of the social meanings inherent in emotions (Burkitt 1997, 2002; Craib 1995; Duncombe and Marsden 1993). The social meaning of emotion emphasizes a comprehensive understanding that incorporates relations, situations, and interactions (Burkitt 1997).

Within the relational approach, Ian Burkitt (1997) posits that research on emotions should center on relationships, where practices and discourses are both structured by and derive meaning from them. Burkitt challenges Ian Craib's perspective, contending that emotions are not mere expressions of something "inner." Instead, drawing on Wittgenstein's idea that views emotion as bodily expression within a given situation, Burkitt suggests that emotions are the amalgamation of inner psychological processes within the context of everyday life (Burkitt 1997:

44). Paul Griffiths and Andrea Scarantino (2009) contribute to this evolving narrative by proposing a situated perspective on emotion. In contrast to previous perspectives such as cognitivism and neo-Jamesian theories that depict emotion as internal states or processes neglecting environmental influences, the situated perspective posits emotions as designed to function within a social context. This perspective highlights emotions “designed to function in a *social context*, forms of *skillful engagement* with the world which need not be mediated by conceptual thought, scaffolded by the environment; and *dynamically coupled* to an environment which both influences and is influenced by the unfolding of the emotion” (Griffiths and Scarantino 2009: 2, the italic is original). This perspective highlights emotions as forms of skillful engagement with the world, dynamically coupled to an environment that influences and is influenced by the unfolding of emotions.

Situated emotions inherently involve interactions, as emphasized by Randall Collins (2004) in his extensive analysis of emotional interactions, "Interaction Ritual Chain". Collins argues that, from a micro-sociological perspective, the situation, rather than the individual, is the fundamental unit for face-to-face interactions. He introduces the Interaction Ritual theory, which posits a mutual-focus/emotional entrainment mechanism, “interactional situations varying along those two dimensions-how much mutual focus of attention occurs, and how much emotional entrainment builds up among the participants” (Collins 2004: xi-xii). In the unfolding dynamics of interaction rituals, Collins introduces the concept of "emotional energy" (EE), casting emotion as a form of potent force. Emotion, in this context, comprises both enduring sentiments (akin to EE in Collins' framework) and transient emotional states that lay the foundation for prolonged emotional experiences. When individuals gather, they initially experience short-term emotions.

The intensity of these emotions amplifies as participants collectively direct their attention towards each other, realizing a shared emotional resonance. This shared emotional experience precipitates the emergence of a collective emotion, which, in turn, evolves into a sustained and enduring force, encapsulated as emotional energy.

These theories, collectively, offer a theoretical framework that sheds light on the dynamics of the co-living phenomenon in China. The concept of "collective individualization" within co-living encapsulates the fusion of individual feelings and desires with collective lifestyles. To comprehend the relationships, interactions, and emotional support embedded in co-living, the collective situation is deemed indispensable. The co-living experience in China reflects three interconnected levels of selection and practice among the youth. First, individually, they navigate competitive pressures in neoliberal marketization reforms, disengaging from traditional social categories like family. In response to the perceived emotional void stemming from distant familial and friend connections, co-living emerges as a compensatory re-embedding, countering the cold and indifferent relations experienced in city work environments. Second, on a relational level, residents cultivate intimacy with roommates, engaging in emotional interactions that foster "mutual focus" and "emotion entrainment," consequently enhancing emotional energy (Collins 2004). Third, organizationally, the active self-organization of individuals allows for the experimentation of a distinctive urban lifestyle. These flexible, fluid, and temporary organizations concurrently provide a sense of collective belonging and identity while serving as a buffer between individuals and other entities, including housing markets, residents' committees, and even the state.

Fieldwork of Co-living

In my research, co-living remains an avant-garde phenomenon in China, limited to a niche group of individuals. Predominantly, co-living houses take the form of self-organized single units rather than interconnected communities comprising multiple houses. During my revisit to the field sites in the summer of 2023, I discovered that some residents were contemplating the implementation of the "1+N" model. This model involves designating one existing co-living house as the focal point and establishing new co-living arrangements within the same building or community to expand the scope of co-living institutions. However, as this initiative is still in progress, it will not be discussed in detail within this dissertation.

The co-living institutions under examination in my research are referred to as Experimental Houses, a co-living initiative affiliated with a youth community named Sven, located in Shanghai.⁷ Two primary reasons guided my selection of Experimental Houses. Firstly, Experimental House stands out as one of the earliest, if not the earliest, co-living programs in China. This historical precedence allows me access to a diverse pool of current and former residents as key informants. Originating in Beijing in 2016, Experimental House expanded to more than ten branches within the subsequent three years. Unfortunately, most of these branches closed due to the impact of the pandemic in 2020. Consequently, the Experimental Houses in

⁷ Sven is a youth organization with its roots in Beijing, subsequently expanding its presence to various cities in China and internationally. Initially, Sven focused on organizing public activities in rented houses. In 2016, recognizing the potential for synergy between communal living and public engagement, Sven introduced the co-living program named "Experimental Houses." This initiative aimed to seamlessly integrate public spaces with living quarters, transforming some of the residents into active contributors responsible for maintaining the houses and welcoming visitors, both from within and beyond the Sven community. The Experimental Houses serve a dual purpose by providing housing for certain youth members while concurrently fostering social connections with others in the community. Moreover, for additional Sven members, the Experimental Houses function as public spaces where they can actively participate in various public activities. The intricate network of connections between residents of Experimental Houses and other members of Sven will be mentioned in specific chapters of the dissertation.

Shanghai represent the largest scale of the program thus far. The inaugural Experimental House in Shanghai was established in November 2019. During the pandemic, it evolved to encompass five branches, including two specialized units catering to Chinese international students engaged in remote classes. The closure of these specialized branches coincided with the resumption of in-person international studies for Chinese students. At the time of my fieldwork, three Experimental Houses were operational in Shanghai, with two others in the process of establishment (the details of one will be expounded upon in the conclusion). Secondly, Shanghai, being a globally recognized international metropolis and the second-largest city in China, shares housing affordability challenges and enticing urban aspirations with other international counterparts such as New York, Los Angeles, London, Paris, and Tokyo. Thus, it serves as an ideal site for observing how young individuals self-organize their lives and navigate both the opportunities and pressures inherent in co-living arrangements.

My one-year fieldwork lasted from September 2021 to August 2022, followed by a revisiting phase from July to September 2023. In the initial phase of my fieldwork, I selected two specific Experimental Houses as my primary sites, immersing myself in a 24/7 living experience alongside other residents. I initially resided in Experimental House T (hereinafter referred to as EHT), the third co-living house in Shanghai, established in July 2021. Comprising six rooms with a total of seven beds and an additional bed on the balcony for occasional couch surfers, EHT accommodated 18 residents, including myself, from its inception to the conclusion of my fieldwork. This diverse group consisted of eight male and ten female residents. My initiation into EHT was serendipitous and arose from an unforeseen opportunity. I initially reached out to a resident named Kongqing, expressing my interest in living with them for the purpose of my

research. Kongqing informed me that, unfortunately, there was no available room at that time. However, shortly thereafter, I received a message from Kongqing notifying me that one resident was embarking on a business trip, leaving his room temporarily vacant. Seizing this chance, I joined EHT and commenced my research. Fortuitously, there was a continuous occurrence of residents temporarily leaving, affording me the chance to reside in different rooms during those periods. When all rooms were occupied, I accommodated myself on the sofa in the living room. It was not until December 2021, two months into my research, that I acquired a room of my own. This became possible when Houpu left for further education in Australia.

Following the completion of a six-month research stint at EHT, my intention was to transition to Experimental House F (hereinafter referred to as EHF) for the second phase of my research. However, my plans were disrupted by the lockdown imposed on Shanghai in April and May 2022 (see details in chapter 6). Consequently, I opted to extend my stay at EHT for an additional two months. Subsequently, once the lockdown was lifted in June 2022, I applied for a room at EHF and commenced the second phase of my research there. This phase continued for another three months. EHF is the first established co-living house. Originally featuring four rooms with seven beds, the residents later moved to a new house at the end of 2022, which boasted six rooms and eight beds. Over the three years since its establishment, EHF hosted an estimated 60 residents.

In my revisiting phase, EHT underwent a relocation to a new house, referred to as EHT 2.0, featuring five rooms. While some original residents remained, new members were also recruited. I lived the same 24/7 life alongside them as before. As EHT 2.0 was newly established

during my revisit, it only experienced a change in ownership for one room. In total, 10 residents had lived in EHT 2.0 from its establishment to the conclusion of my revisiting.

All the co-living houses are strategically located in the inner central area of Shanghai, enjoying convenient transportation and access to urban amenities. However, the central location comes with the trade-off of high rent, with monthly rates starting at 18,500 RMB for EHT and decreasing to 15,000 RMB (refer to Chapter 5 for detailed information), while EHF is priced at 22,000 RMB and EHT 2.0 at 20,000 RMB. Despite the seemingly steep rent, the cost is distributed among each resident in co-living houses, making it a comparatively reasonable arrangement for each individual. Both co-living houses themselves are approximately 150 square meters, featuring expansive living rooms that occupy half of the area (see the picture of housing structure of EHF as an example in chapter 3). These living rooms serve as spaces for public activities, where residents frequently interact with strangers. Residents in these co-living houses predominantly consist of white-collar workers employed in Internet and advertisement companies, freelancers, as well as gap-year students pursuing studies in the U.S., Europe, and Australia. The consistent pattern across all co-living houses persists, with residents typically spending an average of around six months in their shared living arrangements, and the majority falling within their twenties or early thirties.

Figure 1: Residents of EHT during my fieldwork (2021.9-2022.6)

Name	Gender	Job	Age	Living period
Jingmo	Male	Freelancer	31	2021.7-2022.6
Houpu	Male	Student	22	2021.7-2021.12
Zhaoyan	Female	Freelancer	25	2021.7-2022.6

Name	Gender	Job	Age	Living period
Kongqing	Male	Architecture designer	30	2021.7-2022.6
Chensha	Male	Staff of a foundation	21	2021.8-2022.2
Qinjiao	Female	Student	22	2021.7-2021.12
Yunling	Female	Student	N/A	2021.7-2021.10
Ruiren	Male	Student/intern	25	2021.7-2022.6
Faxia	Female	Designer	34	2021.12-2022.6
Xinyi	Female	Student	21	2022.1-2022.5
Qingdai	Female	Student	21	2021.11-2022.1

Residents of EHF living during my fieldwork (before 2022.9)

Name	Gender	Job	Age	Living period
Fengshi	Male	Film cutter	25	2020.5-2022.9
Meiren	Male	Rehabilitation	34	2021.1-2022.9
Ziyuan	Male	Ph. D Student	28	2021.7-2022.9
Liuzhi	Female	Insurance seller	N/A	2020.6-2022.6
Xixian	Female	Social worker	N/A	2021.12-2022.6
Chuanlian	Male	Programmer	23	2020.8-2022.6
Changshan	Female	Ph. D student	26	2021.8-2022.8
Fanlv	Female	Internet company	26	2021.12-2022.6
Zhuru	Female	Advertisement company	26	2022.6-2022.9
Zelan	Female	Student	21	2022.6-2022.9
Wuti	Female	Designer	27	2022.6-2022.9

The listed residents were living at EHF exactly before and when I lived there. Some other residents who moved in after I left were also covered in this dissertation, as I maintained connection with them on Notion, but they were not listed here.

Living alongside other residents day and night provided me with extensive opportunities for daily conversations, active participation in their interactions, and the conduct of interviews. Residents actively fostered an environment conducive to interactions and conversations, aligning with one of the core principles of co-living itself. Consequently, there were intense dialogues in the living room nearly 24 hours a day, occasionally with multiple concurrent group conversations. A significant portion of the data I collected stemmed from these daily conversations in the relaxed environment, where residents tended to be more talkative. Frequently, I stayed up late with some residents, engaging in discussions that delved into various aspects of their lives. Fengshi from EHF humorously remarked, "Haoyan always stayed up late with us, how energetic he is!" To this, Zhuru added a playful comment, "He is working (as an anthropologist for participant observation), but what are you doing staying up late?"

In addition to the data gathered through daily conversations, I conducted semi-structured interviews with residents, recording these interviews only after establishing a level of familiarity with each participant. A total of 25 in-depth interviews were conducted with co-living residents. Each interview comprised three main sections: life history, co-living experience, and personal understanding of co-living life. The interview questions were tailored based on the responses of the informants, resulting in discussions that typically lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. As I developed familiarity with my informants, there were no rejections when I sought to conduct interviews. Even after I concluded my fieldwork, I conducted remote follow-up interviews with some residents, particularly when significant changes occurred in the co-living environment, such as the relocation of EHT to a new house. This approach allowed me to continue capturing the evolving dynamics of their co-living experiences.

In this context, the conversations and interviews I conducted with the same group of residents repeatedly can be viewed as a form of person-centered interviewing. Person-centered interviewing emphasizes an extended period of research, fostering an experience-rich understanding of ways to describe and analyze human behavior, and “represent human behavior and subjective and intersubjective experiences from the point of view of the acting, intending, and attentive subject, and to actively explore the emotional saliency and motivational force of cultural beliefs, symbols, and structures, rather than assume such saliency and force” (Levine, 1982; Levy and Hollan, 2015). While I did not conduct formal interviews with the same individual over an extended period (typically spanning years) as person-centered interviewing often entails, the intensive dialogues and group communications within the same situational context can be considered a form of person-centered interviewing. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of residents' perspectives, motivations, and experiences within the dynamic and evolving context of co-living.

Furthermore, I actively engaged in participant observation of the organization of public activities (e.g., the planning, organizing, and hosting phases), collective discussions on various matters (e.g., interviews and collective meetings), and other issues that were collectively addressed. My role extended beyond that of a passive observer; I became an active participant, involved in the intricate details of the entire process. This participatory involvement commenced at the outset of my fieldwork. On the very day I moved into EHT, while unpacking my belongings, Jingmo knocked on my door and asked if I would be interested in hosting their regular activity, "Ichi-go ichi-e," scheduled for the upcoming weekend (for public activities, refer to Chapter 3 for details). In an effort to deepen my fieldwork and foster stronger relationships

with informants, I agreed. Following this initial involvement, I gained permission to attend their meetings for public activities and increasingly became involved in various other situations. This deep level of participation allowed me to closely examine events at the moment they unfolded, providing firsthand and immediate access to valuable data.

In addition to conversations, interviews, and active participation, a portion of my data stems from content analysis. Residents at EHT used Feishu to document their meetings and maintained specialized charts to record public funding. Residents at EHF used Notion to document daily life, fostering substantial interaction through comments on each other's records (refer to Chapter 1 for details). As a resident myself, I had authorized access to these records and collected data as permitted. These content analysis data served as crucial supplements to my interviews and participant observation. Even after concluding my fieldwork, I retained the ability to track the ongoing development of their co-living life through the records on Notion. I continued to interact with the residents through these digital platforms. Additionally, announcements of public activities and other articles written by residents on the WeChat account constituted essential data resources for my research.

It is pertinent to emphasize that residents granted permission for my participation and utilization of written materials. This research protocol adhered to ethical standards and was granted approval by the institutional review board, aligning with established research norms. In accordance with confidentiality considerations, all individual and co-living institution names mentioned in this article are pseudonyms.

Engaging in fieldwork within the co-living environment not only allowed me to collect valuable data but also immersed me deeply in the co-living lifestyle. My dual role as both a

researcher and a resident fostered a strong connection with my informants, facilitating a profound, empathic understanding of co-living life. In this sense, this dissertation takes on a quasi-autobiographical narrative, where the recorded activities in my fieldwork notes served both as research data and as my responsibilities for participation as a resident. The intensive engagement had its advantages, granting me access to data that would have been challenging to collect solely through interviews or short-term fieldwork. For instance, as the public funding manager of EHT, I exclusively possessed data on the collective's financial status, a perspective unknown to other residents.

However, this deep engagement also posed potential issues from a researcher's perspective. The first potential problem lies in the distinction between emic and etic perspectives. While I was aware of this issue before commencing my fieldwork, I did not realize its true significance until my revisiting two years later. Participating as an observer during an interview at EHF marked the first time I engaged in an interview solely as an observer, without the dual role of being both a resident and an observer. This separation allowed me to focus more on the presentation of applicants and the reactions of residents, rather than thinking about questions, whether I wanted this one as my roommate, and how I could persuade others during the discussion. So, I have to acknowledge that the ethnography in this dissertation has a more or less autobiographical narrative, which is the cost of the deep engagement strategy of my methods.

Moreover, my presence within the co-living environment influenced the behaviors and reactions of other residents, leading to a notable intersubjectivity between my informants and myself in my narratives. Residents consistently perceived me as an anthropologist, even when functioning as their roommate. This intersubjectivity, while common in ethnography, required

constant reflection on the narratives of my informants. As Alessandro Duranti suggests, intersubjectivity includes “acts in which one actively works at making sure that the Other and the Self are perceptually, conceptually, and practically co-ordinated around a particular task” (Duranti 2010: 17). The residents' curiosity about the anthropological process manifested in their keen observation of my actions, as Fengshi expressed when I first arrived at EHF, stating, “We are observing you while you observe our life.” This dynamic illustrated that the observer is observed. As the observer, I found myself being observed by those I was studying. A noteworthy incident occurred when I cleaned and rearranged the kitchen upon my arrival at EHF, motivated by my personal preference for a clean and organized living space. However, the residents, informed by the awareness that anthropologists might employ various tactics to befriend informants and gain trust, interpreted my actions as a deliberate strategy to entertain and foster relationships by improving the shared living space. Their interpretation, shared with me later, left me in a state of bewilderment. The residents, by scrutinizing my behavior, were actively engaged in shaping their perceptions of my role as an anthropologist, illustrating the nuanced dynamics of observer-observed relationships in the field.

The acknowledgment of intersubjectivity enabled a more reflective stance, as Johannes Fabian suggests, “acknowledging intersubjectivity as a condition of possibility of communicative research enabled us to conceive an alternative to a positivist view of ethnographic objectivity” (Fabian 2014: 205). In the co-living environment, the intensive communication and dialogue between my informants and me facilitated a comprehensive understanding of each other's intentions and desires. As the research progressed and familiarity between my informants and me deepened, any initial misunderstandings and divergent interpretations evolved into a more

profound mutual understanding and empathy fostered by intersubjectivity. Fengshi, having observed me over a period of time, came to the conclusion that my enjoyment of living with them was genuine rather than a performance. This realization, made possible through intersubjectivity, allowed me to maintain a state of "passionate detachment" or "embodied objectivity" in my research (Haraway, 1988).

Furthermore, the potential influence of my opinions on their practices and vice versa remained uncertain. As residents were aware of my study and dissertation, they often sought my thoughts on their co-living life. To foster dialogue and garner their perspectives, I openly shared my opinions, possibly creating an echo chamber effect where their practices may have been influenced by my insights. For instance, I openly shared with them what I perceived as effective mechanisms that unified them as a collective, including the significance of interviews, collaborative note-taking, and establishing clear guidelines for everyone (as discussed in Chapter 1). There is a possibility that, upon learning from my observations and insights, they integrated and reinforced the emphasized mechanisms, creating a potential echo chamber effect as intersubjectivity developed between researchers and informants.

In summary, the deeply engaged strategy of my fieldwork methods provided rich data but also introduced challenges, such as the blurred lines between emic and etic perspectives and the potential influence of my opinions on the co-living practices of residents. Acknowledging these complexities is crucial for a nuanced interpretation of the co-living experience presented in this dissertation.

The structure of this dissertation

The dissertation is structured into two sections, each comprising three chapters. In the first section, the primary emphasis lies on elucidating how residents collaboratively navigate their daily lives within both domestic and public spheres (chapter 1-3). The second section shifts the focus to the challenges that residents encounter in their co-living experiences and explores the collective strategies they employ to overcome these challenges (chapter 4-6). The dissertation concludes by synthesizing the mobility of residents, the development of co-living and key findings gleaned from the exploration of co-living dynamics.

In Chapter One, the central inquiry revolves around how individual residents come together to form a collective. The contention posits that the establishment of a collective is a responsibility shouldered by residents, reciprocating for the intimacy privileges they enjoy within the collective. The realization of collectivity is facilitated through various mechanisms that bind individual residents together. These mechanisms operate through three avenues: fostering individual voice in collective matters, promoting individual engagement in collective activities, and allowing individual documentation for collective life. The promotion of individual voices in collective affairs is evident in interviews and the formulation of written by-laws, providing residents with opportunities to express their opinions and preferences, and engage in negotiations based on consensus and shared values. The flexible work schedule and what I refer to as "domestic social connection" ensure residents' participation in public activities, thereby fostering communication and intimacy. The use of "Notion," a daily record of co-living life, is crafted individually by each resident, contributing to the collective memory of their shared experiences.

In Chapter 2, the focus will be on the quasi-familial relationships among co-living residents. The residents interpret their interactions with roommates within the co-living context

as akin to familial bonds. The argument put forth is that this familial narrative can be comprehended through the framework of neo-familism prevalent in contemporary Chinese society. In the neo-familism model, the youngest generation assumes a central role in intergenerational relations. As the youngest generation in their natal families, these youth receive both economic and emotional support from their parents and grandparents. Consequently, they replicate this form of support within the co-living arrangement, not through intergenerational connections, but rather through peer support. In this perspective, those who offer economic and emotional support are likened to family members, despite the absence of blood or marital ties. Therefore, the familial narrative both reproduces and broadens the understanding of family among the youth in China.

Chapter 3 will delve into another dimension of intimacy—stranger intimacy. Unlike traditional families or ordinary shared housing arrangements in China, co-living spaces are open to strangers through public activities. This chapter will concentrate on the interactions between co-living residents and stranger visitors during these public activities. Within the co-living context, these young individuals foster an environment that is welcoming to strangers, promoting disclosure, interaction, and ultimately leading to intimate situations, fostering what can be termed as stranger intimacy. This exploration emphasizes that the evolution of stranger intimacy is influenced by the principles of co-living, the yearnings for relatedness (*lianjie*) among urban youth, and the ongoing processes of individualization within Chinese society. The emergence of stranger intimacy among Chinese youth signifies a fresh role for strangers in daily life, an evolving relatedness among the youth, and the cultivation of social trust within Chinese society.

In Chapter 4, the focus will shift to address issues, challenges, and risks that co-living residents face in their lives as co-livers. While the first three chapters highlight the harmonious and creative aspects of collective living, the subsequent chapters will shed light on the demanding environment in which co-livers navigate in contemporary China. Chapter 4 will delve into gender issues within Chinese society, examining a significant gender conflict that unfolded in EHT and Sven. The conflict emerged when a male couch surfer, temporarily residing in EHT, was accused of sexual harassment involving certain young women during public activities organized by Sven. An investigation group, comprising residents from EHT and Sven, was established. However, the investigation process reached an impasse due to divergent opinions on sexual harassment among those involved. The analysis will explore the divergence of gender views through the lens of two co-existing dimensions—the hierarchical and horizontal dimensions. This examination aims to reveal the conflicts between these dimensions and uncover gender dynamics in contemporary China, utilizing this case as a lens on broader societal issues.

In Chapter 5, the focus shifts to organizational conflicts faced by co-living residents, specifically involving three key stakeholders: neighbors, authorities, and actors in the housing market. This chapter will explore how residents collectively navigate challenges posed by these stakeholders. The presence of public activities and guests in co-living houses may disturb some neighbors, particularly as co-living arrangements including both male and female genders challenge conservative notions regarding gender relations. Consequently, co-living residents often find themselves under the scrutiny of skeptical neighbors. If neighbors express discomfort, they may report their concerns to the residents' committee, a grassroots governmental organization in China. The co-living lifestyle is consequently subject to the oversight of local

authorities, including the residents' committee and district governments. Given that co-living operates in the gray zone between legal and illegal housing rent, the relationships between co-living residents and authorities are nuanced and dynamic, allowing for the continued survival of co-living arrangements. Moreover, residents must contend with letting agencies and house owners in the rental market. Faced with these challenges, residents typically adopt collective strategies to navigate and overcome them.

In Chapter 6, the focus will be on situating co-living within the broader context of the relationship between individuals and the state, particularly through the lens of the lockdown in Shanghai during the pandemic. The argument put forth is that co-living, as a re-embedding mechanism, functions as a buffer between individuals and the state. The lockdown period serves as a significant case study, highlighting the advantages of co-living over solo living in terms of mental health and the provision of material and social support under risks. Co-living arrangements become crucial during times of crisis, showcasing their resilience and ability to meet residents' needs in challenging circumstances. Additionally, the lockdown period provides an opportunity for co-living residents to actively engage with the community through activities such as food exchange, volunteer work, and caring for the elderly, facilitated by a process of "gift exchange," which releases the challenges co-living residents are faced with, as discussed in chapter 5.

In the conclusion, there will be a departure from a mere summary of the preceding chapters. This introduction commences with interviews for applicants, marking the initiation of co-living life. In the conclusion, the focus will first emphasize the departure of residents. Similar to the interview process as a rite of passage for entry, the leaving residents experience rites of

passage such as responsibility transfer and group photos. Through the lens of residents leaving, the argument is made that co-living life is a fluid and dynamic experience, aligning with the insights from neo-tribe theory. The open and flexible life plans of individual residents contribute to the continual flow of co-living life. Despite the sentimental aspects associated with leaving, residents pursue a better future through mobility, reinforcing the notion of co-living life as an evolving and adaptable collective. The conclusion further posits the concept of "collective individualization," highlighting how individuals strategically navigate personal choices and risks within the framework of collective living. Co-living, as a re-embedding mechanism, provides individuals with a shield against economic, emotional, and social pressures. This collective lifestyle sheds light on emerging preferences, behaviors, and actions of the youth, redefining concepts such as family, stranger intimacy, and gender relations. These findings suggest ongoing social transformations in contemporary China.

1 To the Collective We Belong: The mechanisms and life experience to establish the belongings and connections among individuals

Introduction

Chansu, a resident of EHF, skillfully captured and artistically depicted the distinct personalities of her fellow residents, unveiling a tapestry of diverse characteristics and traits (see figure 3, 4 and 5). “I noticed that everyone’s personality is different and featured. Sometimes you might feel that Xiangru's words have a sting. In reality, she aims her sharpness at others but points the blade towards herself. She's constantly growing through both the criticism and strikes from others, as well as her own self-critique. However, she also has a tendency to embrace others, which often leads to accidentally hurting those around her while simultaneously causing even greater harm to herself.. Liuzhi is the most tender-hearted person I've ever encountered. That's also why there's always a continuous stream of nice friends and resources around her. However, Liuzhi tends to project herself outward. She forms a hollow version of herself, which

Figure 3: Xiangru’s visualized personality

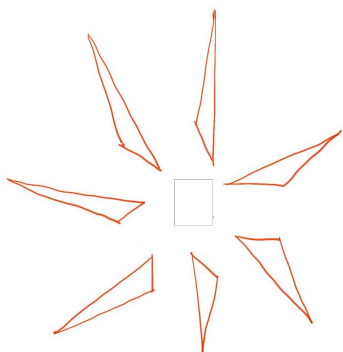
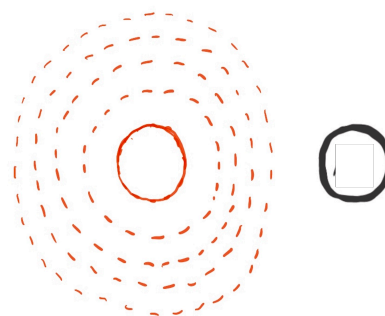


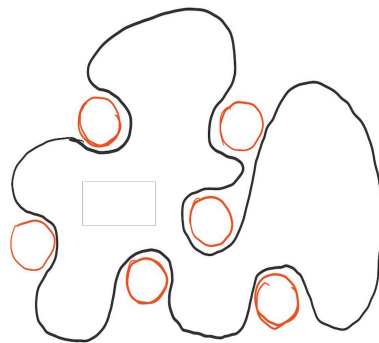
Figure 4: Liuzhi’s visualized personality



she uses to receive the echoes and accolades of fate. This results in the genuine Liuzhi being left to face life's challenges all alone, powerless, and subsequently facing significant setbacks.....As

for me, I have attempted to establish clear boundaries and positions like others, but without success. I truly lack a specific form. In this chaotic world, I navigate recklessly, relying on others' boundaries to define my own. I greatly require others to define the boundaries of their interactions. Consequently, I often proceed with caution, feeling unsure and apprehensive. I fear inadvertently crossing the boundaries of others.” (data from a Notion record written by Chansu)

Figure 5: Chansu’s visualized personality



Chansu’s own introspection mirrors the broader tapestry of co-living residents. She grapples with the intricacies of establishing personal boundaries and viewpoints within the communal setting. The question emerges: how do individuals with such distinct personalities coexist within the co-living framework? How do they maintain personal boundaries and communal life at the same time?

The establishment of a collective among individuals is not an organic process but is contingent upon specific mechanisms, such as shared identities, that cultivate a sense of belonging and connection (Cole 2008). Co-living residents, despite their diverse personalities, aspire to foster amicable individual relationships and a harmonious collective life. However, the attainment of such amicable and harmonious relationships in co-living is not inherent but

contingent upon the active participation of individual residents. Consequently, the co-living collective is an amalgamation of participation in collective public affairs duties and the enjoyment of the rights to intimate relationships among individuals.

In this chapter, a nuanced analysis is undertaken to explore the interplay between participation duties and the rights to intimate relationships, encompassing three dynamic dimensions between the collective and individuals: 1) collective affairs and individual voice: The process of collective decision-making prioritizes individual voices, irrespective of their magnitude. Residents do not merely adhere to the "minority obeys the majority" principle but actively engage in negotiation, ensuring that every resident's perspective is considered. This characteristic is discernible in interviews with candidates and articulated in the codified "by-laws" of the co-living arrangement. 2) collective activities and individual participation: The success of collective activities fostering resident intimacy hinges upon the active participation of individual residents. The "digital nomad work style," characterized by flexible schedules, facilitates residents in allocating time and energy to engage in communal activities. Additionally, the concept of "domestic social connections," arising from the scarcity of external social networks in the metropolitan context of Shanghai, underscores the significance of cultivating relationships within the co-living milieu. The combination of the "digital nomad work style" and "domestic social connections" ensures residents' sustained participation in collective endeavors. 3) individual life and collective record: The collective identity within the co-living community is fortified through the communal duty of recording daily experiences using the "Notion" platform. This collective recording of daily life not only creates a shared memory but also reinforces the communal bond among residents. The act of documenting daily experiences on the Notion

platform serves as a collective record, contributing to the cohesion and sense of community among residents.

Collective Affairs and Individual Voice

Interviews: the rites of passage of co-living life

A journalist who had conducted interviews with residents of EHT published an article titled *Interview required when renting a house? Possible eviction after check-in? What's the secret of this apartment?*⁸ The spotlight in the article was cast on the interview process, which stands out as one of the most captivating facets of co-living. Journalists excel at emphasizing the most captivating and informative elements of events to captivate readers' attention. On the other hand, it falls to ethnographers to delve into the intricacies of the interview process itself, examining the decision-making behind applicant performances, and comprehending how interviews contribute to the cohesiveness of co-living communities. I contend that interviews act as a symbolic rite of passage, distinguishing residents as a unified "us" entity from the external "others". Even more crucially, interviews serve as a repeated platform where residents reaffirm and negotiate the fundamental tenets of co-living. In this regard, the interview process not only reinforces consensus but also solidifies residents' collective sense of belonging.

Participating in interviews typically marks the initial step toward entering the co-living community. As part of this process, each applicant is mandated to complete an online form that encompasses personal information and responses to inquiries such as "What are your perceptions of co-living?" and "How much of your time are you willing to allocate to communal activities?" Contextual scenarios are also posed, such as "How would you react if another resident and their

⁸ The resource of the news: <https://new.qq.com/rain/a/20220320A07F8D00>

partner were making noise at home?" and "If some residents are engaging in loud conversation and drinking in the living room while you're heading to bed, how would you respond?" Co-living residents undertake the role of assessing these forms and determine whether an interview with the applicants is deemed necessary, taking cues from their responses to the provided questions. It's important to note that applicants are generally not excluded from consideration unless the co-living residents perceive their answers to be perfunctory or inattentive. This deliberative evaluation underscores the residents' conscientious approach to selecting individuals who exhibit a genuine interest in and compatibility with the co-living ethos, rather than hastily dismissing applicants based on superficial or careless responses.

The interview format exhibits a degree of flexibility, varying according to the distinct characteristics of the Experimental Houses under consideration. EHT adopts a more structured question-and-answer framework, whereby residents often reiterate questions posed in the application form. This practice serves to elicit more comprehensive responses from interviewees, paralleling the initial inquiry posed in the introduction. In the context of EHF, the interview process is typically characterized by a relaxed and informal talk between the interviewers and interviewees. This approach is designed to foster a sense of mutual familiarity. Contrary to the formality inherent in traditional job interviews, the interactions in these contexts transcend mere formality. Instead, they serve as a conduit for both parties to genuinely and candidly acquaint themselves with one another, with the ultimate goal of forging sincere and authentic friendships. Informality notwithstanding, interviews have standard and optimal processes summarized by residents after tens of practices.

Illustratively, at EHF, the role of introducer is typically assumed by Fengshi. With a wealth of experience drawn from conducting numerous interviews, Fengshi adeptly initiates the process with a distinctive and personalized touch. Fengshi's introduction commences with an exposition of the dwelling's challenges. Notably, the issue of soundproofing is addressed—an aspect that bears significance in disrupting residents' repose, particularly when nocturnal conversations in the common area disturb others. Additionally, the prevalence presence of insects emerges as a secondary concern. A noteworthy anecdote underscores this point: in the midst of addressing the soundproofing concern, a sizable cockroach unexpectedly made its presence known, eliciting surprise among those present. In a display of adeptness, Fengshi promptly suspended the interview, skillfully removed the insect, and then Fengshi sat back and said “OK, let’s introduce the second problem. As you can see, we have insects.”

Subsequent to the introductory discourse on the housing conditions, the focus transitions to the exploration of the applicants' backgrounds. This phase commonly entails dialogues centered around their personal life journeys and professional experiences, as the residents evince a curiosity about individuals hailing from diverse disciplines. For instance, in the same illustrative interview involving Fengshi's cockroach interlude, two applicants named Wuti and Pianling were present. Wuti, possessing a specialization in construction design, found herself fielding inquiries from residents pertaining to innovative ideations in the realm of co-living space design. Meanwhile, Pianling was a professional of a social media company and liked playing Texas Hold'em poker. Consequently, discussions meandered towards reflections on the ubiquitous influence of social media platforms. After the interview engagement, Pianling played Texas Hold'em poker with some residents. Hence, the interviews assume the character of an

organic and congenial rendezvous, emblematic of a process centered on the cultivation of new social connections and genuine friendships, rather than a starkly evaluative selection procedure.

The substantive segment of the interview process emerges during the post-interview deliberations. This juncture invariably assumes paramount significance, as it frequently engenders divergent viewpoints among the residents regarding their inclinations. The ensuing discussion serves as an arena wherein residents articulate their individual assessments of the applicants' performances and express their predilections. Simultaneously, this platform operates as an avenue for residents to proffer their insights into their favored candidates while adhering to principles of equity and parity. In tandem, it embodies an environment wherein divergent viewpoints can converge, as residents engage in a dialectical exchange to achieve consensus through democratic principles. It is noteworthy that this arena is not devoid of its challenges, as the crucible of dialogue can at times yield impassioned debates and lead to intractable disagreements. In fact, certain instances can escalate into conflicts among residents, indicative of the profound stakes and emotions that underpin the selection process. To elucidate the dynamics, I will expound upon two instances of such debates.

Subsequent to the interviews with Wuti and Pianling, contention arose during the deliberative phase. Fengshi advanced the view that Pianling exhibited a calculated demeanor in her interview, seemingly crafting her responses in accordance with a perceived set of favorable criteria. Furthermore, Fengshi noted an unsettling emulation in Pianling's disposition, particularly evident during the Texas Hold'em poker interaction. In contrast, Wuti presented herself with a more subdued and affable disposition, engendering a comfortable conversational atmosphere. Wuti's demeanor, perceived as easygoing, contributed to the collective sentiment

that she possessed qualities conducive to harmonious co-living. Concurrently, several other residents echoed Fengshi's apprehensions. However, a divergent viewpoint emerged from Meiren. Having spent more time with Pianling through a game of Texas Hold'em poker and conversation while accompanying her leaving, Meiren proffered an alternative perspective. He argued that Pianling's facade of emulation, as projected during the interview, belied a more genuine demeanor upon closer interaction. Meiren found Pianling to be engaging and captivating, a sentiment not shared by others. The ensuing deliberations provided a comprehensive platform for residents to voice their evaluations. The consensus that emerged tilted in favor of Wuti as the more preferable candidate, with a majority endorsing this perspective. In light of this collective verdict, Meiren, despite his dissenting view, aligned with the majority's decision during the voting process, attesting to the democratic principles underpinning the communal decision-making dynamic.

Nonetheless, the trajectory of discussions wasn't uniformly tranquil and seamless. An instance that underscores this occurred a few days subsequent to an interview involving four applicants at EHT—the same scenario introduced in the opening exposition. With insights into the applicants' performances garnered either through direct participation or by reviewing video recordings, the residents congregated for a meeting with the aim of formulating a voting methodology. Houpu advocated for adherence to the established recruitment procedure, wherein every resident was endowed with two distinct-weighted tickets (one carrying a vote value of 1, and the other, 1.5). However, a counterpoint emerged from Qinjiao, diverging from the proposed course of action. She opined that her involvement was pivotal, given the fact that the prospective new resident would share her living space—a circumstance poised to exert an unparalleled

impact on her daily life. As such, Qinjiao asserted her right to a veto. Houpu, on the other hand, underscored the collective nature of the community and emphasized the primacy of democratic decision-making. He argued that acceding to Qinjiao's demand for a veto would be antithetical to the spirit of equality and would compromise the democratic ethos intrinsic to the Experimental House. Qinjiao countered, contending that the principle of egalitarianism did not hold relevance in this particular context. The differing circumstances between her and the other residents, she maintained, necessitated a customized approach that acknowledged her unique situation. Ultimately, a middle ground emerged from this impassioned exchange. The resolution encompassed a two-step voting process. In the initial round, every resident participated on equal footing, leading to the selection of two candidates. In the subsequent round, Qinjiao assumed the authority to elect one applicant from among the two shortlisted candidates, effectively conjoining the tenets of collective decision-making and her particular considerations.

Consequently, following the broader conversation, certain residents expressed reservations regarding the proposed resolution. Their contention centered on the potential for Qinjiao's individual choice to diverge from the collective consensus, thereby subverting the principle of democratic decision-making. While the applicant garnering the highest number of votes inherently symbolized the collective decision, Jingmo and Houpu anticipated the likelihood of a paradox. They postulated that Qinjiao might opt for the candidate with the second-highest number of votes because she had already shared living quarters with Qinjiao on a temporary basis as a couch surfer. This exposure and familiarity could potentially sway Qinjiao's preference in favor of this candidate as her future roommate. What's more, this predictable divergence in preferences held the potential to introduce a discordant dynamic. Specifically, Qinjiao's ultimate

decision in the second round could potentially color the initial round of voting. Anticipating a lack of respect for their choices, some residents might abstain from voting for their preferred candidate in the first round, suspecting that Qinjiao's veto would effectively override their selections.

From my perspective, the crux of the voting method conflict lay in the inherent tension between individual autonomy and collective consensus—a dynamic not uncommon within co-living contexts. Qinjiao's assertion of a veto embodied the prioritization of individual will over the collective preference, necessitating the acceptance of a new resident whom other residents might not find most compatible. Conversely, adhering strictly to the collective decision would have led Qinjiao to potentially accommodate a roommate she might not personally favor. This predicament is intricate due to the fundamental tenets of individual autonomy and authoritative collective choice that each side espouses. This case underscores the confluence of rational appeals from both factions. While an agreement was eventually reached during the discussion, a lingering sense of unease persisted, stemming from the belief that their respective interests were not fully acknowledged by the opposing camp. Consequently, this discord evolved into a seemingly insurmountable impasse. Jingmo went so far as to propose a contingency plan: if Qinjiao were to opt for the applicant with the second highest votes without compromise, he would initiate another meeting to deliberate on the possibility of her removal. This proposition encapsulates the intensity of the conflict, as it touches upon the core issue of respecting collective decisions. In the end, as predicted by Houpu and Jingmo, Qinjiao did indeed choose the applicant with the second highest votes. However, the threatened impeachment did not

materialize; instead, a compromise was struck to preserve the relationships rather than escalate the confrontation.

Interviews within co-living houses play a pivotal role by serving as a multifaceted cornerstone of the collective endeavor. This multifaceted role can be classified into three fundamental aspects. Firstly, interviews fulfill the function of discerning individuals who are inherently attuned to the ethos of co-living. This selection process hinges on assessing candidates' proclivity for the co-living lifestyle, encompassing factors such as compatibility, interpersonal communication skills, and enthusiasm. A common inclination among residents is to favor applicants who share analogous personalities, interests, and perspectives on co-living, thus facilitating the identification of optimal candidates based on shared preferences and enabling the establishment of deep-rooted relationships and a communal sense of ownership.

Additionally, interviews hold a distinctive place as a rite of passage for incoming residents embarking on their co-living journey. Drawing inspiration from Van Gennep's framework of rites of passage, Victor Turner (1966) elucidated the three sequential phases: separation, liminality, and incorporation. The liminality phase, characterized by its unique transformative nature, finds a parallel in the interview process. During interviews, the boundaries of relationships between applicants and residents are in a state of flux. This transitional phase propels candidates beyond being strangers while not yet attaining the status of roommates. The conversations encompass casual camaraderie alongside discussions pivotal to co-living, such as rent and logistical arrangements. The successful passage through this liminality heralds the newcomer's integration into the co-living milieu, symbolized by inclusion in WeChat group of co-living community, shared documentation platforms, and access to the financial facets of co-

living. This rite underscores co-living's ritual significance and fosters a profound sense of belonging for the entrants.

Moreover, interviews serve as occasions wherein incumbent residents reaffirm their collective ideals and principles. This platform of interaction crystallizes mutual understanding and engenders the convergence of diverse perspectives, ultimately coalescing around the principles that define co-living. A case involving a debate post-interview at EHT offers a vivid illustration. Amidst the discussion about voting methods, the underlying fabric was the democratic underpinning of co-living. These deliberations provided residents an opportunity to articulate their viewpoints, negotiate differences, and ultimately strike a compromise, underscoring the communal baseline for admitting new members and adhering to co-living tenets.

Written by-laws: the regulation based on consensus

Interviews indeed serve as a catalyst for nurturing shared values and consensus within co-living communities, thereby fostering a heightened sense of collective identity among the residents. In addition to the unspoken consensus that permeates the minds of each resident, EHF takes the principle of communal consensus further by implementing written by-laws that delineate the behavioral norms for all occupants. These by-laws remain dynamic, subject to revision whenever new residents join the community. The revision process ensues to ensure that the evolving preferences and inclinations of newcomers are duly accounted for.

Upon the induction of new residents, an expeditious meeting is promptly convened, marked by a collective endeavor to deliberate and amend the existing by-laws. This crucial assembly involves the entire resident cohort congregating within the communal living room,

collectively poring over the established by-laws. Each article is scrutinized, with residents openly discussing and inviting alternate perspectives on each clause. This entails that an article only gains passage when every single resident extends their concurrence. In the event of a dissenting opinion arising from any resident, the collective community engages in a collaborative discourse aimed at reconciling differing viewpoints. The focus is on crafting revisions that incorporate the preferences and concerns of all residents, thereby striving to strike a harmonious balance.

I present a version of these by-laws that was in effect during my tenure at EHF, accompanied by an analysis of certain revisions that occurred during that time.

By-Laws⁹

1. [House Rules]

1.1 Prohibited Activities: Sexual activities are prohibited in the living lab.

1.2 Duty One: Every resident takes turns to handle the garbage disposal for all common areas, including two bathrooms, on a fixed day each week. If unable to do so on the assigned day, the resident is responsible for asking another resident for help.

1.3 Duty Two: Record the day's activities in the Notion log. If you're not at home, delegate this to another resident.

1.4 Refrigerator Usage: The bottom two levels are for personal items that you don't want others to touch. Other spaces are for communal items.

1.5 Pet Accommodation: Bringing pets requires unanimous consent. Pets are to be kept in the owner's room, including litter boxes for cats. Pets are allowed to roam during the day but must stay in their own rooms at night.

1.6 Tenant Responsibility: As per the contract, significant issues during residency can lead to contract termination by Party A (Landlord).

1.7 Renewal Notice: Residents are required to inform everyone one month before the tenant contract expires, indicating whether they want to renew. Renewal is assumed if there are no objections. If there are objections, a full-house vote is initiated, requiring unanimous approval for renewal.

1.8 Voting: Unanimous consent is needed for consensus and decisions involving residents (including pets). Other matters require over half of the votes to pass.

1.9 Footwear: Shoes can be worn in the living room and kitchen area, but slippers are required in other areas.

1.10 Kitchen:

⁹ The by-laws in co-living institutions are only regulations launched by themselves, without any legitimate foundation with the laws in Chinese society.

1.10.1 The person cooking decides, and others shouldn't direct.

1.10.2 Those participating in group meals must be involved in at least one step from purchasing to dishwashing and counter cleaning.

1.10.3 Kitchen utensils and takeaway items must be cleaned before the next cooking session. Sanitary supervisor oversees.

1.11 TV Remote: The TV remote is placed on one of the coffee tables beside the couch.

1.12 Shoe Rack: Each person has three spots.

2. [Public Fund]

2.1 Full Reimbursement:

2.1.1 Rice, seasonings

2.1.2 Cleaning of common areas

2.1.3 Laundry detergent, disinfectant

2.1.4 Cleaning tools (with collective agreement)

2.2 Partial Reimbursement:

Unwanted furniture left behind can be reimbursed by 60% (up to 15% of monthly rent).

Extra costs borne by the tenant.

3. [Visitors]

3.1 Lab Open to Visitors: Visitors are allowed but must be notified in the residents' group chat by a resident in advance. Please introduce friends briefly and avoid unfriendly or closed-off friends. If a resident has concerns about a visitor, they can communicate this. Sofa guests who wish to invite others must have a resident convey the message.

3.2 Unplanned Stayovers: Guests who unexpectedly need to stay the night don't need formal permission but must be announced in the residents' group chat by a resident. The notifying resident becomes the endorser. Note that if this causes more than 2 people to stay overnight in the living room, this rule no longer applies, as per rule 3 in this consensus.

3.3 Stayover Frequency: Stayover mechanisms cannot be used consecutively. In other words, no person can stay continuously for 2 nights as a guest.

4. [Couch surfer]

4.1 Fee Until Dec 31, 2021: The sofa guest fee remains 80 RMB/night until December 31, 2021. 25 RMB goes to the Sven. If the common fund is severely depleted, discussions can be held.

4.2 Application Process: Sofa guests need to complete the "Sofa Guest Check-In Application" (link provided) and have their application forwarded by a resident in the group chat. More than half the votes are needed for approval. The exception is described in Visitors Rule 2.

4.3 Link: Sofa Guest Check-In Application

4.4 Maximum Number: Normally, a maximum of 2 sofa guests are allowed simultaneously. In special cases, temporary expansion is possible but requires unanimous approval from present residents (excluding those already asleep).

4.5 Advance Payment: Sofa guests must pay the rent in advance and can apply for a maximum of 7 days. The first 2 applications (14 days) require only more than half the residents' approval. For subsequent 7-day stays, unanimous approval is needed.

5. *[Subleasing]*

Subleasing While Present: Subleasing while the resident is present is not allowed; guests can only stay as sofa guests. To sublease, complete the resident application form, an optional interview, and unanimous approval are required. Duties of the original and subleasing residents are shared in voting. The original resident remains in the group; the subleasing resident joins. There's no time limit as long as it's within the original resident's lease term. Short-term premium goes to the common fund, while the rest goes to the original resident.

In the context of by-law revisions, it is customary to encounter minor adjustments as the by-laws primarily encapsulate overarching and collectively endorsed principles. Within the list of revisions provided only Article 4 of the "House Rules" section, concerning "Refrigerator Usage," underwent a subtle amendment. In the earlier iteration, due to the inclinations of two previous residents who preferred personal space, the refrigerator space was divided equitably among all occupants. This division ensured that each resident possessed an individual compartment, with only a limited area reserved for communal use. However, during the deliberations centered on the by-law revisions, these two residents left, and new residents at that juncture introduced a distinctive perspective. They asserted that the presence of a diminutive communal space engendered inconveniences and disrupted the shared spirit emblematic of co-living. In response to these concerns, a collective decision was reached, and the by-law was adapted accordingly. The amendment entailed the expansion of the communal refrigerator space, with approximately one-third of the refrigerator space now designated for communal use. The remaining portion retained individual storage, albeit in a more compact proportion compared to the original arrangement.

The efficacy of by-laws as a unifying force within the collective is multifaceted and can be delineated through three distinct dimensions. Firstly, the formulation of by-laws is a product of extensive collective deliberation wherein the needs and perspectives of all members are taken

into account. This inclusive process ensures that the voices of both the majority and the minority are acknowledged and respected. An exemplar from the mentioned by-law revisions is the allocation of refrigerator space in consideration of two residents who preferred smaller individual compartments. Despite their minority stance, their suggestions were honored, evading the imposition of "democratic violence," (Honderich 1973), that is, the majority pushing the minority to compromise, wherein the majority imposes its will on the minority. This approach cultivates a sense of respect and consideration among all residents, thus heightening their collective consciousness.

Secondly, because the by-laws are founded on the unanimous consensus of all residents, the adherence to these by-laws ensures that all residents are equally protected and governed by the same principles, fostering a sentiment of equity and shared purpose. The sense of collective identity stems from the realization that these guiding principles are embraced by all, encapsulating the values and ideals held by the co-living community.

Thirdly, the overarching priority of by-laws is to preserve the cohesion of the collective and nurture harmonious relationships, rather than focusing solely on punitive measures. An illustrative instance emerged when the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the co-living community at the end of 2021.¹⁰ The initial by-law mandated that infected individuals temporarily vacate the premises, seeking accommodation in hotels until recovery. The public fund will subsidy the cost and residents moving out could refer their rooms to someone else. However, as the situation evolved and more residents contracted the virus, residents convened to reassess the by-law's relevance, leading to the amendment of the by-law to facilitate home quarantine for the infected

¹⁰ At the end of 2021, the Chinese government cancelled the quarantine policies. A widespread but mild infection occurred in order to reach herd immunity.

individuals. The emotionally taxing experience of solitary quarantine, compounded by the physical burden of infection, cast a pall of melancholy over the residents. This collective despondency prompted a pivotal decision—to reunite within EHF and to pass through the challenging situation together. In doing so, the community reaffirmed the paramount importance of fostering cohesion and nurturing interpersonal bonds in the face of daunting challenges. Chansu wrote, “We have a memorable voting process that transpired—an emblematic instance wherein the residents collectively opted for "option 2" denoting home quarantine. Symbolically, the gesture of raising two fingers bore connotations of victory, evoking a sense of unity and shared triumph. The residents, who had weathered the emotional tempests of isolation, now radiated long-absent smiles.” (data from Notion)

The enforcement of by-laws and adherence to collective agreements are vital for sustaining the harmony and cohesiveness of co-living communities. In instances where violations of these agreements occur, a collective process for addressing and resolving such issues is generally preferred over individual actions. A successful case of addressing an issue and subsequently removing a resident from EHT 2.0 exemplifies this approach. In this case, a resident's communication style provoked discomfort among fellow residents. The perception that this individual consistently sought to persuade others and unwaveringly championed their own viewpoints led to contentious debates and strained interactions, further permeating an uncomfortable atmosphere within shared spaces. Recognizing the detrimental impact of these dynamics, the residents collectively determined that the removal of the problematic individual was necessary. Subsequently, a meeting took place at a nearby restaurant where the remaining residents convened to deliberate and make a final decision. This collective discussion extended

into a conversation with the resident in question within the living room of EHT 2.0.

Encouragingly, the dialogue proceeded without major friction, as both parties recognized that their paths would inevitably diverge. The individual in question accepted the decision, as they themselves acknowledged that their current living situation was contributing to their own unhappiness. Throughout this process, the emphasis on collective decision-making emerged as a salient aspect, fostering unity and solidarity among the residents. By engaging in collective deliberation and decision-making, rather than relying on individual judgment, the co-living community amplifies the sense of collective identity and responsibility. This approach not only resolves immediate issues but also bolsters the community's cohesiveness. It underscores the significance of a unified front in making impactful decisions and addressing challenges that may arise, ultimately reinforcing the shared values and sense of collective purpose that characterize co-living spaces.

In essence, the interview process functions as a pivotal rite of passage for potential co-living residents, providing a structured platform for the reaffirmation of shared values and consensus through the judicious selection of candidates. Simultaneously, the written by-laws, serving as a comprehensive code of conduct, establish a framework for uniform treatment and collective accountability. Residents, in turn, bear the dual role of both rights and obligations within this structure. Participation in candidate interviews and expressing opinions on the written by-laws are not merely individual rights to be heard and respected; they constitute communal obligations. Every resident is expected to engage actively in candidate discussions and voting, contributing to the ongoing refinement of the written by-laws to align with the evolving needs of the community. This shared participation is integral not only to ensure the enrollment of the most

qualified candidates but also to foster consensus on collective living practices. Despite individual differences in preferences, the interview process and written by-laws serve as the common ground, uniting residents with diverse personalities under a shared commitment to the principles that govern co-living life.

Collective Activities and Individual Participation

The active participation of individual residents is a crucial component of the collective life in co-living arrangements. Why do they want to participate? And why do they have time to participate? The motivations behind residents' willingness to engage in collective activities stem from both the nature of their flexible work schedules and the significance of interpersonal connections within the co-living environment. The flexibility of residents' work schedules liberates them from rigid time constraints, allowing for spontaneous and adaptable participation in collective activities. With the absence of a fixed timetable for work, residents can engage in communal events whenever they have available time, fostering a dynamic and responsive collective life. Furthermore, the limited external social connections in the bustling metropolis of Shanghai contribute to the heightened importance of relationships within the co-living space.

Flexible working schedules: digital nomads and other adaptable arrangements

On a tranquil Tuesday afternoon, I sat on the sofa in the living room of EHT 2.0 and read a book. At the same time, Zhaoyan reclined languidly on another sofa, her attention tethered to the luminous expanse of her phone screen, while Hexiang orchestrated a symphony of keystrokes on her laptop perched atop the table. The living room's serenity was momentarily disrupted by the entrance of Fanlv, who emerged from the embrace of his bedroom and was surprised to find that many residents were also there. "Hey, a Tuesday afternoon, aha," Fanlv put.

Fanlv's remark subtly underscored the unique rhythm of co-living life, where Tuesday afternoons defied conventional expectations. Within the broader societal framework, Tuesday afternoons are typically synonymous with bustling office spaces and professional commitments. However, the co-living context veers from this norm, as many residents have flexible working schedules. Chief amongst such flexible working schedules is digital nomads—a contemporary lifestyle phenomenon that transcends the boundaries of traditional work environments. First put forward by Tsugio Makimoto and David Manners in 1997, "digital nomads" has many definitions (Shawkat et al. 2021). They are “individuals who leverage technology to work remotely and live an independent and nomadic lifestyle” (Nash et al. 2018) and “therefore choose not only to work from almost anywhere in the world but also live almost anywhere in the world, as ‘perpetual travellers’ ” (Wang et al. 2018). This digital nomadic lifestyle is predicated on an innovative work-play balance (Reichenberger 2018; Thompson 2018) and offers greater flexibility in navigating neoliberal frameworks (Mancinelli 2020). The global pandemic further amplified this trend as remote work gained prominence (de Almeida et al. 2021), reshaping the parameters of both work and living spaces. As digital nomads traverse fluid boundaries, they exhibit the freedom to select diverse settings for their endeavors, encompassing tourist hostels and co-working spaces (Chevtaeva 2021; Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet 2021). Co-living and digital nomadism share an intertwined narrative (Lee et al. 2019). These co-living spaces strategically position themselves as ideal accommodations to counteract the isolation that accompanies urban life and digital nomadism (Zumbusch and Lalicic 2020). This symbiotic relationship frequently results in co-living environments that accommodate the cohabitation of

digital nomads, uniting individuals who share both a penchant for unconventional work styles and a desire for communal living.

Fengshi is a typical digital nomad as a video producer for a prominent Bilibili uploader. He teamed up with his classmates from college, the uploader and some others, to establish a video production crew in Shanghai. Fengshi's workdays are dictated by the ebb and flow of their projects. During the intensive phases of video production, he immerses himself for days on end, both at his personal abode and within the confines of his studio. These bustling periods are marked by round-the-clock dedication, where the boundaries between work and personal time blur into an all-encompassing creative endeavor. However, the transient nature of his profession also grants Fengshi periods of respite once projects conclude. During these interludes, his schedule shifts dramatically, with days unfurling leisurely within the walls of his residence.

Besides digital nomads, some other residents are gap-years students or enjoy other flexible working schedules. Zhuru, another resident, navigates her flexible work schedule within the realm of advertising. This fluidity allows her to occasionally toil from the comfort of her living quarters, the allure of a later start time eased by the leniency of her manager. One instance finds Zhuru engaged in mid-year self-review, an endeavor that warrants a temporary shift to the domicile as she crafts her reflective musings. An impending three-day vacation further prompts her to embrace an unconventional schedule, leading to a week in which daytime melds with nighttime. The eventual return to the routine workweek finds Zhuru grappling to acclimate to customary working hours, prompting her decision to eschew the office on a Tuesday, after one-day work on the Monday. Instead, she hunkers down within the familiar embrace of home, committed to weaving her mid-year self-review. However, despite her initial intent to hunker

down in productive solitude, the day morphs into a communal one, rich with conversations with other residents.

Indeed, the intricate dance between flexible work schedules and co-living lifestyles showcases a reciprocal relationship where each facet amplifies the other's dynamics. Zumbusch and Lalicic's insights into the symbiotic nature of leisure and sociality find resonance in the co-living landscape, particularly within the context of digital nomads and those embracing flexible work arrangements. As they experience more discretionary time due to their work flexibility, their inclination towards sociality and engagement with fellow residents naturally intensifies. In a captivating illustration of this synergy, Zhuru's narrative underscores the organic fusion of work and interaction within the co-living sphere. Though she initially embarked on a day of remote work within the confines of her residence, the gravitational pull of communal engagement drew her into a tapestry of conversations and interactions with other like-minded residents who were similarly present at home. Collins' perceptive analysis of emotional interactions resonates strongly here. In his book-length analysis of emotional interactions, Collins suggests that “interactional situations varying along those two dimensions-how much mutual focus of attention occurs, and how much emotional entrainment builds up among the participants” (Collins, 2004: xi-xii). The heightened emotional energy fostered by mutual focus and emotional entrainment promotes greater intimacy among individuals, further enriching the fabric of their shared experiences.

In addition, a heightened presence can lead to greater attentiveness and a commitment to refining shared living conditions. Houpu's proactive engagement with the co-living environment at EHT underscores the valuable role that residents with flexible schedules play in enhancing the

quality of communal living spaces. Houpu was a junior student studying at Australia and stayed in China because of COVID-19 in 2021. Invited by his good friend Jingmo to co-establish EHT, he went to Shanghai to get involved in the establishment. As he did not work and therefore could dedicate more time to the shared living spaces, he became attuned to the nuances of communal life, leading to insights that might otherwise go unnoticed. He made efforts to procure new kitchenware and enhance soundproofing through seal strips to solve common challenges that residents encounter. His immersion in the daily life of the co-living house provided him with a first-hand understanding of the areas in need of improvement, and his proactive actions resulted in tangible upgrades that benefited all residents.

It should be noted that not all residents of co-living houses have flexible working schedules. With the mobility of residents, sometimes residents with flexible working schedules are the mainstream, whereas sometimes it is the opposite. When a significant portion of residents have flexible schedules, the house is likely to be more active and bustling throughout the day. Conversely, when the majority of residents adhere to traditional work schedules, there might be periods of the day when the co-living spaces appear quieter and less occupied. Some Notion records mentioned the quiet living room at daytimes.¹¹ Zhuru wrote: “It is said that the most difficult moment for those living alone is returning home after work, walking into complete darkness, and finding everything just as it was when they left in the morning. Tonight, when Baiwei arrives home, he might experience the same feeling. Baiwei switches on the lights, waits for takeout, eats the meal, and offers the first contribution of the day to the trash bin (which is

¹¹ I follow the residents of EHF on Notion. Therefore, most data about the co-living life after I left are from content analysis of the record.

usually full, but today, due to no one being home, seems desolately empty).” So, when residents are busy, the collective life of co-living disappears.

“Domestic social connection”

Someone might wonder now that many residents enjoy flexible working schedules, why do they not go out for social activities but prefer to staying in the living rooms and communicate with roommates in their spare time? The answer is rooted in the matrix of social connection of co-living residents that I call “domestic social connection”.

The concept of "domestic social connection" emphasizes the central role that roommates play in the social lives of co-living residents, particularly in situations where individuals lack extensive pre-existing social connections in the new city they have moved to, such as Shanghai. The shared portrait of co-living residents arriving in Shanghai with relatively few established social connections is a defining characteristic that shapes the dynamics of their interactions within the co-living environment. Many co-living residents relocate to Shanghai for various reasons, such as career opportunities, personal interests, or studies, but often without a strong network of friends, family, or colleagues already in the city.

Fengshi's experience serves as a poignant example of this common scenario. He graduated from a college in Nanjing and followed his college classmates to Shanghai. They established a studio and produced short videos on social medias. During the co-living period with Fengshi, I indeed only noticed once that he went out without roommates. He went to Shanghai Museum with his college classmate who visited him in Shanghai. In the rest time, if Fengshi did not go to work, he stayed at home all the time. In an interview, he straightforwardly admitted that he had "no friends here" and that he rarely contacted his colleagues after work. His

word surprised me, and I started to focus on the reasons why residents came to Shanghai and their social connections. The diverse and coincidental reasons that co-living residents have for coming to Shanghai contribute to the shared portrait of individuals arriving in the city with relatively few established social connections. Zhuru moved to Shanghai because of her boyfriend. Her original reason for relocating was based on the desire to maintain her relationship with her boyfriend, even though they lived in separate cities. However, life took an unexpected turn when they eventually broke up. Zhuru humorously remarked about her boyfriend having gone missing but her job remaining. Changshan decided to come to Shanghai to learn from her favorite street dance instructor. Kongqing, who completed graduate education in the U.S., chose to work in Shanghai due to a favorable job opportunity.

Another pivotal social dynamic pertains to the relationships with colleagues or other work-related acquaintances, given that a majority of co-living residents are employed in Shanghai. Nonetheless, such professional affiliations often remain distinct from personal lives, resulting in a deficit of intimate social connections of co-living residents. Notably, Zhaoyan stands out as a social enthusiast within this context. Her propensity for dating and engaging in social interactions deviates from the norm observed among her co-residents. As a participant in a startup venture, Zhaoyan articulated how her dating experiences afforded her the opportunity to engage with individuals from diverse fields, thus facilitating the acquisition of knowledge that might eventually prove beneficial to her work. Her proclivity for engaging with a diverse range of individuals was driven by a genuine interest in these encounters, providing her with a sense of emotional relaxation. However, she was keen on maintaining a clear demarcation between her professional and personal spheres. An intriguing development arose when one of Zhaoyan's

dating partners transitioned into a collaborative business partner, leading to her swift disinterest in pursuing a romantic connection. In this sense, close relations with roommates in co-living are supplementary for stressful and utilitarian working relations for residents.

It's worth noting that while some co-living residents may have friends or interest groups outside of the co-living context, the "domestic social connection" is that their connections within the co-living environment often take precedence. The emphasis of co-living interactions, combined with the shared experiences of building a new life in a city away from familiar networks, strengthens the bonds formed among roommates.

Individual Life and Collective Record

"Notion"-Collective memory of Co-living

"Notion," a versatile software tool, serves as a multifunctional platform accommodating note-taking, chart creation, and various recording activities. For co-living residents, initially employed solely for the utilitarian purpose of cataloging the storage locations of items owned by the homeowner but irrelevant to the residents, its latent potential as a repository for capturing engaging events and delightful moments occurring in their daily lives became apparent.

Operationalizing Notion as a digital diary, residents of EHF commenced the documentation of their daily co-living experiences from April 2022 onwards. With the integration of new residents in June 2022, the practice of recording daily occurrences on Notion transcended its discretionary status to evolve into an essential obligation. Each resident undertook the responsibility of chronicling the events of co-living life for a designated day of the week. This systematic approach engendered a sense of collective engagement, enabling every member to contribute to the shared narrative.

The records meticulously compiled within Notion captured a plethora of seemingly inconsequential yet collectively significant activities that unfolded within the span of a single day. These chronicles were artfully woven together, interweaving words, images, and videos to encapsulate the vibrant tapestry of co-living experiences. Illustratively, a record penned by Fengshi serves as a vivid example of this practice.

The entry commenced with a captivating visual—a pair of stunning sunrise photographs captured by Changshan.

This visual prelude segued into an array of activities that spanned the entire day.

The narrative unfolded with the account of a neighbor's visit, prompted by suspicions of water from the air conditioner dripping onto their window.

Following this, the narrative took a poignant turn, recounting Kongqing's visit and the contemplative conversation that ensued regarding the trajectory of co-living.

This discourse was punctuated by a communal dinner, where another participant named Malian joined the residents. Visual documentation punctuated this juncture, with images of the shared meal immortalized within the record.

The record ventured into the evening, where yet another layer of engagement materialized. A friend of the residents made an appearance, leading the inhabitants in an impromptu play that involved adopting various roles reminiscent of a drama.

As the hours waned, the communal space transformed into a zone of shared laughter and camaraderie. The living room resonated with the collective mirth as residents exchanged meme pictures and revealed in each other's company.

The record concluded on this harmonious note, encapsulating the day's interactions, emotions, and moments of shared joy. (a record from Notion)

The recording task was a conduit for residents to intentionally tune into the nuances of daily life—how their fellow residents felt, what they said, and the manner in which they interacted within the shared living space. This engagement, in turn, fostered a heightened sense of mutual attention (Collins 2004) and interaction among the residents. When the living room buzzed with activity, the recorder had the privilege of amassing a plethora of anecdotes (see as Fengshi's record). In contrast, during quieter times when only a few residents were present, the recorder had to exert more effort to document noteworthy occurrences. An illustrative episode occurred on a Sunday when most residents ventured outdoors, leaving the co-living house deserted. On this day, Ziyuan held the role of recorder, a responsibility that compelled them to remain in the living room in anticipation of the residents' return. When the first resident arrived, Ziyuan instinctively reached for their smartphone, capturing the scene on video. The resident reciprocated, perceiving the purpose behind Ziyuan's actions. This unspoken understanding led to a synchronized moment, where the residents collaborated tacitly, adopting poses and gestures that aligned with the recorder's intentions. It is worth noting that many stories meticulously curated within Notion were imbued with intentionality, capturing carefully orchestrated instances. These moments, while consciously recorded, held within them the essence of shared experiences, encapsulating the rich fabric of co-living life. The records, born from deliberate attention and shared understanding, transformed into repositories of memories—vivid testaments to the coalescence of individual narratives and collective dynamics that define the co-living community.

The robust collection of co-living moments meticulously documented within Notion epitomizes an active form of "collective remembering" rather than a static "collective memory" (Wertsch and Roediger, 2008). This repository of experiences mirrors the ongoing, dynamic nature of events unfolding within their co-living life journey. The intentional and participatory act of recording by residents not only facilitates the preservation of these events but also encapsulates the shared happiness experienced within the co-living environment. Residents actively remember what occurred in their co-living life rather than passively leave an impression on what happened. Through their recorded chronicles, residents foster an interactive engagement with the past, engaging in collective reflections that transcend mere reminiscence. These records serve as more than a static archive; they embody the living narrative of their co-living experiences. By revisiting these records, residents are afforded the opportunity to relive their shared adventures, crystallizing the transient moments of happiness that permeate their co-living lives. In addition, the act of recording is inherently a collective endeavor, a collaborative enterprise that involves the contribution of every resident. This collaborative co-creation not only bolsters a sense of communal ownership but also nurtures intimacy among the residents. The shared responsibility for capturing the essence of their co-living interactions cultivates a shared sense of belonging, underscoring the communal spirit that is emblematic of co-living spaces. Residents exhibit palpable enthusiasm for this recording task. Fengshi eloquently encapsulated this sentiment "It is cool to review records in Notion everyday, especially when I am absent from home. It feels like waiting for the update of a soap opera. I always log in several times everyday to see if there is any update." (data from WeChat group).

Notion transcends its role as a mere recording platform, assuming the additional mantle of facilitating immediate interactions through co-editing and comment features. This virtual space for interaction introduces a unique dimension for residents, even when they are physically separated. Of note is the distinctive tag titled "Roaming the Rivers and Lakes" (xingzou jianghu),¹² which is employed to denote travel narratives penned by residents who temporarily depart from the co-living community. A poignant illustration of this interconnectedness is manifested through the travel experiences of Meiren and Changshan. In August 2022, they embarked on a journey to Chongqing. Throughout their sojourn, they diligently crafted travel notes on a daily basis, chronicling their explorations, culinary escapades, and encounters with new friends. These narratives were then shared with the other residents who remained in Shanghai through Notion's online platform. The co-living continuum was thus maintained, as residents across distances engaged with and responded to their fellow residents' experiences by appreciating their experience or asking them to recommend delicious food or interesting tourist attractions.

Notion's role extends beyond fostering interactions among current residents; it also serves as a means for former residents to maintain connections with EHF. Through collective deliberations among current residents, former residents are granted the privilege to continue editing and reviewing all recorded content. This practice enables departed residents to remain

¹² "Rivers and lakes" (jianghu) refers to remote areas in Chinese. It originates from the geographical imagination of water as remote in traditional Chinese people's mind (Song 2019).

engaged in the co-living community's ongoing narrative.¹³ For example, Meiren sometimes shared a short video on Notion about his daily life in Canada. Zhuyu wrote her individual thoughts and life when she returned to her college to continue her education. Ziyuan further elucidated this decision through a later comment on my writing, “We discussed the rights of former residents in Notion. Fengshi thought that the interactions between former and current resident in Notion replace the WeChat group including all residents.¹⁴ I agree. WeChat groups requires immediate response, which causes pressure for members and stops people chatting relaxedly. But Notion resolves this problem ingeniously. It requires low-immediate interaction and even no response at all. Everyone can write something if s/he wants, which is suitable for people who left co-living.” (Comments in Notion). As Ziyuan suggests, this platform offers distinct advantages for fostering interactions. Unlike instant social applications that demand swift responses, Notion functions as an online forum that allows participants to engage and respond at their own pace. This asynchronous nature promotes relaxed interaction, free from the constraints of immediacy. Moreover, Notion operates as a public space where participants—both current and former residents—can interact openly and freely. This freedom empowers individuals to contribute their thoughts and comments without inhibition, fostering active participation and connections.

¹³ Such connection also helps me to follow their lives after I left EHF, which enriches my fieldwork data. I have checked their new records to learn what newly occurred in co-living life, commented on their records and also shared some of my experience on campus and even the outline of my dissertation to seek comments from my informants, making it, in this sense, a cooperative ethnography.

¹⁴ EHF establishes a WeChat group including all residents having ever lived in that house, but it doesn't work well.

Some communications on Notion can be thoughtful and serious. The exchange of ideas can delve into serious considerations about the evolution of co-living life. An instance of such contemplation is exemplified by Wuti's discourse on spatial utilization within co-living houses. Reflecting on her experience at another co-living residence with a smaller public space, she shared insights on the pivotal role of a maximized public space and the nuanced thresholds between public and private realms. Wuti highlighted the significance of permeability in public spaces, citing its influence on fostering communal interactions and facilitating the openness of the space. This thought-provoking analysis engendered a dialogue among residents, delving into their perspectives and reflections on communal living dynamics. Ziyuan, in response, affirmed the residents' collective emphasis on public space permeability, a unique focal point that differentiates co-living environments from more conventional rental spaces. Their observations underscored the strategic selection of houses with spacious living rooms, a deliberate choice made to cultivate a comfortable public sphere and stimulate innovative strategies to enhance its functionality. This shared perspective amplified the resonance of the communal intent. Changshan's contribution introduced a tangible suggestion to further augment the communal space—a call for an additional table in the living room to facilitate collaborative study and work. This proposition resonated with the notion of a multifunctional living space that not only encourages interactions but also accommodates various activities that contribute to the residents' holistic experience. Fengshi's response to Wuti's reflections demonstrated a communal spirit open to evolution. He offered insights into past furniture arrangements, acknowledging that while current configurations were an improvement, the residents remained receptive to future adaptations. This receptiveness to change encapsulated the co-living ethos of fluidity and

Figure 6: A corner of the living room of EHF



adaptability. Indeed, these thoughtful discussions often translate into practical initiatives. Zhuru's Notion record documented the implementation of residents' ideas—capturing the transformation of the living room, complete with new furniture arrangements that fostered a small leisure area (see the picture above).

In summary, through recording, interaction and connection on Notion, residents establish collective remembering of their life—the moments they collectively participated, recorded and therefore memorized in the future. In this way, these recording and interactions extended beyond mere readership, encapsulating a participatory spirit. Notion, in this capacity, operated as a digital bridge that transcended geographical boundaries, fostering connections and preserving a sense of community even when physical presence was not possible.

Summary: collectivity through unity of rights and obligations

Drawing insights from literature on social movements, Cristina Flesher Fominaya (2010) distills the fundamental elements of collective identity. These encompass "emotions and affective ties" that sustain activists' engagement, "boundary work" that delineates the group's identity, "opposition to dominant cultural practices" which signifies a conscious alternative to prevailing

norms, and "shared leadership, organization, ideologies, and rituals" that cultivate shared meanings and awareness.

Co-living, though distinct, adheres to these principles. While co-living residents might not be characterized as possessing a collective identity per se, the components of collective identity are pivotal within co-living contexts, which distinguish them from other shared living arrangements. The process of interviews, acting as a ritualistic practice, demarcates a clear boundary between residents and external parties. It serves as a means for residents to not only voice their opinions on the personalities and performances of potential applicants but also for establishing a sense of inclusiveness and unity. Moreover, this mode of communication cultivates heightened emotional and affective bonds among the residents. Similarly, the formulation of written by-laws follows a comparable mechanism to the interview process in fostering collectivity. Through collaborative revisions of these by-laws, residents engage in active communication and contribute to the evolution of the regulations. Additionally, this process mirrors an incorporation phase of the co-living experience, reminiscent of the rites of passage framework delineated by Turner (1966). The digital platform Notion plays a significant role in enabling residents to engage in collective remembering of their co-living journey. It facilitates the preservation of shared memories and experiences, enhancing emotional and affective bonds through an online medium. The flexible working schedules and "domestic social connections" are more "oppositional to dominant cultural practices" and become shared ideologies amongst co-living residents that motivate co-living residents to embrace this unique phase of life.

Furthermore, the mechanisms and life experiences promoting collective identity alone are insufficient to explain the establishment of collectivity. Notably, other youth with similar life

experiences may not choose co-living, prompting the exploration of what sets co-living apart. Why do other youth with similar experiences not select co-living? What are the special characteristics of co-living compared with other living arrangements? The answers lies in the unity between individual rights and obligations. A prospective resident, despite passing the interview, opted not to move in due to personal reasons. But she later stated that she was grateful of not moving in because it was stressful for her to participate in organizing public activities. This insight underscores that co-living transcends mere shared habitation; it demands active contributions from each resident. As highlighted in this chapter, these contributions materialize through individual voices in collective affairs, active participation in collective activities, and meticulous individual record-keeping of collective life. The processes of discussing potential candidates, negotiating by-laws, participating in planning and hosting public activities, and maintaining the Notion platform require substantial effort, time, and dedication. Consequently, the collective nature of co-living is not bestowed freely but necessitates significant investment from residents. It becomes apparent that co-living is not universally suitable; rather, it is tailored for individuals with the passion, time, and eagerness to engage in collective endeavors.

The unity between individual rights of intimacy and obligations to collectivity unveils a dynamic relationship between individuals and the collective within co-living. Returning to the initial inquiry posed in this chapter — how do residents with disparate personalities coexist within a co-living arrangement? — the answer lies in a deliberate emphasis on individual autonomy while concurrently fostering a shared experiential foundation. Consequently, co-living life assumes a dual nature, being both collective and personalized. The interplay between the

collective and the individual represents a dialectical and ever-evolving relationship, encapsulating the dynamic essence of co-living communities.

2 In the Family We Dwell: Familial Narratives in Co-living

Introduction

During one material exchange with their neighbor, a nuclear family, co-living residents had some yeast for baking and paid pancakes back. Jingmo, who had regular communication with the neighbor, delivered the pancakes to the neighbor and said, "Dr. Zhuang (the author) of our family (womenjia de) baked pancakes, and I sent some to you for a taste.¹⁵" The wife asked "How does she (the author) bake the pancakes?" However, Jingmo was taken aback when the wife assumed I was a woman. He quickly clarified my gender to her, explaining that I was, in fact, a man. The wife promptly apologized and clarified her assumption, stating that she thought I was Jingmo's partner because he referred to me as "Dr. Z of our family (womenjia de).¹⁶" Given that Jingmo is a man, she naturally assumed that his partner, referred to as "womenjia de," was a woman. Additionally, as the wife responsible for household chores such as cooking and laundry, she had taken for granted that it was women who typically handled the cooking.

This anecdotal misunderstanding highlights the contrasting interpretations of the term "family" held by W1 and the wife. The wife, residing in a typical nuclear family within Chinese society, perceives familial relationships based on blood and marital ties, heterosexual associations, and gender-specific division of domestic responsibilities. On the other hand, W1, and other co-living residents, consistently employ the same familial terminology, such as "our

¹⁵ I was a doctoral candidate while conducting my fieldwork, but most Chinese people identify doctoral students with PhDs. Therefore Jingmo called me Dr. Zhuang.

¹⁶ "Womenjia de," literally speaking, means something of our family in Chinese. It also specifically refers to the wife of a family, especially when a man says this phrase.

family" (women jia), "in our family" (women jiali), and "my family members" (jiaren men), referring to their co-living arrangement and the relationships among the residents, which I refer to as the "familial narrative" in co-living.¹⁷

Residents emphasize intimate rather than detached roommate relationships that are common in group renting. As reviewed in the introduction, this distinction also positions co-living residents apart from those in commercial collective living arrangements as well as individuals connected by co-working relationships. Residents, as peer groups, emphasize self-management, sharing, communication, and collectivism, which diverges from lineage-based structures and traditional workplace "danwei" systems. This sets them apart from arrangements grounded in consanguinity or regional affiliation. There are no blood or marital ties among the residents, sexual relationships are also prohibited at some co-living institutions (see the article 1 of the written by-law of EHF), and co-living does not involve childbearing or child-rearing functions, unlike traditional Chinese families. In other words, co-living residents do not share the conventional attributes of family associated with marriage, childbearing, and child-rearing with their neighbors. Why is co-living considered as a family by residents? What are the causes of the new understandings of family and "familial narratives" in co-living of the youth? What are the

¹⁷ Co-living is still an emerging trend in China and has not evolved into institutionalized and extensive living arrangements. Residents, characterized by high mobility, view co-living not as a permanent choice akin to chosen family structures found among sexual minorities (Nelson, 2013; Weston, 1991) or ethnic communities (Taylor et al., 2022), some scenarios where individuals anticipate lifelong connections. Therefore, I use the term "narrative" to describe it more as an ideational concept rather than a practical choice for forming lasting families. However, this ideational transformation in alternative living arrangements has the potential to instigate practical shifts in family dynamics. This is observable through the increasing trend of cohabitation (Yu and Xie, 2015), declining marriage rates, and lower birth rates. In subsequent sections of this study, I will explore the implications of such ideational transformations on family structures.

implications of the ideations and practices of the youth on further transformations of Chinese society?

Through the lens of familial narrative in co-living, I argue that some Chinese youth extend the understandings of family from blood and marital ties to peer relations. Such understandings grow up from their experiences as the center of their natal families and therefore receiving myriad material and emotional supports from parents and grandparents, some ongoing transformations within Chinese families (Yan 2018). In addition, I suggest that the understanding of family as peer relations, born from current familial transformations, challenges the blood and marital foundation of family. Therefore, the examination of familial narratives in co-living holds profound significance for the study of family and social transformations within Chinese society by illuminating potential disconnections with conventional aspects like marriage and childbearing within Chinese society and implying further transformations amongst youth. Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader global discourse on alternative family structures. The Chinese case examined in this dissertation serves as an illustrative example of how cultural nuances shape alternative family dynamics. As the prevalence of co-living increases among youth in both Western and Chinese contexts, especially when living independently from their parents (Burke et al. 2002; Heath 2009), it becomes imperative to explore the impact of co-living on the evolving perceptions of family. The familial narratives emerging from Chinese co-living experiences enrich the global understanding of the intricate dynamics between mainstream family and alternative living arrangements across diverse societies.

This chapter will commence with a comprehensive review of co-living dynamics and familial structures across diverse societies. It will be argued that a nuanced understanding of this

narrative necessitates contextualizing it within the broader framework of family transformations, as summarized by neo-familism (Yan, 2018), in Chinese society. The second section will scrutinize the emotional and social support dynamics within co-living arrangements, coupled with an examination of public funding mechanisms supporting such communal living setups. These elements serve as foundational pillars, encompassing both material and emotional dimensions of the familial narrative. Subsequently, divergent attitudes among co-living residents towards core familial elements such as marriage, childbearing, and childrearing will be explored. These attitudes are intricately shaped by the evolving intergenerational relationships within their natal families. The ensuing section will delve into the paradoxical phenomenon of co-living residents employing the familial narrative despite harboring differing opinions on their natal families. The conclusion posits that familial narratives represent a recalibration of familial components, influenced by both personal experiences and national narratives promoting harmonious families. Residents underscore notions of support and equality typically associated with family structures, while concurrently eschewing hierarchical relations within families. Such redefined understandings of family imply a noteworthy disconnect between familial constructs and traditional notions of marriage among contemporary youth.

Understanding Co-living through Family Lens

Co-living, as an alternative living arrangement, always has complicated interplay with mainstream family mode in local societies. Therefore, to understand the familial narrative in Chinese co-living, the review of the transformations of family in Chinese society is of vital importance. In this section, I will first review the interplays between co-living and family in

American and European societies, and then review the transformations of Chinese family as the foundation of familial narratives in co-living.

Rebellion and Revival: Co-living and Families in the West

As reviewed in the introduction, in the U.S. and Europe, co-living worked as a challenge to mainstream family and cooperator with family in different historical periods. The hippie communes questioned nuclear family, as the basic foundation upon which society rested in two ways by the commune dwellers who advocated egalitarian relations (Shey 1977; Vestbro 2010). On the one hand, the unequal gender division of labor within nuclear families was questioned as it blocked the social development of women. On the other hand, the familial relations were questioned as they constrained the development of broader social connections of the youth (Ussel 1977). However, although the commune movement achieved egalitarian relations, gender equality and the avoidance of hierarchies within communes, it did not challenge the mainstream bourgeois family forms (Davis and Warring 2011). Some returned to nuclear family as they grew older and progressed on to new life stages.

Co-housing is based on family, rather than individual, as the primary unit of co-living. Co-housing is usually a community of some families (and single individuals) who share public space and facilities such as swimming pool. Each family has its own private space and lives familial life separately but take part in public activities and mutual support collectively. From the family perspective, co-housing develops because it provides a social network and mutual support among families in terms of childbearing, elder care, social activities, and a sense of community. Some co-housing communities consist of alternative families, such as single-parent families, cohabitation, DINK families and homosexual families. The alternative families both result in a

great demand for mutual support and can provide mutual support for each other at the same time. For example, the couples in DINK families can help single-parents to care for children, which liberates the single-parents socially and economically. In addition, given the small size of each family, sharing facilities rather than owning separately is more economical. Therefore, people in alternative families have strong motivations to live together and constitute a co-housing community. Co-housing does not challenge family but goes hand in hand with family. People establish families (usually nuclear family in this case) and cooperate with each other in terms of family issues. The development of co-housing communities relies on harmonious relations within families.

Understanding Co-living in Chinese Familial Transformations

According to the development of co-living in the West, co-living arrangements are closely relevant with local family models. It is the same in China. The emerging co-living amongst youth is a response to the transformations of Chinese family in recent decades. The Chinese extended family and lineage have long been characterized by sociologists and anthropologists as the fundamental social unit based on kinship ties (Fei 1992; Freedman 1966; Hsu 1967[1948]). Traditionally, Chinese families, operating within a framework of patrilineality and patriarchy were kinship groups that shared common property, budgeting, and responsibilities through the division of labor (Santos 2006). James Watson (1982) identified key features such as the "corporate base," "ritual unity," "principles of recruitment and duties of membership," and "material benefits and charity" within Chinese lineage structures. These characteristics underscored the organizational nature of the Chinese family, which functioned as a collective entity pursuing material prosperity, maintaining ritual traditions, and providing emotional bonds

through shared rituals and ceremonies. In the classic Chinese family models, the family served as a multifaceted institution encompassing organizational, instrumental, and affective dimensions. It provided a framework for individuals to navigate their roles and responsibilities within a collective setting, contributing to the family's material well-being while fostering emotional connections through shared rituals and kinship ties.

The Chinese family structure has undergone significant transformations in the last half century due to economic development, cultural diffusion, and various social changes (Davis and Harrell 1993; Whyte 2005). On the one hand, family size has shrunk and nuclear family is the mainstream format. Some organizational, instrumental, and affective functions of lineages and extended families are inherited by nuclear families, such as material support and collective property. On the other hand, new roles of families emerge in daily life. Yan (1997, 2003) argues that the rise of individualization has permeated different aspects of family life, including mate selection, romantic relationships, childrearing, elder care, and property division. These changes challenge the traditional norms of patrilineality and patriarchy, as the focus of family life shifts from ancestors to the youngest generation. This shift is often referred to as "descending familism" (Yan 2016), emphasizing the growing importance of the younger generation in family dynamics. Moreover, there has been an emergence of intergenerational intimacy. Children become "priceless" but gain extra emotional value to parents (Liu 2020). This "intimate turn" highlights the significance of intergenerational and conjugal intimacy as core values within the family (Yan 2018). An equal and communicative intergenerational relationship is rising within Chinese families, and both mothers and fathers, especially in urban areas, are more engaged in the "communicative turn" in intergenerational relationships (Evans 2008). For the younger

generations, who are now the primary focus of resource allocation within families, they enjoy myriad material and emotional ties and support from their parents and grandparents (Liu 2018; Liu 2022).

Running in tandem with the rising intergenerational intimacy, intergenerational relationships exhibit a reflexive and complex nature, characterized by improvisation, as “[c]hinese people from all walks of life must find their own way to maximize their chance to reach to the ideal of happy family life by improvising what resources they have under specific circumstances” (Yan 2021a: 18). In the United States, Vern Bengtson's research (2001) on the solidarity model of intergenerational relationships reveals that there is no dominant or uniform type of intergenerational relationship within U.S. society. Instead, a diverse and intricate landscape of intergenerational relationships is observed, ranging from high levels of closeness to varying degrees of detachment. Chinese society has the same trend. Drawing upon Bengtson's model and utilizing rural data, Man Guo, Iris Chi, and Merrill Silverstein (2012: 1122) have identified five types of intergenerational relations in Chinese society: (a) tight-knit (22.5%), (b) near but discordant ties (16.9%), (c) distant discordant ties (14.9%), (d) distant reciprocal ties (12.1%), and (e) distant ascending ties (33.6%). These classifications demonstrate a diverse distribution of intergenerational relationships, with each category representing a significant proportion.

In sum, the transformations occurring within Chinese families, as summarized by Yunxiang Yan as neo-familism (2018), highlight twofold transformations in contemporary Chinese society. On the one hand, there is a general increase of support for the youngest generation and an intimate turn within families. On the other hand, there is an increasing

diversity and more complicated typology of intergenerational relationships. How do these transformations influence youth growing up in neo-familism? What are their new understandings of family in this context? The familial narratives developed by co-living residents provide a vivid example to explore the influence of familial transformations in contemporary Chinese society and the new understandings of youth on family further developed from current transformations.

Intimate ties: emotional and social support amongst co-living residents

Co-living serves as a means for individuals to seek and receive emotional and social support from their fellow residents. This aspect of co-living is highlighted by the experiences shared by Kongqing and Changshan. Kongqing said, “Co-living is a warm experience, especially for working people like me. It gives me a feeling of family. In the co-living environment, I feel comfortable and enjoy the intimacy of friends after I return from exhausting work.” Changshan said she felt she was dating all the other residents while living together, which indicated that she learned to develop intimate relationships with others through co-living. This sentiment resonates with the emotional ties experienced within natal families, as it reflects intergenerational support, encompassing both ascending and descending relationships and both material and emotional dimensions within families (Dykstra and Fokkema 2010; Qi 2016; Xiao 2016).

Within this section, the focus will be on three key types of emotional and social support that are prevalent among co-living residents: the concern shown for each other's romantic circumstances, the provision of suggestions and guidance on personal issues, and emotional release during a special period (the lockdown during the pandemic in this case). These aspects demonstrate the depth of interpersonal connections within the co-living environment and further contribute to the establishment of a familial narrative.

Chief among the emotional support within the co-living environment is the genuine concern shown by residents regarding each other's romantic relationships, which often becomes a topic of daily conversations. Residents actively engage in discussions and offer assistance and suggestions to one another when it comes to navigating romantic relationships. Ruiren, for instance, regularly engages in conversations with Jingmo, sharing his own experiences and asking guidance from Jingmo whenever Ruiren encounters difficulties in the realm of dating.

Residents in co-living houses not only provide emotional support but also serve as valuable sources of information for potential romantic partnerships. Houpu and Jingmo, recognizing the compatibility between their friends Baiying and Kongqing, took the initiative to introduce them to each other for a potential matchmaking opportunity. Their efforts led to the arrangement of a first meeting between Kongqing and Baiying, which took place directly at EHT. As Kongqing and Baiying's relationship progressed, the other residents in the co-living community expressed their genuine interest and concern. They frequently inquired about Kongqing's thoughts on the development of his connection with Baiying.

One day, Baiying made a surprise visit to EHT, suggesting that she and Kongqing had scheduled a meeting there, which caught the other residents present (Houpu, Jingmo, and me) off guard. In a lighthearted manner, Houpu jokingly suggested that they vacate the premises to allow Kongqing and Baiying to have the space to themselves. Reacting to the situation, Houpu and Jingmo proposed to me to have dinner together outside, creating an opportunity for Kongqing and Baiying to enjoy their date without any interruptions. After we had dinner outside in order to give Kongqing and Baiying privacy, we intentionally prolonged our time away from EHT, allowing the partners to have the space to themselves.

When we eventually returned after spending two hours wandering the streets, Kongqing and Baiying had already left. As the other co-living residents gradually returned to the house, the topic of conversation naturally revolved around the meeting between Kongqing and Baiying. Upon Kongqing's return, he became the center of attention in the room, with the other residents surrounding him and eagerly inquiring about his dating experience. Houpu playfully asked Kongqing if he had gotten married that day, alluding to the surprising level of conversation they had about topics such as child education. This revelation startled everyone present. However, the surprises continued as Kongqing shared more about his interactions with Baiying. He mentioned that after accompanying her to the subway station, he simply returned home, behaving more like ordinary friends rather than romantic partners. The residents perceived this as a problem and immediately began offering suggestions to enhance Kongqing and Baiying's budding relationship. Jingmo proposed that Kongqing should have stayed with Baiying for a longer period, even past the last subway, so that she would be unable to take the subway home and Kongqing could suggest taking a taxi together to prolong their time together. This suggestion aimed to create more opportunities for them to bond. Amidst the heated discussion, Zhaoyan emerged from her room and disclosed that she was present in the house while Kongqing and Baiying were there. She observed their sitting at two sides of the table, which appeared more like a negotiation rather than an intimate encounter. From a female perspective, Zhaoyan suggested that if the other person wanted to spend more time together, it would be beneficial for women to be receptive to such intentions. According to her viewpoint, lovers should explore various ways to maximize their time together as long as possible. Additionally, Zhaoyan raised the topic of physical touch, an important indicator of intimacy. Zhaoyan suggested certain areas of physical

touch that could enhance intimacy without crossing boundaries or causing discomfort for the other person. The discussion came to an abrupt halt when a couch surfer, an outsider to the co-living community, returned to the house. The residents, not wanting to reveal their romantic discussions and secrets to someone outside their close-knit "family," chose to discontinue the conversation at that point.

Introducing friends as partners, purposely creating private environment for dating, and the suggestions from all residents reflects their supports to each other regarding emotional and romantic issues. When individual residents have problems or difficulties, they can seek help and support from their co-living roommates, which is similar to the parents' role in natal families.

Furthermore, co-living residents also extend their support to one another in addressing personal social issues. One such example is Ziyuan, who faced a dilemma in balancing his co-living lifestyle with his academic research responsibilities. As a Ph.D. student, he had chosen to live at EHF instead of the assigned dormitory, appreciating the supportive co-living environment. However, he found that the co-living arrangement was causing distractions and impeding his self-discipline in pursuing his research. His advisor suggested that if co-living was hampering his focus and discipline, it might be better for him to move out. Ziyuan was torn between his desire for academic development and the benefits he derived from the co-living environment as a means of alleviating the stress of his research work. Seeking guidance, he turned to his fellow residents for suggestions, and they responded with numerous insights. Cheng, drawing from her own experiences, advised against severing social connections completely, as doing so could result in losing those connections permanently rather than being able to resume them later. She emphasized the importance of finding a balance between research and personal life, rather than

choosing one side exclusively. Yu offered more specific strategies for Ziyuan to allocate less time to socializing within the co-living community and more time to focus on his research. This included suggestions such as setting limits on the time spent chatting with roommates and prioritizing research tasks before returning home. Ashley shared her own approach of maintaining a record of her daily schedule and tracking the time spent on each activity. Through reflective analysis of her schedule, she aimed to optimize her efficiency. She expressed her willingness to share her methodology with Ziyuan. Some other residents provided solace to Ziyuan by suggesting that perhaps his advisor's strict requirements were the source of his stress, and he should try to approach his advisor's words with a more relaxed mindset. These supportive suggestions and consoling remarks aimed to alleviate Ziyuan's concerns and empower him to navigate the challenges he faced in balancing his academic pursuits and co-living lifestyle.

The emotional support was especially remarkable during special challenges with which co-living residents were faced. There was the lockdown of Shanghai during the pandemic (April to May 2022). Mental pressure became a significant challenge when COVID-19 started, particularly for those who were unable to work. Such pressure increased during the lockdown. For co-living residents, this situation was no different. That co-living residents maintain a relatively relaxed mental state compared to most Shanghai citizens reflects the advantages of co-living in helping individuals cope with mental pressure during times of risk and crisis (see details in Chapter 6)

This intimate environment is a defining characteristic of co-living. When individual residents meet personal issues, other residents are important resources to get supports and suggestions. Such emotional collectivity worked especially well during challenges like the

lockdown of Shanghai. A former resident Chensha, who frequently traveled for business, said “Experimental House is a place that I miss a lot while I am on business travels, and I feel released when I am back.” The emotional and social mutual support among residents within the co-living community fosters a sense of intimacy that parallels the connections found within families. The concern for one another's well-being and the establishment of a supportive network within the co-living community create an atmosphere akin to that of a family. Residents' adoption of the familial narrative, referring to the co-living house as their "family," can be attributed in part to this sense of intimacy.

Collective funding: the material foundation for co-living life

Co-living arrangement also releases economic burdens of residents in two ways. The first way is the shared rental through group renting. Despite the high rental costs because of the large areas and central locations of the co-living houses, it is not so expensive when seven or eight residents share the burden. Usually, the ideal rate between rental and salary is 30%. For co-living residents, it is estimated that this rate is 20%, which is lower than usual. Therefore, co-living is an economic lifestyle choice for residents.

The second system that provides support is the collective funding of co-living, which makes co-living a quasi-family financial system. In Watson's model of the corporate lineage, the material base and collective benefits are essential aspects (Watson 1982). Similarly, in traditional Chinese families, property is not divided until the family itself is divided (Cohen 1976). Despite considerable changes within families over time, the division of bank accounts has not become widespread in contemporary Chinese society. Families still tend to share collective expenses and income between husbands and wives. In this regard, the collective funding provided for co-living

houses functions as a quasi-family arrangement for sharing costs and income, thus establishing a material foundation for the familial narrative. This section will primarily focus on the public funding of EHT, using detailed firsthand data, as I served as the financial manager in that particular co-living house.

The collective funding in co-living settings is intended to cover daily expenditures, which decreases the individual expense of residents. The collective funding of co-living houses consists of three main sources: the shared funding contributed by each resident monthly, profits generated from collective activities, and charges from couch surfers. On the other hand, the costs primarily include utilities, expenses related to collective activities, and shared food and items. Taking the financial conditions of December 2021 as an example (see table 1), the profits consisted of income from public activities like cooking day, the Sunset Party and others (6215.42), charges to three couch surfers (293) and the collective funds paid by residents themselves (3930). The costs were the payment for utilities (electricity, gas, Internet, etc.), for daily items (milk, napkins, spice, rice and so on), and the costs for public activities. The residents paid some collective funding but enjoyed lots of free items because of the profitable incomes from such activities, which decreased their daily expenditures a lot.¹⁸

Financial conditions of EHT in Dec. 2021 (excerpt)

Income	Amount (RMB)	Cost (excerpt)	Amount
Cooking day	293	Electricity	1212.1

¹⁸ There was a surplus in the balance for that month. However, it should be noted that in some months, the collective funding experienced a deficit due to the purchase of new furniture or if the income from public activities fell short of expectations.

Income	Amount (RMB)	Cost (excerpt)	Amount
The Sunset Party (1)	243.68	Projector rental	500
The Sunset Party (2)	584.82	Loudspeaker box	2450
The Sunset Party (3)	345.32	Cost of Christmas activity	91.29
Lecture of Metauniverse	1627.26	Gas	276
The Summer of Oasis	528.13	Internet	304.98
Christmas Celebration	596.77	Milk	426
New Year Eve Celebration	1996.44	Snacks for New Year Eve Celebration	144.67
Couch Surfer	293	Napkins	56.8
Public Funding	3930	Spice	84.63
Total	10438.42		7219.51*

Note: There were other costs like oil, mark pens and many other items used for co-living life. Given the space, I did not list them all.

The collective funding system in co-living houses serves as a collective benefit that brings advantages both to the individuals and the group as a whole. Firstly, it enhances the quality of life for individual residents by alleviating financial burdens through the coverage of various daily expenses. This, in turn, reduces potential conflicts arising from economic reasons, which are not uncommon in co-living arrangements. Secondly, the collective funding system benefits the collective by fostering active participation in the organization of public activities. By incentivizing residents to engage in planning and hosting events, the system promotes openness, sociability, and a sense of belonging among the residents. Through the shared financial resources, residents experience a stronger sense of solidarity and mutual support within the collective. Furthermore, the presence of a risk-management funding component within the collective funding system helps to mitigate potential risks faced by the collective during

challenging times. This fund provides a safety net that can be utilized to overcome unforeseen difficulties or uncertainties. In essence, the collective funding system in co-living houses parallels the concept of common property and shared benefits found in traditional Chinese families.

In and out of the play: conflictual understandings of family

The act of sharing familial narratives, based on emotional, social, and material support in everyday interactions among co-living residents should not be mistaken as an indication of unanimous perspectives on family matters. In reality, residents hold divergent opinions on various aspects of family life, including marriage, childbearing, childrearing, and familial obligations. These contrasting views on familism stem, at least in part, as I will argue below, from the differences in intergenerational relationships experienced by residents within their own natal families. This section aims to shed light on the nuanced understandings of family and intergenerational relationships among residents through their debates while collectively watching a soap opera. While co-living primarily emphasizes peer interactions, the topic of intergenerational relationships is rarely discussed. However, during the viewing of a soap opera titled *Left Right* (also known as *My Dear Child*, qin'ai de xiaohai), residents at EHT engaged in discussions that revealed their contrasting opinions.

Residents of both co-living houses often enjoy watching videos together during their communal meals, a practice typically initiated by one or more residents. When they are unsure of what to watch, they casually search online for popular content of the moment. On one such occasion, residents of EHT stumbled upon the soap opera *Left Right*, a family ethics drama. As young individuals in their twenties and early thirties who had yet to experience marriage or

encounter significant family issues, initially, the family-oriented nature of the drama did not pique their interest. However, out of curiosity, they decided to give it a chance and began watching it collectively. To their surprise, they soon found themselves becoming increasingly engrossed in the storyline and characters.

Kongqing and Xinyi's debates extended to the topic of marriage, sparked by another plot in the drama involving Lu Xiao's infidelity and the subsequent divorce. Kongqing expressed his disapproval of the husband's actions, criticizing his desire to maintain the marriage while pursuing a romantic relationship with another woman simultaneously. Kongqing placed great importance on the institution of marriage, emphasizing its priority and the need to preserve marital relationships. However, Xinyi held a contrasting viewpoint, suggesting that marriage itself was unreliable in terms of bringing happiness and should be abolished altogether. For her, maintaining the status of marriage was meaningless. Zhaoyan, influenced by her mother's beliefs, also voiced her dissent, stating that she would immediately seek a divorce if her future husband were to engage in marital infidelity. She believed that a marriage could not be sustained if there was infidelity involved. In a later conversation between Kongqing and Xinyi, long after their viewing of the soap opera, Kongqing attempted to explain the significance of marriage to Xinyi, emphasizing its role in fostering personal fulfillment and completeness. He earnestly urged Xinyi to reconsider her negative stance on marriage. However, Xinyi maintained that marriage was a personal choice and that individuals should be accepting and tolerant of one another's decisions. Their differing perspectives on marriage ultimately prevented them from reaching a consensus on the matter.

Kongqing embodied a more conventional perspective, emphasizing the value of marriage, the importance of coordination and cooperation among family members during conflicts, and the significance of maintaining a balance of power within the family structure. In contrast, Xinyi held a more radical viewpoint that questioned the significance of both marriage and family itself, while drawing attention to the subordination of women within familial contexts. Although gender differences played a role in shaping their differing opinions, it was not the sole determining factor. The intergenerational relationships they experienced within their respective natal families also contributed to their contrasting views. Kongqing's upbringing involved his father leaving for work in Beijing after being laid off, while his mother took on the responsibility of raising him and his younger brother. Kongqing had a positive relationship with both his parents and consistently strived to meet their expectations, such as participating in match-making activities. This upbringing fostered a masculine orientation that emphasized familial responsibilities, coordination between family members, and empathy towards his father and paternal grandmother. Xinyi, on the other hand, grew up as the only child in her family, with her mother assuming a stronger role within the household. This upbringing instilled in her an independent and assertive personality, particularly in relation to familial dynamics and the recognition of women's status within families. These factors contributed to her questioning of traditional family structures and the subjugation of women within them.

Zhaoyan's story highlights the individual nuances and complexities that shape one's familial values and beliefs. While she strongly disagrees with her mother on the issue of infidelity, it does not mean that Zhaoyan follows all of her mother's familism values without question. Regarding the topic of having children, Zhaoyan expressed a clear stance that she does

not desire to have any children in the future. I reminded her that she mentioned that she could be a single mother in our conversation before, and she said it was her mother's suggestion. She clarified that in her personal opinion, she simply does not want to have a child unless her mother pushes her towards childbearing. She further explained that if she were to have a child, she preferred methods such as IVF, surrogacy, or adoption. The divergence reveals Zhaoyan's contrasting opinions between an independent individual and a daughter in a generational relation. She might be willing to compromise when she takes her mother's opinion into account.

Faxia's personal experience also vividly reflected her opinions on some plots of the soap opera. One notable incident involved the paternal grandmother, who had a scatterbrained personality, which resulted in the baby being left unattended in the carriage, leading to the baby getting hurt. This incident intensified the conflict between the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, pushing their relationship to a complete state of antagonism. Faxia believed that the mother, Yinuo Fang, was hypocritical and bore primary responsibility for the conflicts between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Faxia felt that Yinuo Fang took advantage of her mother-in-law's mistake to expel her from the family and bring her own mother in, solely to serve her personal interests.

Faxia's sympathy towards the paternal grandmother and her distrust towards the mother can be attributed to the strained relationship she has with her parents. Faxia and her mother often clash over the topic of marriage. Faxia perceives herself as having a more masculine personality, which her mother views as problematic. In an attempt to conform to societal norms, her mother has even arranged for men to visit their home for matchmaking purposes, which greatly upsets Faxia. She rejects the idea of matchmaking and voices her discontent to her mother, citing the

tumultuous marriage of her parents as an example. Faxia recalls that her parents' marriage, arranged through matchmaking, was marked by constant quarrels and unhappiness. Growing up, Faxia did not experience a sense of happiness or fulfillment within her own family. She finds it perplexing that her parents raised her with a more tomboyish upbringing, only to suddenly expect her to conform to traditional gender roles and get married after graduating from university. As a result, Faxia has chosen not to rush into marriage. Due to the strained intergenerational relationships with her parents, Faxia has distanced herself from them and has not spent the Spring Festival with them for several years. In 2022, she was the only resident who remained at EHT during the Spring Festival, as she opted not to return home and celebrate with her family.

It is a paradox between the complicated landscape of residents' intergenerational relationships and attitudes towards family, marriage and childbearing, and the shared familial narrative amongst them. Why do they all follow a familial narrative although they have quite different expectations of family? How do they follow and expand the meaning of family through co-living practice? In the following section, I will analyze the influence of neo-familism and the state on the paradoxical phenomena found in co-living.

Support, equality and harmony: familial narrative for co-living

The familial narrative is the reconfiguration of familial components for co-living youth. They highlight the supportive role of family but weed out the hierarchical intergenerational relationships within families. As such, family is referred to as intimate relations without blood and marital ties in co-living context. Therefore, for those who enjoy intimate relations in their natal families, they want to continue such relations when they live independently, whereas for

those who do not, they want to have the intimacy through co-living. The detailed analysis follows.

First and foremost, the familial narrative within co-living reflects the provision of emotional, social, and material support to individuals, which closely resembles the support received from their natal families. As the youngest generation in their respective families, these youth occupy a central position in the descending familism paradigm (Yan 2016). In this familial structure, resources are allocated in a top-down manner, with the younger generation benefiting from the resources without having to provide significant reciprocation. During their twenties and early thirties, co-living residents do not bear the responsibilities of caring for their elderly parents who are typically in their fifties. Consequently, they become the primary recipients of the descending resource allocations with limited obligations to give back. Parents and grandparents continue to provide emotional and material support to these young individuals, allowing them to explore alternative lifestyles such as co-living. Some co-living residents rely on financial assistance from their families to cover their living expenses, including the rent associated with co-living. When these youth leave their natal families and establish their lives in Shanghai, they still seek emotional, social, and material support to alleviate the pressures of independent living. Co-living becomes a means for them to replicate the support system they experienced within their families, leading them to perceive co-living as their new family in the context of Shanghai.

Second, the familial narrative within co-living reflects the presence of egalitarian relationships, mirroring the shift towards more equitable intergenerational dynamics within Chinese families. With the decline of parental authority, intergenerational relationships in Chinese families have evolved into a framework of "negotiated intimacy" (Zhong and Ho 2014).

Through various mechanisms such as “emotional buffering,” “mediatory roles,” and “formalized democratic processes” (Xiao and Guan 2018), parents and children engage in negotiation and coordination to balance individual and family interests (Yan 2018). This negotiation is characterized by a "mild rationality" (Zhu and Zhu 2013), replacing the traditional concept of unconditional obedience and filial piety with an ethic of “mild rationality” where intergenerational rights and responsibilities are more balanced and mutually beneficial (Sun 2017). This represents a form of inverted post-patriarchal intergenerationality within the framework of neo-familism (Yan 2021a). Residents equally discuss and negotiate collective issues within the co-living arrangement. Such mechanisms echo the more egalitarian intergenerational relationship in neo-familism.

Moreover, it is important to consider why some individuals, such as Faxia, who do not have harmonious family relationships, still choose co-living as a quasi-family environment. In my view, the influence of the state's construction of the idealized image of a harmonious family, promoted by social media, plays a significant role here. Yunxiang Yan (2021b) suggests that family policies are designed to serve the interests of the state rather than individuals. The state promotes the concept of a "harmonious family" as the foundation of a harmonious society, as articulated by leaders like Hu Jintao, and emphasizes traditional familial virtues, as emphasized by Xi Jinping. Through such messaging, the state constructs the family as a space where individuals materially and emotionally support one another, fostering positive relationships. The state's propaganda presents conflicts within families as individual issues rather than universal problems inherent to family dynamics themselves. These ideas are deeply ingrained in people's perceptions, and even those who do not have positive experiences within their natal families still

hold onto the belief that an ideal family should be harmonious and enjoyable. In this context, the state's construction of the idealized harmonious family plays a significant role in shaping individuals' expectations and desires for familial relationships. The allure of a harmonious family, as propagated by the state, influences their decision to seek alternative family-like environments, such as co-living, in the pursuit of a more fulfilling and supportive familial experience.

Furthermore, the influence of the state on the familial narrative in co-living can be understood from another perspective. Despite the state's retreat from individual life since the 1980s (Zhang and Ong 2008), there has been a lack of development in social organizations that serve as intermediaries between the state and individuals. This has resulted in limited options for individuals to seek support outside of their own families. In recent years, the individual family has become the most important institution for individuals to receive economic and social support (Yan 2011). When young individuals establish co-living as an organizational buffer between themselves and the state, they draw upon the image of the family, which is the most familiar and readily available concept in people's minds. Moreover, the state tends to tolerate the use of the term "family" to describe an organization. As co-living represents an experimental lifestyle, it is susceptible to scrutiny and suspicion from the residents' committee, which acts on behalf of the state. By labeling co-living arrangements as "families," residents can avoid unnecessary trouble and suspicion from local residents' committees and law enforcement authorities. This strategic adoption of the familial narrative serves as an adaptive strategy for the survival of co-living institutions.

So, essentially, there are three socio-cultural and political sources for positing a family model in cooperative living: strategic use of state discourses, personal familiarity with egalitarian familial relationships in modern Chinese culture and, possibly, the model of the harmonious family and the importance of family which has deep cultural roots

Conclusion: understanding co-living in local context

In this chapter, I describe the familial narratives in co-living that is deeply ingrained in the minds of co-living residents and is readily expressed in their daily conversations, extending even to their interactions with neighbors. The familial narrative encompasses the emotional, social, and material support that residents provide to one another, facilitated by the mutual concern and the establishment of a public funding system. This creates a quasi-family environment within the co-living arrangement, mirroring the intimacy and material foundation typically associated with traditional families.

However, upon delving into residents' ideations of family-related issues such as marriage and childbearing, a more complex picture emerges. Residents hold diverse and sometimes conflicting opinions, which can be attributed to the different and sometimes complex intergenerational relationships they have experienced within their natal families. These differing experiences shape their perspectives on family matters, which makes co-living not simply the duplication of the traditional notions of familism prevalent in Chinese society. Unlike the conventional understanding of family, which is based on blood and marriage ties, emphasizes both emotional and practical support, and entails specific familial obligations, the familial narrative in co-living undergoes a filtration process. Residents selectively embrace emotional and social support and prioritize equal relationships, while distancing themselves from other aspects

of traditional familism. When residents refer to each other as family members and describe their co-living arrangement as a family, they are not implying conjugal or intergenerational relationships. Rather, they are emphasizing peer relations characterized by mutual support and equality. Consequently, co-living institutions serve as extensions of the understandings of family through the reconfiguration of familial components in contemporary China.

It is important to note that the reconfiguration of family challenges traditional family model by underemphasizing marriage, childbearing and childrearing, which reflects remarkably in some co-living youth's narratives. Through co-living, they further practice such quasi-familial intimacy without marriage and childbearing, which influences their future ideations of family formation. Therefore, it is paradoxical that the duplication of the family system in co-living through neo-familism conversely might undermine the mainstream family system.

This study depicts the narratives and practice of Chinese youth about their new understandings of family rooted in Chinese culture and society. It echoes the declining marriage rate and birth rate through the lens of alternative living arrangements and familial notions of youth. In addition, it suggests the dynamics between co-living arrangements and family in Chinese society as both a duplicative and destructive power for the traditional family. It is not simply the return to family as the hippie communes in the U.S. in the 1970s, nor the co-living institutions based on families in Europe. It is rooted in family ideation in Chinese culture, and therefore enriches the literatures about the dynamics between family and alternative living arrangements in different cultures all around the world.

3 To the Public We Open: Youth Space and Stranger Intimacy

Introduction

The processes of urbanization and increased mobility in contemporary China over recent decades have rendered encounters with strangers a commonplace experience for modern residents, especially in expansive metropolises. The term "strangers" generally encompasses individuals whose lives intersect with ours but remain beyond the scope of our personal relationships. However, as articulated by Sara Ahmed, strangers are not entirely unfamiliar; rather, they are individuals "whom we have *already recognized* in the very moment in which they are 'seen' or 'faced' as a stranger" (Ahmed 2000: 21; see also Koefoed and Simonsen 2011, italics in original). In essence, much like how we identify acquaintances as a distinct type of social relationship, we similarly recognize strangers as another unique form of social connection. Aligning with Ahmed's viewpoint, Mervyn Horgan proposes the exploration of "strangeness," denoting "the form of relation between strangers" (Horgan 2012: 611), and advocates for the analysis of strangers from a relational perspective. Given the pervasive encounters with strangers in contemporary Chinese society, delving into the study of strangeness becomes crucial to elucidate the interaction of individuals in daily life and to understand the evolving attitudes toward strangers in Chinese society. What kinds of relationships unfold between strangers, and how do these encounters with strangers influence people's lives?

Co-living life sheds light on strangeness within daily interactions. Notably, co-living spaces are characterized by the fusion of living and public areas, where public activities are organized to foster social interactions. These activities are not exclusive; rather, they are open to everyone encompassing strangers. Co-living residents actively and intentionally welcome

strangers into their shared spaces, aiming to broaden their social circles. Consequently, they advocate for close and intimate relationships with strangers through public activities. In essence, co-living serves as a daily context wherein strangers not only encounter one another but also cultivate a sense of intimacy.

Regan Koch and Sam Miles (2021), through the concept of "stranger intimacy," suggest that strangers can develop very close and intimate relations despite their lack of pre-existing connections. They define stranger intimacy as "conditional relations of openness among the unacquainted, however fleeting, through which affective structures of knowing, providing, befriending or even loving are built" (Koch and Miles 2021: 1380). Based on this concept, I investigate several key questions: What kind of environment do co-living residents establish to embrace strangers? How do they interact with strangers in public activities? Why can a kind of intimate relationship develop in the co-living environment? Why is stranger intimacy significant for young people in a metropolis like Shanghai? What is the implication of stranger intimacy in Chinese society? Through my research, I demonstrate that co-living residents intentionally create a stranger-friendly environment that encourages disclosure, interaction, and intimacy through public activities. This environment fosters intimacy among participants. I argue that three factors contribute to the development of stranger intimacy: making friends, the demands for relatedness in urban life, and the individualization process in Chinese society. The development of stranger intimacy meets the social and emotional needs of young people living in metropolises and helps to alleviate the pressures of urban life. Additionally, I suggest that the development of stranger intimacy implies further transformations towards equal relationships among people and social trust.

The study of strangership in Chinese co-living is significant both for anthropological research on strangers and co-living studies. Previous studies of stranger intimacy stress the need for “ethnographies of encounter” (Faier and Rofel 2014; Koch and Miles 2021), which necessitates more empirical research on interactions with strangers. Anthropologists have a long history of conducting ethnographic research, but the study of strangership remains an underdeveloped field in anthropology (McDonald 2019). Therefore, empirical research on “stranger intimacy” in co-living spaces will enrich the anthropological study on strangership. Conducting this research in China is particularly valuable, given the country's traditional emphasis on networking and close acquaintance (Fei 1992[1948]: 120-127). The intimate connections with strangers among Chinese youth reflect changes in interaction among young people and broader social transformations in China. In addition, the interactions with strangers in co-living, a living arrangement that emphasizes communication, equality, and sharing, is a nascent domain within the study of co-living. Conducting inquiry into the concept of strangership within co-living environments carries the potential to make a noteworthy contribution to the broader discourse surrounding co-living. Such a study holds promise in shedding light on how a communicative and interactional environment is established in co-living, while also delving into the strategies employed by residents to navigate their co-living experiences.

The structure of this study unfolds in the following manner. Commencing with a review of studies on strangers and co-living in both Western and Chinese societies, the initial section aims to enrich the understanding of strangership in the Chinese context. This is achieved by emphasizing strangership in face-to-face interactions rather than online ones, and by exploring

the dynamics of intimate rather than perilous strangership within daily encounters. Furthermore, the study contributes to the field of co-living research by spotlighting the nuanced development of interactions with strangers within co-living contexts. In the second section, attention is directed towards an in-depth analysis of the intentions behind co-living residents' endeavors to create a stranger-friendly environment and the meticulous design of public activities. The third section delves into a demonstration of how such environments catalyze the development of intimate relationships among participants in public activities, accomplished through practices like disclosure, interaction, and the cultivation of an intimate setting. The fourth section explores the underlying reasons behind the emergence of stranger intimacy among young individuals in metropolises, scrutinizing the founders' intentions, the concept of *lianjie* (relatedness) among the youth, and the overarching process of individualization within Chinese society. Finally, the study concludes by discussing the broader implications of stranger intimacy for Chinese society.

Strangership and Transformations

Encounters with strangers unfold through both face-to-face interactions and virtual platforms, giving rise to a dual trajectory in the research on strangership. Scholars have observed the development of intimate relationships with strangers facilitated by online platforms, a phenomenon exemplified in the use of GPS-enabled applications for sexual liaisons, dating platforms, and sharing economy services (Koch and Miles 2021). In China, the dynamics of online encounters with strangers manifest in diverse contexts, spanning rural areas (McDonald 2019), borderlands (He and Tan 2021), and urban youth interactions (Xu and Wu 2019). In their exploration of individuals' interactions with strangers on Momo, Deya Xu and Fang Wu (2019) suggest that people employ Momo for "mosheng ren" communication, enhancing their social

networks and fostering a cosmopolitan orientation that champions open and tolerant attitudes towards others. However, the online engagement with strangers entails both intimacy and risks for participants. Tom McDonald's investigation into interactions between strangers on social media in a rural Chinese town posits that online strangership, or "net friend" relationships, fundamentally disrupts the traditional boundary between friends and strangers (McDonald 2019). Men exhibit a greater inclination to connect with strangers while concealing these connections, whereas women, particularly married women, experience significant pressures in engaging with unknown individuals online. Such online connections have the potential to reshape the social fabric and moral norms of local communities. Similarly, Haishi He and Chris K. Tan (2021) highlight the dual impact of online contact with strangers through WeChat in borderland China. On the one hand, it facilitates villagers in establishing social and economic connections with the outside world. On the other, it contributes to the separation of couples and the erosion of the social fabric, thereby illustrating the complex consequences of online interactions with strangers.

The progression of online encounters with strangers is, in part, driven by the desire to circumvent the challenges posed by "stranger danger" in face-to-face interactions (Ahmed 2000; Koch and Miles 2021). In contemporary urban settings, face-to-face strangership often carries an air of indifference and potential danger, which means "the stranger is still disturbing but one feels obligated to suffer this" (Stichweh 1997: 5). Georg Simmel further contends that the indifference between strangers is a characteristic aspect of the mental life of the metropolis, as "[a] latent antipathy and the preparatory stage of practical antagonism affect the distances and aversions without which this mode of life could not at all be led" (Simmel 1950[1908]: 416). In Western contexts, the term "stranger" often denotes individuals of different races, leading to

negative perceptions and imaginings about racial others (Delaplace 2012; Wei 2006; Xu and Wu 2019). Conversely, in the Chinese context, the concept of strangers, while devoid of racial connotations, still carries a marginal status. Strangers are not perceived as insiders and lack trust, a perspective deeply rooted in Chinese societal norms (Fei 1992[1948]). The modern Chinese state continues to propagate the notion of stranger danger, cautioning citizens about the potential risks posed by unfamiliar individuals (Haiyan Lee 2014). In this capacity, the state assumes the role of a third party in the moral world, disrupting and severing moral connections between individuals. Consequently, the development of morality concerning strangers and the notion that "what is good for me must be good for others" (Bauman 2011: 78) has not flourished in the Chinese public sphere. Instead, individuals prioritize abstract notions of what is right and just concerning the state over specific moral considerations for those around them.

The existing body of research has extensively explored the dynamics of strangership in both online and face-to-face contexts, shedding light on the associated risks and dimensions of intimacy. But the emergence and transformation of stranger intimacy in face-to-face interactions warrants further attention. An exploration into the intimate face-to-face strangership has been conducted within the specific context of tourism in China (Jiang et al. 2022). In this unique setting, individuals encounter strangers during their travel experiences and, driven by the concept of "yuan," form transient yet intimate connections. "Yuan," as a Chinese notion, underscores fated relationships with others, transforming the strangership into one that is less impersonal and distant. The emergence of yuan-based strangership in tourism signals potential shifts in the nature of strangership within Chinese society.

The notion of transformations in strangership aligns with the understanding that the status of strangers is not static but evolves

across different epochs (Stichweh 1997). Zygmunt Bauman, drawing on Simmel's ideas about identity in stranger-us relationships, extends the discourse to highlight the fluidity and changing nature of "stranger" and "us" identity in the context of "liquid modern" society. Bauman proposes that in a world characterized by flowing identity, the distinction between "stranger" and "us" becomes blurred and entangled. In this fluid reality, "everyone is a stranger, no one is," (Bauman 1988: 39) leading to a situation where we "live among strangers, among who we are strangers ourselves." Consequently, "strangers cannot be confined or kept at bay; Strangers must be lived with." (Bauman 1990: 63) This redefinition of the relationship between "stranger" and "us" opens the possibility for more intimate connections, challenging traditional notions of distant and indifferent strangerships.

Intimacy is conventionally associated with the romantic bonds shared between lovers (Giddens 1991) and the intergenerational connections fortified by filial devotion within Chinese familial structures (Yan 2003). These intimacies tend to be enduring, fortified by commitment and obligations. In contrast, stranger intimacy is more transient, but can furnish emotional and material sustenance within the urban milieu. By transcending the confines of romantic and familial relationships, co-living scenarios provide an ideal arena for examining the intricate dynamics of intimacy in interactions with unfamiliar individuals. The constructs underpinning stranger intimacy, in my understanding, are tripartite. First, it requires disclosure of oneself to strangers to facilitate mutual understanding. Second, it involves interactions, rather than just one-sided disclosures. Finally, the stranger intimacy takes place in certain situations where individuals "choose," rather than "chance," to meet strangers (Koch and Miles 2021).

Studying strangership in co-living provides a fresh perspective in three key aspects. Firstly, as highlighted by McDonald, the meaning of strangers must be understood in specific contexts, given the “diversity of stranger practices existing throughout human societies” (McDonald 2019: 80). The co-living context particularly sheds light on intimate strangerships in face-to-face interactions amongst young people in metropolitan areas, a context rarely studied and therefore enriching current scholarly research on online contexts. Secondly, the face-to-face interactions with strangers in co-living settings reveal a new attitude towards strangers amongst youth, which I refer to as a stranger-oriented interaction. This matrix reflects a preference for interacting with strangers amongst young people in large cities where strangers are encountered in daily life, indicating a transformative attitude towards strangers from indifference to intimacy in Chinese society that is in line with the country's development and modernization, as Bauman suggests. Thirdly, in the era of widespread global mobility, the face-to-face strangerships observed in co-living settings suggest a more universal interaction. This matrix involves the act of disclosing, interacting, and intentionally choosing to meet strangers to foster intimate relationships that extend beyond romantic and familial bonds. As this phenomenon aligns with the principles of post-modernity (Bauman 1988), the occurrence of stranger intimacy in daily life is likely to manifest cross-culturally on a global scale.

Co-living with Strangers

Some co-living institutions serve essential political and social functions, such as supporting substance abuse recovery communities in the U.S. (Polcin 2009), resisting government demolitions for native populations in Taiwan (Ng 2015), and aiding in the integration of refugees into European societies (Mahieu and Caudenberg 2020). While existing

studies on co-living in Western society have thoroughly examined the social and political roles, ideations and values, and institutional structures of co-living, the aspect of strangership within these institutions remains unexplored. Given that co-living institutions are designed to establish connections among strangers rather than relying on blood ties or existing connections, understanding the role strangers play in co-living is essential. This study, framed through the lens of strangership, aims to contribute to the co-living literature by delving into how co-living residents interact with strangers and how a stranger-friendly environment is established. By doing so, it sheds light on the workings of co-living life and the dynamics of daily relationships within co-living arrangements beyond the Chinese cases.

The focus on strangers is especially important because of the special nature of Chinese co-living. In China, although the evolution of co-living is driven by social and individual motivations reminiscent of Hippie communes and co-housing, including factors like increased mobility, rising housing costs, and psychological stress, it diverges from its European and American counterparts in two aspects. Firstly, the demography of co-living residents and visitors predominantly comprises single individuals in their twenties and early thirties rather than families, so the interactions occurred in co-living context are primarily between strangers rather than other existing social connections, such as family members. Second, co-living spaces in China tend to be more compact in small scale,¹⁹ so the participation of strangers is important for residents to expand their sociality.

The Establishment of a Stranger-friendly Environment in Co-living

¹⁹ Co-living institutions in China primarily have been single houses rather than communities. So, I prefer calling them institutions rather than communities given the sparse connections between them. I will introduce the conditions of co-living institution in the following section.

In the initial phases of co-living house establishment, residents intentionally adopted a strategy of engaging with unfamiliar individuals through public activities because they did not have many friends in Shanghai. Ruiren, a graduate student in his gap year, initially arrived in Shanghai to attend a movie festival and subsequently return to his hometown for an internship. However, captivated by the allure of Shanghai and encountering challenges with his internship offer, he decided to extend his stay and lived in EHT. During his prolonged residence at EHT, Ruiren organized weekly movie-watching activities. He said:

“We did not have friends when we started our activities. The participants were basically strangers. I estimate that fewer than 40 percent of the participants participated on a regular basis. Regular refers to those who can participate twice a month and can be considered as our friends whom we were made through the activities. So more than half are strangers.”

With the purpose of generating youth space for public activities, co-living residents prefer renting those houses with large public spaces. The public space (space outside of personal bedrooms) occupies half of the area of both co-living houses I surveyed. Ziyuan at EHF said that in most renting apps, only the photos of bedrooms were presented because tenants prioritized the conditions of bedrooms, as they seldom used the living rooms to communicate with their roommates. But co-living residents gave the public space priority, and a house with smaller public space would never be considered.

Figure 8: House structure of EHF



The structure of EHF. The right part is the public space. Made by Charlotte, a resident of EHF

Figure 9: The activities held in co-living houses

	Recreational activity	Academic activity	Festival Celebration
Regular activity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The “Sunset Party” 2. Home Party 3. Profession sharing amongst residents 4. Movie Playing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Ichi-go ichi-e” 2. Interdiscipline Workshop 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Halloween Celebration 2. Christmas Celebration 3. New Year Celebration
Depending on the organizer(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cooking Day 2. ”Listening Music in Darkness” 	Sharing Salons	N/A

Note: This table just lists different categories of public activities, some activities (e.g., “Ichi-go ichi-e”, Sharing Salons and The “Sunset Party”) have different themes each time.

Co-living residents entered into collective rental agreements with letting agencies to secure their accommodations. The house owners and letting agencies exhibited a hands-off

approach, showing little concern for residents' actions as long as they adhered to legal guidelines. This leniency allowed co-living residents the freedom to invite strangers to their rented houses, provided there were no illegal activities involved.

Lots of public activities are successfully held in the large public space (see figure 9). Every Friday evening, EHT hosted the "Sunset Party," a welcoming event for strangers to gather and watch movies together. The event typically commenced at 8 pm, with participants arriving continuously. In the midst of strangers, some attendees initially felt a sense of awkwardness, engrossed in their phones without engaging with those nearby. To foster connections, Ruiren, the host, introduced a unique activity. Participants were invited to draw a question from a wooden box remade from a drawer, each containing prompts, such as describing an ideal day, sharing a significant accomplishment, or recounting an embarrassing moment. This segment, inspired by the "36 questions" from psychological experiments on interpersonal closeness by Arthur Aron et al. (1997), aimed to pair participants up, prompting them to introduce themselves by answering personal questions. The objective was to encourage open communication, breaking down initial barriers and fostering closer relationships among participants. As familiarity grew through answering these questions, participants felt more at ease while watching movies together. Following the film screening, a structured discussion ensued for approximately an hour, allowing participants to deliberate on the film's nuances and themes. After 11 pm, the atmosphere transitioned into an open forum, providing a platform for unstructured dialogues and further fostering familiarity within the communal space.

The interpersonal relationships are cultivated for their intrinsic value and are grounded in emotional affinity, as opposed to being driven by pragmatic considerations, which promoted the

intimacy amongst participants. Fanlv, an active participant of the Sunset Party and subsequently a co-resident within the EHT, articulated his initial attraction to the party as stemming from a profound resonance with the discussions surrounding social issues, Foucault's theories, and other sociological subjects that deeply captivated his interest. As a musician with a penchant for delving into sociological and philosophical literature, Fanlv's existing social circle predominantly engaged in financial matters rather than substantive dialogues pertinent to his musical vocation or societal implications within his field. Consequently, he allocated the majority of his time to honing his musical craft and engaging with intellectual pursuits, rather than seeking social interaction. This pattern changed when he became involved in the Sunset Party. During these gatherings, Fanlv discovered an environment conducive to discussion that not only catered to his personal passions but also engendered meaningful connections. He forged companionships with individuals like Rc and Jingmo, ultimately leading to his decision to join in a co-living house with them.

These public activities served as catalysts, not only fostering deeper connections among participants but also expanding residents' social horizons. Zhaoyan, one of the participants, aptly encapsulated the transformative impact of these activities on the co-living dynamic. "Through several instances of home parties, a palpable shift in the residents' interactions was discernible. Inhabitants lingered longer, their experiences interwoven through shared meals, collaborative work sessions, and animated discussions pertaining to the planning of future gatherings. We created a WeChat group, serving as a conduit for extending invitations to participants, affording them carte blanche access to the co-living space at any opportune juncture. A participant

frequently came at midnight, and even suddenly informed us that she would arrive at 1:30am one day. Haha, a funny guy. We still waited and welcomed her”

In order to improve the experience of participants, residents also invested in improving the hardware facilities in the living rooms. Ruiren recalled that in the initial stages of the "Ichi-go ichi-e" activities, without any facilities, presenters could only use white papers to display content. To enhance the experience of participants during presentations and movie screenings at the "Sunset Party," the residents decided to purchase a screen and rent a projector. Moreover, Houpu proposed the idea of converting the balcony into a bar, inspired by a console table left by the house owner in the living room. This addition was aimed at creating a lively atmosphere during the "Sunset Party." Houpu personally bought alcohol and bartending tools, but any profits from the bar were donated to the collective funding pool of EHT. Houpu emphasized that the cost of these improvements was not significant and that it was unnecessary for him to keep the profits for himself.

Houpu's enthusiasm stemmed from his vision of creating a dynamic youth space. Reflecting on the inception of their co-living house, he articulated, "Our intention was to create a vibrant youth space, with the living room designed to host public activities during weekends." As a co-founder of EHT and a close friend of Jingmo, Houpu had prior co-living experience during his studies in Canberra. Coincidentally, during the establishment of EHT, Houpu found himself in his gap year. "I am interested in co-living," Houpu explained. "When I studied in Canberra, seven or eight of us lived together, following written by-laws. I frequently visited Jingmo when he lived in a co-op. It was an intriguing and novel experience for me. So, when Jingmo planned to establish one in Shanghai, I was interested and came to Shanghai to assist him."

In summary, co-living residents undertake intentional efforts to curate their living space and organize public activities with the explicit aim of attracting and engaging strangers within their community. They make thoughtful choices in selecting houses that feature spacious living rooms, thereby creating an inviting and communal environment conducive to shared interactions. In addition, the design of the activities themselves reflects a keen awareness of fostering relaxation and conviviality, effectively breaking the ice for newcomer participants who may be strangers initially. Moreover, the physical embellishment of the co-living space itself plays a significant role in signaling an open and inclusive atmosphere to strangers, encouraging a sense of belonging and participation. The cumulative effect of these intentional contributions is the nurturing of a sense of closeness and intimacy among the community's constituents—both residents and strangers alike.

Intimate Environment of Public Activities

Residents of co-living spaces have been successful in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment. However, does the environment attract strangers as expected? Furthermore, compared to other public spaces, what unique benefits do co-living spaces offer for public activities? Additionally, how does the environment of co-living foster intimacy among strangers? To shed light on these questions, the “New Year's Celebration” activity provides compelling evidence of the appeal and advantages of co-living spaces.

On the New Year's Eve of 2022, approximately 30 people gathered at EHT, transforming the living room into a bustling space. Co-living residents were actively engaged in the kitchen, preparing pasta to share with the visitors. Some visitors engaged in casual conversations, while others delved into a Q&A section reminiscent of the "Sunset Party," fostering familiarity with

each other. Around 9 pm, a unique activity called "Listening to Music in Darkness" unfolded. Each participant had previously recommended a song, which was compiled into a playlist. As the lights dimmed, the recommended songs played sequentially. After each song, the recommender shared the personal significance of their choice, whether it was a release from work-related stress, a reflection on failed love, or a nostalgic reminder of friends. This activity resonated with many participants, as it provided a shared experience of listening to meaningful songs in the company of others. This section lasted for three hours. At midnight, Ruiren, as the host, stopped the music at 11:57 pm and took out a clock for the countdown. There were lots of balloons piled up in the living room, and Rc suggested that everyone grab a balloon and pop it as the year turned. The act symbolized leaving behind bad luck and embracing happiness in the new year. The balloon popping created a festive atmosphere and filled the room with laughter. In the last ten seconds, everyone counted down together "Ten, nine, eight... three, two, one! Happy New Year!"

The "New Year's Celebration" activity at EHT turned out to be a success, although co-living residents initially had differing opinions on whether to host such an event. Faxia expressed concern that with numerous events occurring on the last night of the year in Shanghai, their gathering might struggle to attract enough attendees. Kongqing and Ruiren, on the other hand, preferred the idea of bringing people together to celebrate the New Year as a group, finding it more enjoyable and sociable. Ruiren proposed the streamlined process mentioned above, and Faxia agreed to give it a try. Due to limited space in the living room, only a maximum of 20 positions were available for enrollment. The residents announced the activity through their WeChat public account, and to their delight, all positions were filled within two days. In the end,

around 30 people attended the activity, exceeding expectations and highlighting the success of their unique New Year's celebration.

The reason for the success of the activity, contrary to the concerns of some residents, was expounded upon by Kongqing, who shared his thoughts and interpretation on the matter. Kongqing, who hails from northeastern China and pursued his undergraduate education in Henan province, followed by graduate school in the U.S., had not previously spent any time in Shanghai before he began working there. Although he had some acquaintances in Shanghai with whom he occasionally met, they did not deliberately plan to meet on holidays, and their frequency of interaction decreased over time. Additionally, his colleagues, with whom he interacted on a daily basis, did not typically meet on holidays due to their professional relationship, which at times could be fraught with tension. Consequently, Kongqing had limited options for companions with whom to celebrate festivals. Drawing from his personal experience, Fo believed that strangers were viable options for creating a more engaging and intimate festival atmosphere.

Ruiren expressed his perspective on the activity, stating, "In my opinion, the sense of ritual is strongest at the turning point of the New Year. However, many young people struggle to find suitable places or companions to celebrate with. Co-living houses offer the advantage of being hospitable (*wenxin*), and private, in contrast to public sites such as The Forbidden City. If a New Year celebration were to be held at The Forbidden City, the experience would likely be crowded and overwhelming. Conversely, if the celebration were to be hosted at a private venue such as a home party, it would be more exclusive, with only close friends in attendance. We are somewhere in between these two extremes. Compared to public sites, our event is more private, while in comparison to private venues, it is more open."

Kongqing and Ruiren placed different emphases on the factors contributing to the success of the activity. Fo emphasized the strong desire of young people for connection and communication with others in metropolitan areas, while Ruiren highlighted the balance between openness and intimacy provided by co-living houses. Their explanations, along with the presentation of the activity, reveal three significant features that contributed to its success. Firstly, small activities held within co-living houses offer participants opportunities to disclose and share their feelings with others. The "New Year Celebration" event was not merely designed as a way to spend the turn of the new year, but also as an occasion for participants to engage with one another. During the music listening, participants shared their emotions and experiences by explaining why they recommended particular songs. Several participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their favorite music with the group and to have their stories and experiences heard by an audience they might not have encountered otherwise in the city. As a result, participants were able to share personal information with strangers and establish a sense of intimacy among themselves.

Secondly, the intense communication that occurs within the confined space of a co-living house promotes emotional interactions among participants. Being confined to the living room, participants interacted with one another frequently and intensely. According to Collins' analysis of emotional interactions, such intense interactions increase the "emotional energy" of individuals (Collins, 2004). Collins proposes that the level of mutual focus of attention and emotional entrainment, referring to "the process whereby interacting human nervous systems can become physiologically and rhythmically attuned to one another" (Collins 2004; Hollan 2020) among participants are two key dimensions of interactional situations that contribute to the

strengthening of emotional energy and further increase intimacy. Within the living room, participants were more focused on one another's presence than they would be in large public activities such as the light shows at the Bund, where individuals are primarily focused on the event rather than one another. Additionally, through sharing personal experiences and learning about others' lives, participants became entrained in one another's emotions. The experience of being focused and entrained in emotions increased the connections between participants, despite their initial status as strangers. This correspondingly decreased the sense of loneliness experienced by many young people, particularly during holidays. The strong emotional energy generated by intensive interactions resulted in the establishment of intimate relationships among participants.

Thirdly, the co-living environment offers an intimate situation for emotional interactions and disclosure. Emotions have various presentations in specific situations. Paul E. Griffiths and Andrea Scarantino (2009), suggest that emotions are "designed to function in a social context, forms of *skillful engagement* with the world which need not be mediated by conceptual thought, scaffolded by the environment; and *dynamically coupled* to an environment which both influences and is influenced by the unfolding of the emotion." (Griffiths and Scarantino 2009: 2, the italic is original). From situated perspective, people probe the environment through initial emotion, monitor the response of other people, and determine how the emotion will "evolve" (Griffiths and Scarantino 2009: 3). In the case of co-living, as the co-living houses are the home of co-living residents, participants assume a hospitable (wenxin) environment that is common at home. This warm (wenxin) environment encourages individuals to be open and relaxed, which strengthens the situation and promotes intimacy among participants. As people are active

emotional influencers on others and are influenced by others (Jan Slaby, Rainer Mühlhoff and Philipp Wüschner 2019), the co-living environment provides a unique situation where individuals can engage in meaningful intimate emotional interactions.

Individual Autonomy and Acquaintances: Nuances in Stranger Interactions

Although residents hold open and friendly attitudes towards strangers in co-living houses, the openness is not unconditional. When I talked with Fengshi about the openness of co-living life, he asked for clarification by saying, “Probably you mean limited openness?” His question reminds me of the conditions of openness in co-living life. What is the limitation? What are the nuances when residents open the space of co-living to strangers? I argue that the borderline between inclusion and exclusion depends on the individual autonomy and the relations with acquaintances. The individual privacy and willingness of meeting strangers in public space is fully respected by other residents. In addition, residents trust strangers more when some acquaintances are present.

Residents are mindful of their privacy in co-living. The individual bedrooms of residents are usually not open to strangers. In one activity at EHT, a participant arrived early and stayed, apparently, bored, in the living room. Curious about the co-living house, he walked around the house and entered the bedroom area. He opened the door of one bedroom and wanted to see what it looked like. It was Kongqing’s bedroom, and Kongqing was in it at that moment. Kongqing was angry and berated the guy. The latter apologized immediately and returned to the living room. I asked him why he opened the door of the bedroom. He explained that he thought all the rooms were public areas, so he wanted to see the difference. For outsiders, co-living houses are like public sites; they do not realize the houses are actually a combination of public space and

private space. The invasion of private space without permission, even if unintentional, is still offensive for residents. But residents might let guests see their bedrooms upon request. Some participants said they would have applied for a room at Experimental Houses but their current lease had not expired. So they were curious about the conditions of bedrooms and probably would apply in the future. In these cases, residents enthusiastically led guests to the bedrooms they were interested in and introduced the conditions. Co-living life also attracts some researchers and journalists. Residents are willing to expose the private bedrooms to them if they schedule appointments in advance.

Even the living room is not open all the time. Residents usually let others know that there will be guests, and the visits are not finalized until all residents agree. Arbitrary visitings, even in the living room, are still offensive for residents. One day in the evening, three visitors, two male and one female, suddenly came to EHT, but no resident claimed their visit in advance. They said they came to meet Houpu and Jingmo. However, Houpu and Jingmo were out at the time. So Kongqing and I, who stayed in the living room at that moment, felt confused about their visiting timing. The visitors stayed in the living room chatting and eating fruit and snacks on the table, considering the living room as their own house. Later on, a fourth visitor, with the other three, came, so the living room was left completely for them. They stayed for a while and left as Houpu sent them messages to meet outside rather than in the living room. When leaving, they took some fruit and snacks with them. I asked Kongqing about his opinion on the situation. Kongqing was mad at the behavior of these visitors. He thought they broke the borderline between visitors and hosts. So, we talked to Houpu and Jingmo about the issue, and Houpu said he realized the inappropriate actions of these visitors and would not invite them to visit in future.

As the aforementioned cases show, residents accept those who request, or schedule appointments in advance, but reject arbitrary visits of strangers, no matter if happening in a private area or communal area. The emphasizing of the borderline between publicity and privacy underlines the individual autonomy of residents. The self-determination of individual autonomy is twofold. On the one hand, from the residents' perspective, individual residents make their own decisions regarding meeting strangers, and their decisions are respected by other residents. In my first visit to EHF, all residents at home greeted me enthusiastically in the living room and we chatted for a couple of hours, except Fengshi. Fengshi told me later that he would have liked to meet me, however, he was so sleepy at that moment so he decided to fall asleep eventually. No one called him out of bed. In this case, Fengshi made his decision, although different from other residents. and his decision was fully respected by other residents. On the other hand, from the strangers' perspective, the presence of strangers should not violate the private life of individual residents. As the case of the participant who entered Kongqing's private bedroom reveals, although Kongqing would participate in the activity later, he was unwilling to be disturbed before that time. So, Kongqing's private area and the period before the scheduled activity were not open to strangers.

Furthermore, the presence of acquaintances plays a significant role in shaping the receptiveness of residents towards strangers within the co-living environment. Notably, subtle distinctions emerge in residents' attitudes when external individuals or groups utilize communal spaces, particularly the living room. Residents typically prefer to relinquish complete control of the communal space for activities organized by external parties. However, their decision to

remain at home during such events hinges upon their level of familiarity with the organizers. To illustrate these nuances, I will delineate two contrasting public activities.

The “Cooking day” was organized by Shiwei, a friend of residents at EHT. Notwithstanding the name, it does not refer to collectively cooking for a whole day. Rather, Shiwei was to cook for the participants. Shiwei selected EHT as the place for his activity because it was inconvenient to cook with strangers in his own house where he lives with his parents, so EHT, as a quasi-public space, was a good substitution. In addition, the kitchenware at Experimental House was all ready and met his demands. When Shiwei hosted his activities, he occupied the kitchen and served participants meals he cooked. In this case, residents could not cook at the same time, so they usually went out for dinner together and left the house to Shiwei and his guests completely. One time when Shiwei hosted the “Cooking Day,” Houpu and Jingmo invited me, the only three residents staying at home then, to have dinner outside. We left our house to go to a noodle restaurant. After dinner, we thought it was still early to go back home as the cooking day was still in progress. So, we hung out for around one hour outside and then went back the house.

If the organizers are not so familiar with residents as they were with Shiwei, residents will leave at least one co-living member in the house in case any accidents occur. Another non-resident organizer, Xijiao, organized an activity called “Listening to Music in Darkness” on one Saturday evening. However, all residents had schedules on that evening, but they still discussed who would stay at home to serve as a supervisor. Eventually I was the one staying at home and hosting the guests. As the guests just stayed in the living room and listened to music with all lights off, I did not need to do anything for them and simply stayed in my own room so as not to

disturb them. Fortunately, no accidents occurred. Most participants left soon after the activity was over.

In both scenarios, the majority of residents vacated their dwellings, allowing strangers access to the communal spaces. The subtle distinction lies in the need for at least one resident to remain as a supervisor, a decision contingent upon their level of acquaintance with the organizers. While residents are receptive to outsiders organizing activities within the communal spaces of co-living residences, they perceive supervision as necessary precaution. However, with acquaintances serving as intermediaries, strangers are regarded as more trustworthy, enabling all residents to comfortably relinquish their homes and grant access to the communal areas.

Thinking Stranger Intimacy in Chinese Society: New Relational Self and Relatedness

The emergence of strangership within co-living constitutes a pivotal shift in relatedness and the relational self of youth, particularly within the broader context of societal transformations such as individualization. As Yan suggests, the changing place of desiring individual presents challenges to the relational self (Yan 2017, 11). The stranger intimacy observed in co-living spaces aligns with the increasing individual yearning for relatedness. Consequently, the evolving morality of the relational self among the youth transitions from the traditional ethos of regulating one's desires and self-interests to achieve a socially acceptable relational self, to achieving individual desires by placing trust in others, including strangers. These shifts are intrinsically linked to the ongoing processes of individualization, the redefined roles of strangers in individuals' lives, and the heightened mobility characterizing the contemporary youth experience.

First, during the individualization process, individuals are disembedded from historically prescribed social forms and commitments and re-embed in a new type of social commitment (Beck 1992, 128). However, the Chinese individualization process lacks institutional mechanisms for re-embedding individuals beyond the family (Yan 2010b, 2011). The influence of Chinese individualization process on intimate strangership, therefore, is twofold. On the one hand, as individuals dis-embedded from traditional categories, they are entitled the freedom to establish new relationships by themselves. On the other hand, the pressure of urban life and the lack of re-embedding mechanisms push youth to search for new connections that cover strangers. Therefore, the emergence of stranger intimacy can be seen as a strategy of youth to establish new relatedness that goes beyond kinship, as response to their dilemmas caused by individualization.

The desiring of relatedness is underlined by the announcements for public activities at Experimental Houses through highlight *Lianjie* (relatedness) as the lingua franca of residents. *Lianjie* is used as a means to establish relationships with others in a society where individuals often feel atomized and disconnected. For instance, the announcement for the "Sunset Party" says:

Drinking, chatting and watching movies.

Creating a comfortable environment with the least cost as possible.

*Seeking *lianjie* with other individuals through honest communications.*

Similarly, the advertisement for the "Escape from Cities" activity highlights connection.

When we open up ourselves, *lianjie* starts.

More and more people say they have fewer and fewer friends, and there are more stakeholders, or colleagues. But there is always something missing—real mutual understanding and care. Something that seems corny, but something that fades away. We urgently need to recover from it.

...

IT'S TIME TO OPEN UP, CONFRONT REALITY, AND ESTABLISH A *LIANJIE*!

The demand of *lianjie* is rooted in the indifference and loneliness that pervades urban life. While urbanization provides individuals with greater freedom from traditional institutions such as lineages and families, it also creates a sense of isolation and disconnection. Young migrants in China's urbanization process often experience personal difficulties due to a lack of social support. Many co-living residents fall into this category, having completed their education abroad or in other Chinese cities before moving to Shanghai in search of employment. They want to transform the indifferent strangership in urban context, as Simmel suggests, to more intimate relationships through co-living and stranger intimacy, some strategies to cope with their isolation and lack of support. Fortunately, the pursuit of these bonds with strangers is often reciprocated in the form of enduring friendships, as conveyed by Rc, who states, "For me, the significance of these activities lies in engaging in leisure pursuits and acquainting oneself with individuals of interest. Some of these connections eventually culminate in profound friendships and meaningful social ties. For instance, I have established a bond with a cohort of like-minded individuals who share my penchant for watching movies. Such experiences are the fruits of my involvement in these activities."

Second, urban Chinese youth hold new morality on strangers, viewing strangers as “stranger danger” (Ahmed 2000) but instead recognize them as an essential part of their urban

lifestyle and a significant source of intimacy. As I reviewed, in traditional Chinese society, strangers held only a marginal status in communities, and people interacted with strangers only when they did not want to reciprocate with their kins (Fei 1992). However, with the easing of mobility restrictions in the 1980s and the subsequent mass migration between rural and urban areas in China, community boundaries were broken down, and people became more accustomed to living in an environment filled with strangers, particularly in urban areas. Consequently, youth born into such a stranger-proximity environment do not view strangers as unusual. They seek social and emotional support from the people nearest to them, who are often strangers, and such stranger-oriented interaction and intimate relations expand the horizon of sociality and intimacy of youth.

Moreover, the new interactions with strangers promote social trust based on interpersonal and systemic factors (Giddens 1990, 1991) rather than the traditional *guanxi* network prevalent in Chinese society. *Guanxi* networks were the foundation of people's instrumental and emotional connections in daily life, with reciprocity as the underlying principle (Yan 1996; Yang 1994). People established their *guanxi* networks based on kinships and territorial proximity as the premise, and incorporated more people to expand their social connections. Trust, in this case, was built on the previous establishment of *guanxi* networks. In stranger intimacy, while residents and some visitors may become long-term friends, which seems like the mechanism of *guanxi* network, their initial interactions do not have any previous personal basis like kinships or territorial proximity of *guanxi* network. Instead, their interactions are based on the consensus that strangers are not danger but trustworthy relations. Therefore, the trust between residents and

visitors is social trust based on the systemic transformation of stranger status in contemporary China rather than personal trust based on guanxi networks, which further implies social solitary.

Furthermore, the development of stranger intimacy and social trust amongst youth can be seen as a critique of the state's abstract stranger morality (Lee 2014) and the prevailing indifference and mistrust within Chinese society (Yan 2009). As opposed to relying on state propaganda that emphasizes "stranger danger", residents form personal connections and interactions with strangers, leading to greater empathy and understanding towards the experiences of others. In doing so, they explore the meaning of life from their "nearby" (Xiang 2021), the space "emphasizing the richness generated from the juxtaposition of differences and the layering of histories" (Xiang 2021, 149), rather than from extreme "own experiences as individuals" nor "ideological stances that are often tied with global power play" (ibid). By fostering empathy towards strangers, residents can embody Bauman's morality towards strangers, "what is good for me must be good for others".

Third, the high mobility of youth cause more ephemeral and fleeting sentiments but robust bonds (Maffesoli 1996), which is especially experienced by those youth who study abroad alone. WI is such a case. WI lived in co-ops when he studied in Sydney and worked in Canberra, which left his unforgettable experience with his stranger roommates.

"I was poor in Sydney and suffered from feet pain. I felt depressed. I started smoking to release my sickness and connected sociality with my roommates through smoking. They liked talking with me. Most of them majored in finance while I majored in philosophy. So they wanted me to talk and respected me. I made friends with them and felt much better then. When I worked in Canberra, I lived in a co-op. It was very interesting. They had division of labor and had various

departments responsible for making beer and growing vegetables. There were more than 20 residents, and we took turns to cook for others. I was very happy when I passed their interview, and felt my life was hopeful. So when I returned to Shanghai, I wanted to continue such lifestyle. I felt uncomfortable to live solely. I hope I could stay with others to chat, sharing sunflower seeds or playing mahjong (laughing).”

WI acknowledged that economic consideration was important for him to select co-living because of his poor conditions. But the people he met through co-living provided great emotional and social support for him to help him pass through the difficult time in his life. Wil's decade-long tenure encompassing studies and employment in Sydney, Canberra, and Shanghai bestowed upon him a profound realization of the influence wielded by strangers, prompting him to replicate the support and strangership he experienced upon settling in new cities. The amalgamation of an individualized and mobile lifestyle often imparts to certain individuals a cosmopolitan orientation, characterized by an advocacy for open and tolerant attitudes towards strangers (Xu and Wu, 2019). As alluded to earlier, in an era dominated by widespread global mobility, the manifestations of strangerships observed within co-living settings are assuming a cross-cultural dimension on a global scale.

Conclusion

As proposed by Stichweh (1997), the role of strangers in society evolves in response to changing social circumstances. With significant social, economic, and cultural transformations in China over the past few decades, it is not surprising that the societal perception of strangers has also undergone a shift. This dissertation presents empirical evidence demonstrating that some urban Chinese youth embrace strangers and incorporate them into their daily lives by creating a

stranger-friendly environment and engaging in public activities in their co-living spaces. They intentionally select houses with large public space when they rent co-living houses and decorate the space with their personal devotions. Then with decorated public space, they host various public activities and design some sections that attract the participation of visitors and promote intimate atmosphere. Residents and visitors, who are initially strangers, establish intimate relations through disclosure, intense interactions, and the intimate situations, a kind of stranger intimacy. Residents establish distinct boundaries between private and public spaces and exercise autonomy in deciding whether to engage with strangers. However, the overarching ethos within the co-living environment typically fosters an atmosphere that encourages open and amicable connections with strangers.

Stranger intimacy can be ascribed to physical proximity to strangers due to heightened mobility, the absence of robust social and emotional support systems for the youth in metropolitan areas, and the ongoing process of individualization within Chinese society. In contemporary China, the younger generation is brought up in an environment characterized by a pervasive presence of strangers. As they pursue their educational and professional endeavors in urban settings independently, they actively engage in a struggle for self-development, necessitating the cultivation of emotional and social connections in their daily lives. This yearning for interpersonal relatedness transforms the role that strangers assume in the lives of the youth, consequently altering the moral perspective towards strangers from stranger danger to stranger intimacy. This paradigm shift implies more egalitarian and trustworthy relationships with strangers, fostering social solidarity within Chinese society.

However, it is important to note that the findings presented in this study are based on a small sample and should not be generalized to all Chinese youth. Rather, they provide insight into the complex landscape of youth's thoughts, ideologies, and practices in their daily lives, which may serve as a foundation for further social transformations in Chinese society.

4 With Mixed Genders We Meet: Sexual Harassment Issues in Co-living

Introduction

Co-living houses ideally facilitate the cohabitation of residents from diverse gender backgrounds, creating spaces where individuals of different genders routinely interact with one another.²⁰ This trend of co-renting and cohabitating with individuals of different genders than oneself is on the rise in China. A study examining the rental market in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, conducted by journalists, revealed a significant increase in the percentage of individuals renting with those of different genders, surging from 11.59% in 2010 to 30.05% in 2013.²¹ Intriguingly, this practice appears to be more widely accepted among men than women, with 83.48% of men and 36.95% of women indicating their willingness to co-rent with individuals of the opposite gender.²²

Amongst female residents, those who are open to co-living with individuals of different genders constitute a minority. However, in actual co-living situations, both male and female residents are universally present. The latter typically espouse a more egalitarian gender ideal than the public. Changshan, a female resident from EHF, revealed that she had grown accustomed to living with male roommates. Since she began attending university in the United States and gained her independence, she consistently lived with male roommates in dormitories, youth hostels, and later with her boyfriend. For co-living residents, gender is not seen as a significant impediment to forging connections with other young people. Xinyi, a female resident of EHT,

²⁰ I use “different genders” rather than simply “men and women because some residents do not conform to gender binary. Therefore, the range of genders in co-living context are more than bigender.

²¹ http://www.hnr.cn/news/shxw/201304/t20130428_425478.html

²² <http://house.china.com.cn/980528.htm>

illustrates this perspective when she states, "I chose to move in more for a sense of community, like being part of a team. I didn't think much about gender. I felt that everyone living here was like good friends. As long as we were friends, gender didn't matter. I assumed that people living in co-living spaces shared a common understanding of gender awareness and, at the very least, there would be no sexual harassment, although I later found that this assumption was not entirely accurate."

As Xinyi said, sexual harassment might occur. Conflicts within co-living houses can be particularly troublesome and uncomfortable because co-living spaces are considered private environments, and female residents may feel more vulnerable in situations involving gender conflicts. Faxia, a female resident of the house, felt uncomfortable during interactions with Yupei, a couch surfer. She believed that Yupei was too forward and deliberately tried to engage her in continuous conversation on various topics. Faxia shared her discomfort with Zhaoyan, who, in turn, shared it with the male residents. Faxia was too shy to directly express her feelings and situation to male residents. In response to Faxia's discomfort, a meeting was held among the residents to address the issue. Most residents agreed that Yupei should no longer stay as a couch surfer to prevent any further discomfort among female residents. They also decided to allow him to participate in public activities held at EHT. Nevertheless, it was challenging to determine who should inform Yupei of this decision and how to do so without causing additional embarrassment. Ultimately, the residents chose not to directly inform Yupei of the outcome but instead declined his future couch surfer applications using various excuses. Faxia's case underscores that, in private settings like co-living, the only feasible resolution to uncomfortable

gender-related situations, even if they do not involve sexual harassment, often involves one party withdrawing from the situation, and addressing such issues can be quite challenging.

In this chapter, I will provide a thick description of a more dramatic gender conflict than those mentioned above between two residents, Xinyi, a female undergraduate student in her gap year, and Yupei, a male couch surfer at EHT in his fifties, living a unconventional life. This narrative serves two primary purposes: 1) to shed light on occasional tense gender conflicts that can arise in co-living environments, offering a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by co-living residents; 2) to further rethink gender conflicts “*as a dimension* of a broader system of social inequalities” and as a system “embedded in larger social-cultural and politico-economic structures” (Santos and Harrell 2017: 9-10). Through this exploration, I will analyze gender relations from two dimensions: the horizontal dimension where the interactions and closeness among different genders is emphasized, and hierarchical dimension where gender inequality is emphasized. I argue that in contemporary China, young people focus more on the horizontal dimension as they have lots of interactions and develop different types of intimacy with different genders (like the stranger intimacy in last chapter). But at the same time, the gender inequality is still remarkable and haunting in women’s minds. When both dimensions co-exist and meet in people’s daily interactions, people are renegotiating the boundaries of other genders by placing different people in appropriate position based on their relations. In addition, the interwoven dimensions are influenced by the various social, cultural, and economic factors that shape their experiences and interactions in contemporary Chinese society.

In nowadays Chinese society, there exists a noticeable undercurrent of gender tension, which is heavily influenced by factors such as social media, the capitalist market, and class

hierarchies. For instance, the well-known female talk show actor, Li Yang, controversially characterized all Chinese men as "ordinary but overconfident" (puxin nan), sparking intense debates about the self-perception and subjectivity of Chinese men as a collective category. Another prominent case involved a female passenger who, suspecting malicious intent from a male Didi driver (China's equivalent of Uber) when he deviated from the suggested route, chose to jump out of the moving vehicle and tragically lost her life. Without strong evidence of his criminal intent, the driver was still sentenced to prison. Such incidents are unfortunately common in Chinese society, prompting people, particularly women, to critically examine social events through a gendered lens. On a positive note, this heightened awareness reflects the growing recognition of gender inequality in various facets of Chinese life. However, from a more negative perspective, it has also led to increased social distrust and strains in gender relations.

The gender landscape in Chinese society becomes even more intricate when considering the urban-rural divide. Shahnaj Parveen (2007) suggests gender awareness tends to be less developed in rural contexts in Bangladesh, and its development shows a positive correlation with factors such as formal education, exposure to social media, spatial mobility, and access to institutional resources. Chinese rural women are no different. Chinese women in rural settings often do not possess strong gender equity awareness, as observed in a study by Lei Wang et al. (2013) examining women's attitudes toward the use of reproductive healthcare services in rural China. However, research conducted among university students in urban Shanghai, led by Xiayun Zuo et al. (2018), reveals a relatively more egalitarian outlook on gender roles in this population. Female students in this study expressed a desire for greater equality in social status. Factors like increased exposure to social media, higher levels of education, and greater mobility

contribute to the heightened gender awareness observed among urban youth compared to their rural counterparts.

It is difficult to craft an overview that cover all the features of gender issues. Given the under-recognized situations concerning gender in rural areas, I will confine my analysis to urban contexts. Why does the rising of gender awareness go hand in hand with gender tensions in contemporary China? How do urban youth think of and interpret gender interactions in daily life? Why do gender issues become intricate problems for the people involved in co-living? Co-living, as a lifestyle embraced by young individuals from diverse genders, serves as a lens through which we can examine the multifaceted nature of gender interactions. The specific case discussed in this chapter involves a young woman and a middle-aged man in his fifties, adding layers of complexity related to age and class differences. By contrasting the narratives surrounding gender relations between these individuals, this chapter seeks to elucidate how young people experience and narrate their interactions with other genders. Additionally, it aims to uncover why gender issues tend to be intricate and challenging to resolve. This analysis argues that current gender relations in contemporary China are interwoven with narratives related to intergenerational dynamics, power structures, and class distinctions, and it is the renegotiation of the boundaries amongst genders in daily interactions that contribute to the intricate nature of gender issues in contemporary Chinese society.

Horizontal and hierarchical gender relations in Chinese society

Gender relations in contemporary China are marked by a complex and often contradictory landscape, with divergent narratives coexisting regarding gender inequality.²³ Gender inequality has long been a central framework for analyzing gender relations, and the subordinated status of women relative to men has been a subject of study across various cultures. This perspective has been explored by scholars from different theoretical angles. Some well-known analysis includes the Marxist perspectives that connect the subordination of women with the rise of private property and class (Engels 1972[1902]) and the symbolic perspective that suggests “women are seen merely as being closer to nature than men” (Ortner 1974: 73). While Sherry Ortner later nuanced this view by suggesting that elements of male dominance can be fragmented (Ortner 1996), the analysis of gender inequality remains relevant, especially in contemporary societies. Gender inequality continues to be a pervasive issue, and understanding its roots and manifestations is crucial for addressing and rectifying gender disparities.

This hierarchical perspective of gender relations aligns with the broader movements for women's emancipation and gender equality that have shaped modern Chinese history. According to the reform and revolution narratives of gender relations since the beginning of 20th century, the criticism of gender inequality in China has been closely linked to the broader movement for family revolution (Sun 2015; Zhao 2019). Gender inequality was seen as part of the oppressive

²³ Not everyone subscribes to the notion of men dominating and women being subordinated in gender relations. Within society, there are stigmatized labels applied to both men and women, highlighting the diversity of perspectives and the complexities of gender dynamics. For instance, terms like "puxin nan" (ordinary but overconfident men) are used to describe men who may display confidence or arrogance but are otherwise considered unremarkable. Similarly, the term "xiao xiannv" (small fairy) is sometimes applied to women, implying they are spoiled and picky. These labels can be used as rhetorical tools to critique or attack the opposite gender, demonstrating how individuals may employ them to highlight what they perceive as the privileges or disadvantages of their own gender. Such labels and narratives reflect the multifaceted nature of gender relations in contemporary Chinese society, where diverse viewpoints and attitudes coexist.

social order that needed to be overthrown. The Communist Party of China (CCP) considered the emancipation of women as a fundamental aspect of the revolutionary agenda (Barlow 1994). Funv, as the general name of women, dis-embedded women from traditional roles in families and lineages where women were in a subordinated and oppressed status, and shifted women's loyalty beyond husband and father to "nation" (Barlow 1994: 264). Chinese women gained legal rights and ideological support for gender equality, which was reflected in policies like the 1950 Marriage Law and the slogan "Women hold up half the sky." While challenges remained, such as the work points system (gongfen) where male labors earned more and virilocal marriage practices in which women lived away from their natal families (Santos and Harrell 2017), women enjoyed more freedom and equality than in the pre-revolutionary era. Since the Reform and Opening-Up period, women in China have experienced increased empowerment. Factors like economic development, improved access to education, career opportunities, and the One-Child Policy have contributed to greater gender equality (Hahn and Elshult 2016; Fong 2002). However, women have pursued independence and equality, leading to ongoing debates and discussions about gender roles and relations in contemporary Chinese society. The debates and discussions further trigger gender tension where both men and women show distrust of each other in contemporary China, which suggests a kind of new gender landscape that did not occur before in Chinese society.

However, the hierarchical narrative of gender relations cannot singly cover all the opinions about the roles, pressures, and privileges associated with men and women in these relations amongst the public. Some argue that men and women have distinct obligations and pressures but also enjoy certain privileges within the existing gender framework. For example, it

is suggested that men may benefit from greater job market privileges but face greater economic responsibility to support their families. In contrast, women may sacrifice some advantages in arenas such as the job market but have fewer economic obligations within the family structure. This perspective highlights a reciprocal rather than hierarchical relationship between genders. Such viewpoint is not entirely foreign in Chinese society. It shares some similarities with Fei Xiaotong's concept of "between men and women, there are only differences" (nannv youbie) (Fei 1992[1948]). Fei's work argues that in traditional Chinese society, men and women had distinct roles related to childbearing and domestic labor division. Outside of these responsibilities, they often spent more time with same-gender social groups than with their partners. While nuclear families, including couples, were at the core of personal social associations in this framework, the couples themselves did not necessarily occupy the central position in each other's social circles. This was particularly true for men. Women, on the other hand, might have felt closer to their children within the "uterine family" (Wolf 1972) than to their husbands and other male relatives.

Based on the viewpoint of gender inequality and "between men and women, there are only differences," I propose that gender relations have two dimensions: a horizontal dimension and a hierarchical dimension. The horizontal dimension involves analyzing the status of men and women within each other's social networks and examining the dynamic boundaries of individual men and women within these gender relations. Contemporary youth are increasingly seeking closer and more intimate relationships with individuals of different genders. However, this pursuit of intimacy is accompanied by a heightened emphasis on individual boundaries. The degree of intimacy allowed largely depends on the level of familiarity and pre-existing closeness

between individuals. In this context, behaviors or words that are deemed excessively intimate between individuals who do not share a very close relationship may be interpreted as flirting or even constitute instances of sexual harassment. This stands in contrast to the hierarchical dimension, which emphasizes issues of gender inequality and hierarchy. Understanding these dual dimensions helps to unravel the complexities of gender relations in contemporary China.

Gender relations in contemporary China evolve along these two contrasting dimensions, often giving rise to incompatible conflicts. On one hand, there is a growing awareness of gender inequality, leading to heightened sensitivity, especially among women, during interactions with individuals of the opposite sex. However, on the other hand, interactions between different genders have increased significantly, especially when women have made significant strides in public spheres, driven by increased educational and career opportunities. Consequently, the frequency of interactions between men and women has surged, fostering the development of more intimate relationships. These connections extend beyond mere acquaintanceship, encompassing close friendships and, in contexts such as co-living arrangements, intimate communal living experiences. This proliferation of close connections coincides with the nuanced boundaries of contemporary youth (as discussed in Chapter 1), resulting in intricate explorations of each other's personal boundaries. A noteworthy phenomenon emerging from this dynamic is the concept of "male confidantes,²⁴" signifying the increasing closeness between individuals of different genders within each other's social circles and negotiated individual boundaries in each

²⁴ Confidantes are usually women's female best friends. "Male confidantes" refer to those male friends of women who have very close relationships, but who are not lovers or partners. It is a popular phrase describing a kind of intimate but non-sexual relationship.

other's individual life. However, this complexity can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings as individuals navigate evolving gender relations and adapt to shifting societal norms.

Analyzing gender relations within Chinese society requires navigating the intricate interplay of the two distinct dimensions. These dimensions involve how individuals of different genders interact and renegotiate their personal boundaries under the pervasive influence of gender inequality. Examining this complex web of interactions through this lens enables an exploration of multifaceted factors, including gender, generation, and class, and how they converge to shape gender relations. The prevailing tension in Chinese gender relations, I argue, arises at a "crossroad" (Johnson 2017). Drawing inspiration from black feminist anthropologists and ethnographies, particularly the work of Amanda Walker Johnson, the term "crossroad" signifies where conjuncture and disjuncture intersect (Johnson 2017: 409). Conjuncture refers to the "simultaneous" and "interlocking" nature of multiple stratifications and cultural formations, as defined by the Combahee River Collective (Johnson 2017: 405). Disjuncture, in contrast, involves moments of division, differentiation between subjects or collectivities, and contradictions or "collision" between opposing realities, ways of thinking, or social realms (Johnson 2017: 405-6). The concept of the crossroad aptly conveys "the simultaneity of conjuncture and disjuncture" (Johnson 2017: 403, original italic) in the gender oppression illuminated in black feminist ethnographies. It effectively captures the complexity of living between contradictory forces (Johnson 2017: 412). In contemporary Chinese society, the conjuncture of contemporary gender relations includes traditional horizontal gender relations, as Fei suggests, and hierarchical relations where women occupy subordinate positions. The frequent interactions among different genders and the renegotiation of individual boundaries in the

horizontal dimension, coupled with the rising gender awareness and pursuit of gender equality in the hierarchical dimension, constitute the disjuncture emerging from the conjuncture. In addition, the two dimensions of Chinese gender relations per se become contradictory in contemporary situations. In this sense, gender tension occurs when conjuncture and disjuncture meet at the crossroads.

Two dimensions of gender relations and crossroad theory

	Horizontal dimension	Hierarchical dimension
Conjuncture	Between men and women, there are only differences	Gender inequality
Disjuncture	Intimacy and renegotiation of individual boundaries	Pursuit of gender equality and rising gender awareness

Viewing gender relations as a "crossroad" provides a comprehensive framework for unraveling the complexities of contemporary gender dynamics in China. This perspective allows for a deeper analysis of how persistent cultural and social formations, which exert a continuous influence on the expression of gender (Butler 1988), and the transformative forces causing discontinuities across generations, genders, and classes, collectively shape interactions and give rise to divergent narratives in everyday life. To shed light on these intricate gender dynamics, I will examine a conflict revolving around allegations of sexual harassment involving Xinyi, a female resident of EHT, and Yupei, a frequent male couch surfer in the same co-living house. In the subsequent sections, I will provide a detailed account of the conflict, analyze the narratives presented by both parties regarding their gender awareness and behavior, and explore how other residents evaluated the entire incident, offering insights into the multifaceted nature of contemporary gender dynamics.

Origin: sexual harassment and anti-harassment team

The issue started when Xinyi became aware of allegations of sexual harassment involving Yupei, who actively participated in public activities held at co-living houses and Sven, and several women who had become acquainted with him through public activities.²⁵ In response to this information, Xinyi proposed the formation of an anti-harassment team and took the lead in conducting an investigation into Yupei's behavior.

Yupei, in his fifties, led a unconventional lifestyle, characterized by its rejection of social norms and materialistic pursuits. He eschewed formal employment, often opting for a nomadic existence, occasionally living in a tent by the roadside. “Societal pressures, particularly those stemming from material desires like homeownership and car ownership, were essentially meaningless to me. People were unnecessarily burdened by their desires. People can lead a more relaxed life by liberating themselves from these materialistic pursuits,” Yupei explained. Yupei had the potential and background to follow a more conventional path. He pursued higher education in the early 1990s when college enrollment was relatively rare and graduates were typically assigned jobs upon completion of their studies. After graduating, he initially worked for a state-owned enterprise in his hometown. However, he diverged from the mainstream lifestyle and expectations early on. During his college years, despite majoring in textile engineering, he spent a considerable amount of time in computer labs, demonstrating a passion for technology. Later, while employed at the state-owned enterprise, he independently ventured to Beijing to

²⁵ As previously introduced in the introduction section, Experimental Houses represent co-living initiatives under the purview of the youth organization, Sven. Both Experimental Houses and other public space of Sven have public activities. There exists a substantial overlap in terms of participants and coordinators involved in these activities. Moreover, the affiliations between Experimental Houses and Sven are characterized by a profound interconnectedness.

acquire expertise in data-recovery technology, investing in top-notch computer equipment and opening an internet cafe in his hometown during the 2000s; such internet cafes were new and popular in China at the time. Following the closure of the factory where he was employed in 2009, Yupei embarked on extensive travels throughout China, sustaining himself through various temporary work opportunities. During this period, he was largely estranged from his family in his hometown. But in 2021, when his son began attending college in Shanghai, Yupei decided to relocate to Shanghai as well. However, it appears that his son was not particularly eager to spend time with him. At the time of the investigation, he was volunteering at a farm on the outskirts of Shanghai, occasionally seeking accommodation at EHT as a couch surfer when he came to the city center to participate in public activities.

Yupei explained his passion for public activities as follows. “I have always been drawn to a wide range of interests that are often associated with young people. Back in my hometown, this eclectic mix of passions earned me the reputation of an eccentric among my peers. However, my journey brought me to Shanghai, where I discovered a remarkable kinship with individuals who shared my diverse interests. This newfound connection allowed me to engage in captivating discussions spanning various topics, such as art, music, poetry, literature, and drama, fostering a deep sense of camaraderie. In a light-hearted vein, I must confess that some folks playfully dubbed me a "creepy uncle" due to my relatively advanced age compared to the other participants in these public activities. I soon realized that my presence often puzzled and intrigued the younger attendees, prompting some of them to inquire about my motivations for joining in. Nevertheless, I remained steadfast in my belief that my youthful mindset transcended considerations of age and appearance. In the end, my interactions with the vibrant youth in

Shanghai brought me immense joy and fulfillment. I not only felt welcomed but also wholeheartedly embraced by this dynamic community. These connections provided me with a profound sense of spiritual nourishment, serving as a vital ballast in my life.”

His personal interests, going hand in hand with dis-embedment from his family, explains why he was active in Sven and EHT. During his involvement in activities, Yupei, despite having limited financial resources, displayed generosity by purchasing fruit for other participants. When he stayed at EHT, he took on numerous household chores and made personal purchases to enhance the living conditions for the residents. Consequently, his presence was widely embraced and appreciated by both residents and activity participants alike.²⁶

On the opposing side of this issue is Xinyi, an undergraduate student studying in New Zealand, who elected to spend her gap year in Shanghai as a resident of EHT. During an activity in a writing club focused on exploring gender issues, she engaged in candid conversations with fellow female participants and was soon confronted with a disquieting revelation. One of her peers, Ziping, disclosed that she had been subjected to a distressing incident of sexual harassment perpetrated by Yupei. Ziping recounted how Yupei had inappropriately touched her without her explicit consent. This alarming disclosure served as a catalyst for Xinyi, prompting her to reflect upon a series of additional unsettling anecdotes involving Yupei and allegations of sexual harassment. Fueled by her unwavering commitment to justice and the well-being of her fellow residents, Xinyi resolved to take action. She recognized the urgent need to amplify the voices of these young women who had endured unwarranted experiences of harassment and felt compelled to seek a resolution to their grievances.

²⁶ Residents had divergent attitudes towards his presence based on their standpoints. Some welcomed him given his generosity, whereas some, like Faxia, felt uncomfortable talking with him.

“To begin with, I must acknowledge that I personally haven't suffered the full weight of patriarchy's oppression or the profound trauma of sexual harassment. Nevertheless, I'm acutely aware that many of my female friends have, to varying degrees, grappled with experiences of sexual harassment. In fact, I've also had my own encounter with sexual harassment, though it didn't reach the severity of some others' experiences. It's this intersection of personal awareness and deep empathy for my friends' ordeals that pushed me into action. I felt an unwavering commitment to pursue the investigation, fueled by a profound sense of responsibility. I couldn't shake the thought that allowing Yupei to continue his active involvement in the youth organization might potentially subject other unsuspecting women to similar predatory behavior. Reflecting on my interactions with Yupei, I couldn't help but feel discomforted by his discussions of "open relations." Despite his outward appearance of innocence and the positive reputation he enjoyed within the organization, I remained resolute in my conviction that my role as a member of a youth organization situated in Shanghai – a city emblematic of China's modernity – and as a resident of EHT, a central entity within the organization, bestowed upon me both the responsibility and the capability to address this pressing issue. In my eyes, the youth organization represented a vanguard entity, one united by a shared consensus against sexual harassment. I believed it to be fertile ground on which meaningful change could be cultivated. I was fully aware that the prevailing public opinion on feminism in China often carried a negative tone, particularly concerning gender relations. Nevertheless, I drew strength from the positive trend of growing gender awareness among women. This prevailing trend fueled my determination to take action, with the hope that my efforts could contribute to a brighter future, in alignment with the currents of change” (interview with Xinyi).

During the course of investigation, Xinyi uncovered further instances of sexual harassment. Beyond Ziping's distressing experience, another girl's encounter with Yupei was particularly noteworthy. This incident took place at a farewell party hosted by Chanyi, who was leaving Shanghai to pursue her education. Yupei, in a state of inebriation, seated himself on Chanyi's bed and maintained uncomfortably close proximity to her, causing her significant discomfort. In addition to Chanyi, several other women who attended the party also reported instances of what they perceived as intentional and unwarranted physical contact by Yupei. Furthermore, the women shared messages they had received from Yupei that contained sexual implications. These messages, according to the women, further supported their claims and added to the mounting evidence against him.

The crossroad of gender relations manifests clearly through the narratives of Xinyi and Yupei about the behaviors of Yupei. Xinyi's fervor and sense of responsibility underscore her acute awareness of gender inequality—the rising gender awareness and pursuit of gender equality in the hierarchical dimension of gender relations. Her decision to launch an investigation into Yupei reflects her robust gender consciousness, acknowledging the societal disparities, inequalities, and power imbalances that stem from gendered experiences. Xinyi's motivation is rooted in her identity as a woman and her broader perception of a gender-equitable environment, both within Shanghai and the youth organization Sven. It's not uncommon for individuals like Xinyi, raised and educated in urban areas, and especially those pursuing higher education abroad, to possess strong gender awareness, as supported by Zuo et al.'s findings (2018). From Xinyi's standpoint, Yupei appeared hypocritical, disguising his seemingly benevolent gestures as a façade to "hunt" women. Conversely, Yupei's narrative, centered around his fascination with

emerging trends and his interactions with youth, reveals the evolving horizontal dimension of gender relations. As a man who had embraced an unconventional lifestyle, he exhibited a genuine enthusiasm for connecting with young individuals who embodied emerging interests and perspectives. The fluidity of contemporary Chinese society allowed him to encounter diverse young people and establish connections with them. Consequently, he had built a positive reputation within the youth organization Sven due to his active involvement and generosity, but simultaneously became entangled in sexual misconduct issues. The disjunctures in both dimensions meet and have contradictory narratives on the same behaviors of Yupei. The intersection of burgeoning gender awareness and frequent gender interactions is further complicated by age, class, and gender identity, the conjuncture in gender relations, adding layers of complexity to the entire situation, which would be exposed with the development of this issue.

Proceeding: anti-harassment team and divergent opinions

An anti-harassment team was swiftly assembled. Several other members from both Sven and EHT also participated in this effort, including the founder of Sven, Duruo (male), two managers of Sven's Shanghai branch, Zisu (female) and Duzhong (male), the founder of EHT, Jingmo (male), the boyfriend of a victim, Suorang (male), one female activist of public activities, Qingdai (female), and Xinyi herself (female).²⁷ Regrettably, the team encountered an impasse, unable to reach a consensus on how to address the situation. The primary point of contention revolved around the perceived intentionality behind Yupei's actions. Xinyi and Suorang, Chanyi's

²⁷ I conducted separate interviews with Yupei and Xinyi to gain insight into their perspectives on the entire process. Additionally, I was not a member of the investigation team but served as a consultant when the team encountered certain difficulties (which will be discussed in subsequent sections). I also had access to their chat records. Furthermore, I engaged in conversations with residents of EHT and some members of the investigation team to gather their opinions on the matter.

boyfriend, staunchly believed that Yupei had intentionally harassed the women. As a result, they advocated for permanently revoking Yupei's participation rights in public activities and residing at Experimental Houses, particularly if any future instances of sexual harassment were reported. Conversely, other team members held the view that it was premature to arrive at such a conclusion. They contended that Yupei should, at the very least, be afforded the opportunity to explain his actions. Jingmo emphasized the importance of adhering to proper investigative procedures, asserting that the voices of both sides should be heard before any conclusive judgments were made. Following the initial round of deliberations, the team members agreed to initiate a conversation with Yupei and provide him with anti-sexual harassment brochures in an effort to convey that his actions were deemed inappropriate by some of the women involved. Jingmo, Duzhong, and Qingdai were designated as the representatives of the team and the broader Sven community was tasked with engaging in this discussion with Yupei.

The issue rapidly disseminated throughout EHT, sparking discussions among the residents. Kongqing contended that Yupei appeared to lack a sense of personal boundaries when interacting with women, which resulted in their discomfort. “In a chat between us, Yupei acknowledged that his interactions with others, particularly women, frequently led to strained relationships. Yupei was aware that he struggled to maintain positive and lasting connections with others but was uncertain about the underlying reasons.” In the case involving Chanyi, Kongqing proposed that sitting on the bed was considered a normal behavior in Yupei's hometown for men of his generation. However, it was viewed as entirely inappropriate from the perspective of today's youth. Yupei's age and generational differences might have contributed to his lack of awareness about what constituted proper behavior in the context of his interactions

with others. Faxia, despite initially feeling uneasy when Yupei stayed at EHT as a couch surfer, supported the investigative process. She recommended that the team should interview individuals who had close relationships with Yupei to gather additional evidence. Faxia also raised doubts about the intentionality of Yupei's alleged acts of sexual harassment, suggesting that his intimate conduct might be a common trait exhibited with individuals with whom he shared a close connection. Faxia questioned whether Yupei's behaviors were specific to gender dynamics or if his interactions might involve universally applied intimate behavior.

Kongqing and Faxia's narratives predominantly centered on the horizontal relationships between Yupei and other individuals or themselves, rather than delving into hierarchical gender relations between men and women. Yupei's efforts to establish rapport with women, while consistently transgressing personal boundaries, appeared rooted in his generational context. As previously mentioned, with the increasing interaction between men and women among contemporary youth, evolving boundaries are being negotiated. In this context, close connections between heterosexual friends coexist with distinct personal boundaries. This perspective on the horizontal dimension of gender relations suggested an alternative interpretation: the conflicts between Yupei and the women might be attributed more to differing perceptions of individual boundaries rather than constituting instances of sexual harassment.

Yupei's perspective on the allegations of "sexual harassment" was characterized by a strong emphasis on the horizontal dimension of his relationships with the women involved. He defended his actions by asserting that he considered these women to be good friends, which, in his view, justified his intimate behaviors. In response to Chanyi's accusation, Yupei claimed that he viewed Chanyi as a close friend and believed that he had the right to attend her farewell party,

even though he hadn't been formally invited. He admitted to being intoxicated that day and not remembering what transpired, but expressed a desire to apologize to Chanyi and her boyfriend, Suorang, with the help of Jingmo as an intermediary. Regarding Ziping's accusation, Yupei expressed shock and questioned why she had brought up an incident from the distant past. He explained that he had touched her lower leg while riding his electric bike together, solely out of concern for her comfort in the cold weather, which was a normal action between good friends.

“We are good friends. One time, Ziping found herself in a precarious situation involving a landlord with connections to a criminal organization. Faced with the ominous threat of having all her belongings disposed of if she didn't vacate her rental property on the exact date specified, she turned to me for assistance. Despite my limited combat skills, I felt compelled to intervene on her behalf. Initially, I suggested that she enlist the help of more capable individuals, given my own reservations about physical confrontations. However, Ziping insisted that I was the only person she trusted in this situation. With a prior commitment scheduled for that day, I made the decision to forgo it and support Ziping instead. To ensure my safety during this encounter, I even purchased a compass, with the needle tip on it, viewing it as a means of self-defense.

Remarkably, the mere presence of another man during the confrontation seemed to deter the landlord from taking any extreme measures, ultimately resulting in a peaceful resolution to the conflict.” Yupei firmly believed that his interactions with Ziping had been marked by mutual respect and positive rapport, with one notable exception. He recalled a specific incident when Ziping had planned a trip to a city in southern China. Prior to her departure, she expressed a desire to meet with him. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, he arrived late to their meeting, which left Ziping understandably frustrated and upset. In Yupei's perspective, this was

the sole instance of conflict between them. He found it inconceivable that this relatively minor disagreement could be the basis for Ziping's allegations against him.

Yupei's perspective on the events in question presents a stark contrast to that of the women involved. It is not uncommon in cases of alleged sexual harassment for both parties to possess differing interpretations of the behaviors and their underlying intentions. It's crucial to highlight that the focus here is not on assigning blame but on examining the divergent explanations surrounding the actions that have been characterized as sexual harassment. First, the conflicting narratives surrounding the context and behaviors shed light on the “conjuncture” and “disjuncture” within horizontal gender relations. Yupei firmly believed that he occupied an esteemed position within the social circles of both Chanyi and Ziping. Drawing from his own understanding of their relationships, he perceived it as his duty to offer assistance and care to Ziping by touching her body to test her body temperature. Moreover, he regarded his presence at Chanyi's farewell gathering as an appropriate and expected gesture, considering their amicable relationship. In his view, his actions aligned with the conjunction of his perceived role in these relationships. However, the women' perspective diverged significantly from Yupei's. They did not share his interpretation of events. From their standpoint, any form of physical contact, even among close heterosexual friends, could lead to discomfort and unease. It is worth noting that young individuals, unlike Yupei's generation, tend to place a higher emphasis on personal boundaries. This difference in generational perspective constitutes the disjuncture between Yupei and the youth. Kongqing aptly commented that Yupei consistently exhibited a weak sense of boundaries, which stemmed from his inability to comprehend and respect the individual boundaries emphasized by the younger generation. Consequently, these conflicting perceptions

of relationships and boundaries underlie the disputes surrounding allegations of sexual harassment and contribute to the contradictory narratives regarding Yupei's intentions.

Furthermore, the contrasting narratives between Yupei and the women shed light on the “crossroad” of gender performativity (Butler 1988). As an older man, Yupei views the youth he encounters in the community as akin to his children and feels a responsibility to protect them. Additionally, he believes that, as a man, he possesses the capability to safeguard women in times of danger, as exemplified by Ziping seeking Yupei's assistance. This sense of responsibility for protection serves as his justification for his actions in touching Ziping's body. These narratives align with stereotypical masculinity in which men are perceived as strong while women are seen as weak—a manifestation of gender performativity in Chinese culture. Thus, the active gender role of men in public spaces and the associated masculinity of protecting women represent a conjuncture in gender relations that Yupei upholds.

The notion of masculinity held by Yupei stands in stark contrast to the beliefs of the women, particularly within the context of co-living, where they challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. A notable example is the perspective on cooking among male and female residents in co-living houses. In traditional divisions of domestic labor, women were typically responsible for cooking, while men were distant from the kitchen. However, in the co-living setting, it was common for male residents to take on cooking duties while female residents handled dishwashing—a reversal of traditional roles in Chinese households. Zhaoyan expressed her disinterest in cooking, opting to engage in other activities during her free time. Changshan said, “As for me, I've never found cooking particularly engaging. It often feels like a mundane chore, a considerable drain on time and energy with little sense of personal achievement. In

terms of culinary expectations, I'm not overly demanding; if the food is edible, it usually suffices. Yet, there's a deeper layer to my aversion to cooking—it's about resisting the idea of being confined within the domestic sphere.” When asked about her views on cooking as a female domestic responsibility, Xinyi put, “To me, the question of cooking and its link to gender roles doesn't hold much significance in today's context. It's an antiquated notion, something I haven't given much thought to for quite some time. From my perspective, it's no longer a defining feature of gender. I believe that people of my generation, and even younger, generally share a consensus when it comes to traditional divisions of labor within the household, including the role of a “housewife.” In this day and age, we perceive men and women as equals in terms of domestic chores. It's entirely natural for both men and women to be skilled in cooking, just as it's natural for trees to be green and the sky to be blue.” Some male residents, like Jingmo, possessed excellent culinary skills. Jingmo had learned to cook from chefs at the hotel managed by his mother when he was a child, and he felt no discomfort in having culinary expertise. Yupei's adherence to traditional masculinity sharply contrasts with the progressive gender roles embraced by the youth, resulting in conflicting interpretations of his intentions and behaviors.

Moreover, it's crucial to acknowledge that the disparities in age and social class between Yupei and the women added an additional layer of complexity to the case. These distinctions, intertwined with gender differences, placed Yupei at a unique “crossroad” within these relationships (Johnson 2017). The conjuncture, or, in other words, the cooperation of multiple factors like class, age, and gender, underscores the intricate interplay in Yupei's case. However, these factors played opposite roles. He enjoyed gender-related advantages. However, as a senior member in a youth organization, Yupei often appeared out of place or unusual in the eyes of

younger participants. This feeling of being perceived as out of sync with the youth culture is reflected in his self-deprecating remark about being a "creepy uncle." Furthermore, Yupei's lifestyle and class status differ significantly from those of the youth in Sven. The members of Sven typically come from urban backgrounds and hold white-collar jobs, whereas Yupei's unconventional lifestyle and class position place him at a disadvantage. Even Xinyi acknowledged that he faced disadvantages within the community due to his age and social class. She commented, "I think he has no privileges, given his age. On the contrary, he holds a weak position in the community. Many youth felt empathy for him, to some extent, seeing him as someone who is, in a way, homeless." So, in Yupei's case, the lack of alignment between his gender, class status and age worked as disjuncture, and such disjuncture within the multiple factors influencing gender relations increased the complexity of the harassment allegation in this case.

In the context of the United States, Mitchell Duneier's analysis (1999) delves into the complex dynamics observed when black male street vendors engage with white women on sidewalks. Duneier suggests that these black male vendors employ various strategies to capture the attention of white women, including compliments and flirting, with the goal of initiating and controlling the conversation. In the United States, men often enjoy gender-related advantages that enable them to actively initiate conversations with women. However, the situation becomes more complicated when considering the racial and class disparities at play. Black street vendors in the U.S. typically face racial and class disadvantages compared to the white women they approach. As a result, these interactions can manifest as somewhat coercive, with the vendors attempting to prolong the conversations by asking questions and finding topics of discussion.

While the men may be eager to engage, white women may feel pressured to continue the dialogue but often wish to conclude it swiftly. This tension between the desire to exit the conversation and the expectation to remain engaged can result in white women displaying a degree of indifference toward the black vendors. Additionally, white women in the United States may experience heightened anxiety when approached by black men due to the historical and contemporary racial conflicts present in American society. However, they may also feel a sense of guilt or unease about these apprehensions, driven by concerns related to political correctness. This internal conflict adds an extra layer of complexity to their interactions with black street vendors.

Like the black vendors in the United States, Yupei is acutely aware of the disadvantages he faces when interacting with the younger generation. This awareness has led to a dual outcome. On the one hand, it compels Yupei to put in extra effort to actively engage with and be accepted by a younger cohort from a different age and social class background than his own. His acts of generosity and kindness, in part, stem from this desire to actively perform friendliness in order to gain acceptance within the community. Through such efforts, he managed to establish a positive reputation within both Sven and EHT, earning him a sense of belonging and fulfillment. In fact, Yupei views Sven as a significant source of emotional support and attachment, referring to it as his "spiritual ballast." His commitment to this community is further demonstrated by his readiness to defend it when it faces disrespect, leaving a lasting impression on many of its members. Additionally, Yupei believed he had formed numerous close friendships within the community, including several with its female members.

On the other hand, Yupei's ability to leverage his disadvantages into advantages, reinforced by his gender advantage in public activities, caused the insecure feelings of women. Being a man allows him to actively engage in these activities and take the initiative to initiate conversations with women whenever he desires. In public spaces, men often hold the conversational initiative, while women tend to be more passive participants. This power differential is something that Xinyi and her female friends observed and experienced. Xinyi herself noted this dynamic, explaining, "Some of my female friends and I feel that during public activities at Sven, men have the upper hand when it comes to speaking. Men tend to dominate, while women take on more passive roles. There's an inherent power difference, and in some cases, men exploit this power dynamic to pursue women during the activities... Many women may not even realize it, as they might be seeking a sense of connection through these activities. I didn't become aware of it until I participated in a few activities at Sven, after which I chose not to engage in any more." This gender dynamic also extends to the co-living spaces. Typically, male residents spend more time in common areas, where they can relax and interact more actively. Female residents, on the other hand, do not enjoy the same level of comfort in these spaces, even in cases where they make up the majority of residents. Consequently, Yupei feels at ease when interacting with women during public activities, and his male identity does not make him feel awkward in these situations, but makes the women feel awkward.

In summary, the conflicts that arose between Yupei, Xinyi, and the women highlight the stark differences in their understanding of heterosexual interactions, the intersection of gender performativity, and the influence of age and class distinctions. Yupei believed he had good relationships with the women and felt it was his traditional masculine duty to take care of Ziping.

His gender advantage allowed him to act in this manner, and his age and class disadvantages compelled him to actively perform to assert his masculinity and maintain these relationships with the women. However, these perspectives sharply contrast with those of the young women who prioritize individual boundaries, emphasize equal and independent gender performance, and advocate for equal interactions in public spaces. Consequently, Yupei's behaviors were interpreted as sexual harassment because they crossed the boundaries and expectations that the women held for men in public spheres.

The Decision: Expelling Yupei

Due to the complexity of the case surrounding Yupei and the differing opinions within the anti-harassment team, the investigation proceeded slowly. Xinyi and Suorang grew impatient with the lack of progress. Xinyi believed that some team members were not pushing the investigation forward because they sympathized with Yupei. As a result, she and Suorang contemplated taking independent action. As Xinyi maintained: “Their apparent desire to protect Yupei under the guise of safeguarding privacy and downplaying the issue strikes me as misguided. In this situation, there are clearly victims and an individual responsible for causing harm. The inherent power dynamics are already skewed in favor of the wronged, but those team members who attempt to remain neutral not only fail to balance the scales but seem to lean even further in favor of Yupei. Their failure to take a firm stance in support of the women involved is, in my opinion, unacceptable. As someone deeply invested in gender equality and fairness, I find it disheartening to witness how some individuals seem more inclined to believe Yupei over the accounts of these brave women. These women, who have bravely come forward to share their

experiences, should be viewed as courageous warriors. Recounting their painful experiences means reopening old wounds, and yet they do so willingly in pursuit of justice and equity.”

In addition to her independent actions, Xinyi also contemplated exposing the charges against Yupei and the perceived inactivity of the investigation team to the entire community in an effort to pressure the team into taking more decisive action against him. This move placed significant pressure on the other team members. Many of them were infuriated, viewing Xinyi's actions as a form of coercion to force a decision in her favor. Jingmo believed that Xinyi's proposed course of action risked damaging the reputations of everyone involved in the matter. He spoke with Xinyi about his concerns, saying, "We should never allow personal emotions to dictate our actions within a collective context. While your intentions may be noble, the means you've chosen could lead to unintended and irreparable consequences. I understand that you didn't intend to cause harm, but there's a risk of cyber violence erupting as a result of this action, in which other people might viciously curse Yupei, Xinyi and other team members because of their biases, and which might become chaotic and beyond our control. No one should be a party to cyber violence; it's a senseless display of aggression. At that point, words and explanations become powerless, and everyone involved in this situation, including the victims, the team members, and even the accused, could be targeted.”

The conflict escalated beyond the dispute between Xinyi and Yupei; it also extended to conflicts within the investigation team. Communication between the two sides had broken down, making any further progress in the investigation impossible. Faced with this chaos, Duruo, the founder of the community, made a determination. He acknowledged that Yupei's actions exhibited characteristics of sexual harassment, albeit of a relatively minor nature. In line with the

community's zero-tolerance stance towards sexual harassment, he decided to remove Yupei from all the WeChat groups associated with Sven and impose a three-month ban on his participation in any Sven activities. Ultimately, Duruo took it upon himself to implement this decision by removing Yupei from all Sven WeChat groups.

However, the outcome left everyone dissatisfied. Xinyi felt that men had still dominated the entire process, and her voice had not been truly heard by the other members of the team. She described the outcome as "huo xini,²⁸" which roughly translates to a messy or compromised solution. According to her, the decision-makers essentially arrived at a compromise, believing that Yupei had done something wrong to the women, so they opted to ban him from participating in public activities for three months and kept the result relatively low-key. However, the punishment was largely ineffective due to a subsequent two-month lockdown in Shanghai,²⁹ which meant there were no activities taking place anyway. Yupei continued to remain active in the community in later activities. Newcomers were unaware of Yupei's past, so the lines between right and wrong became blurred.

When asked why Yupei was still punished if the team members shielded him, Xinyi suggested, "They probably need to maintain their face (mianzi) and certain stances on gender issues. They outwardly agree with gender equality. In their positions, they had to find a way to balance both sides, adopting opinions from both sides and making a decision they believed would satisfy everyone. Men must be satisfied; this is what men do. But women want more. The

²⁸ "Huo xini" can be translated into English as "smudging the issue" or "muddying the waters." It refers to situations where the resolution or announcement of a conflict is unclear, vague, or deliberately made ambiguous, often blaming both sides without considering the actual facts or merits of the case.

²⁹ There was a lockdown of Shanghai from April 1st to June 1st, 2022. For more details, please see chapter 6.

decision-making power lies in men's hands, which is not what women desire... I recall my first participation in a discussion at the writing club. The initial topic was how to prevent sexual harassment in youth organizations like Sven. However, the topic shifted to how men could avoid being stigmatized by women and how to protect men from such stigmatization. It's absurd. Among rape cases involving women, perhaps only 1% with false accusations, while 99% are genuine. Yet, everyone empathizes with the 1% of male victims of false accusations but overlooks the remaining 99% of female rape victims. I believe the empathy for the 1% of male victims serves as an outlet for men to vent their frustrations with the growing gender equality movement. They are opposed to feminism but cannot pinpoint the exact issue to combat it. So, they search for events or victims of false accusations to amplify the suffering of men. Essentially, they want to preserve male privileges... I think fundamentally, men fail to comprehend the suffering and trauma experienced by women. They only focus on themselves. Men are comfortable with the current gender relations in Chinese society. For the past millennium, they have enjoyed gender privileges and have never faced repercussions for hurting women. They take these privileges for granted and remain oblivious to them. So, when they perceive that their privileges are being violated, they believe the gender power balance should return to 'normal.' From male privilege to gender equality, men sense a loss and thus, are discontented with the current situation.”

Xinyi considered the male team members as "feminist men" (nvquan nan) who outwardly appear to support gender equality but, in reality, have ulterior motives such as seeking to control or dominate women, often for personal gain, including in romantic or sexual contexts. She distinguishes between "male feminists" and "feminist men" by examining their sincerity and

intentions. According to Xinyi, a male feminist is someone who sincerely supports feminism and gender equality. They engage in discussions about gender without trying to prove themselves right or wrong and are genuinely supportive of women's rights and aspirations. They don't seek to control or dominate women but rather offer genuine support. On the other hand, "feminist men" are those who engage in gender-related discussions with the intention of proving their opinions as superior or correct. They may argue about gender topics and are more interested in asserting their dominance or gaining an upper hand in interactions with women. Their support for feminism may be insincere and driven by a desire to maintain power over women.

Jingmo expressed disappointment with what he considered an arbitrary decision. He believed the decision lacked a proper investigation and felt that the team, driven by the women's position, did not approach the matter independently and objectively. Duruo's assertion that the decision was based on facts was met with disagreement from Jingmo, who described it as "huo xini," using the same term Xinyi had used to criticize the final result. Jingmo's frustration stemmed from feeling that his contributions to the investigation were not respected by Xinyi and Duruo. He believed the decision lacked a factual basis. Yupei, identified as a sexual harasser, was furious with the decision. Despite his significant contributions to the youth organization, including public activities and helping others, the outcome was unacceptable to him.

Conclusion and discussion: understanding gender relations in co-living and Chinese society

The entire issue culminated in an impasse, leaving no clear winners in the conflict. The male team members found themselves labeled as "feminist men," while Xinyi was seen as a radical feminist who had overstepped the bounds of justice, although she was not ejected from

co-living. The women involved did not receive an apology, and Yupei, who had contributed significantly to the community, felt a sense of grievance. Why did things end in this way? Why did Xinyi's ambition of gender equality and anti-sexual harassment fail in practice? Why did the whole process lead to a "huo xini" result? Why was the conflict expanded and why did social relations deteriorate rather than improve? The answers are rooted in the conflictual underlying logics in the contemporary Chinese gender landscape.

The obstacles Xinyi met shed light on the limitations of adopting a singular hierarchical perspective in analyzing gender relations. Xinyi's focus on hierarchical gender relations throughout the process reflects the male-centered gender structure prevalent in Chinese society. Xinyi is accurate in noting that men dominated the entire process, while women's voices were not fully heard. The construction and perpetuation of gender performance are deeply embedded in social structures through processes of socialization, interaction, and institutional organization (Risman, 2004). However, her exclusive emphasis on hierarchical gender relations and the subordination of women led to a situation where she felt compelled to act more radically to advance the investigation. Unfortunately, this approach had its drawbacks, with other team members becoming upset with her, ultimately resulting in a chaotic resolution. I argue that gender relations in China are more complex than a simple dynamic of male domination and female subordination. Many scholars studying Chinese family and kinship point out women's power and agency (Bray 1997; Stafford 2009; Wolf 1972), and suggest the kind of "matriarchy" in which "considerable power and authority is vested in women (and in wives and mothers in particular), to the extent that they often 'have the final say' over men, including in public discussions, while also often significantly dominating the emotional dispositions and outlook of

their children” (Stafford 2009:149). Men and women exist within intricate gender dynamics, experiencing both advantages and disadvantages simultaneously. What Xinyi overlooked is the multifaceted, "crossroad" nature of gender relations, where individuals navigate various advantages and disadvantages based on factors beyond a strict hierarchy.

The multiple dimensions of gender relations in Chinese culture and society cause the "crossroad" that complicates the conjunctures and disjunctures of gender relations in a transforming Chinese society, which is further exemplified by Yupei's personal situation. As mentioned earlier, three layers of "crossroad" are evident in this issue: conflicts between horizontal and hierarchical gender relations, conflicting understandings of gender performance, and the resulting mismatch between gender, age, and class expectations. Regarding Yupei's side, he conveyed his understanding of the close relationships between himself and the women. His narrative focuses, contrary to that of Xinyi, on the horizontal gender relations. To some extent, his narrative worked because the investigation team did not consider him as sexual harasser immediately. It is not because the team members intentionally shielded Yupei, as Xinyi believed, but because what Yupei described is also common in gender interactions. Furthermore, due to his class and age disadvantages, he adopted a more active approach, leveraging his gender advantage, to establish a foothold in Sven and cultivate a positive reputation among the youth with whom he genuinely wished to engage. However, this approach led to certain behaviors, such as intentional closeness (*tao jinhu*), which made some women uncomfortable, and made his intention more vague and unjudgable.

In light of these “crossroads,” comprehending the seemingly paradoxical resolution of "huo xini" becomes more apparent. The coexistence of diverse and conflicting gender notions,

with individuals engaging in debates, precipitates gender tension. Thus, the term "nvquan nan," employed by Xinyi, although initially perplexing, gains cogency when viewed from the perspective of women navigating the contradictory and awkward attitudes towards gender relations exhibited by men. Moreover, the phrase "a slight sexual harassment" in Duruo's final decision warrants attention. The use of "slight" in the context of sexual harassment, traditionally viewed as a binary situation — where "yes is yes, and no is no" — introduces a spectrum wherein varying degrees of harassment are positioned between affirmative and negative responses. This nuanced characterization reflects the nebulous nature of gender relations, incorporating divergent notions and understandings among disparate groups. The resulting contradictory narratives and practices mirror a transforming gender landscape, where heightened gender awareness prompts Shanghai's youth, denizens of one of China's most modern metropolises, to renegotiate gender boundaries. As individual autonomy and a sense of boundaries burgeon among the youth, the power balance of gender is poised to undergo further intricate transformations. Consequently, this issue encapsulates a snapshot of the evolving gender dynamics in contemporary China, emphasizing the imperative for meticulous and elaborate frameworks to dissect prevailing gender relations within specific contexts and daily practices in Chinese society.

In summary, the conflict regarding gender issues discussed in this chapter is not an isolated case in co-living and the youth organization Sven. It is a snapshot of the complicated gender relations and one type of individual conflict in co-living life in particular, and sheds light on the changing gender landscape in contemporary Chinese society in general. Because of the crossroads of gender relations where conjuncture covers multiple factors influencing gender

inequality and proximity and disjuncture brings forth new gender awareness and intimacy, the renegotiation of individual boundaries between different genders in the context of the pursuit of gender equality will both foster positive and equal gender relations in daily interactions in co-living and pose risks that have the potential to disrupt the solidarity in co-living life. As the metaphor of crossroad suggests, there are many possible directions, but we do not know in which direction future negotiation will move. With these both positive and negative possibilities, co-living residents also need to navigate other challenges from their neighbors, community, and the authorities in their co-living life, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

5 Under the Challenges We Live: Neighbors, Authorities and the Rental

Market

Introduction

The phenomenon of co-living in China, while emerging as a distinctive living arrangement, is intricately interwoven within the broader fabric of Chinese society. Rather than existing in isolation, co-living engages with social structures and interfaces with various institutions. This interaction often gives rise to conflicts between co-living residents and their neighbors, local authorities, and the rental market. These conflicts can be traced back to the ongoing social transformations in contemporary China. One notable aspect of this transformation is the co-living of individuals from diverse genders under the same roof, a scenario that may appear perplexing to many, particularly older individuals. The assumptions surrounding such living arrangements range from the presumption of romantic involvement to that of colleagues collaborating on projects or simply being friends—a more easily comprehensible dynamic, but not “families” (refer to Chapter 2). When these perplexities are brought to the attention of those in positions of authoritative institutions, they may lead to complications such as suspicion and distrust directed toward co-living residents. Moreover, given that co-living is essentially a rental lifestyle, it inevitably becomes entangled in the intricacies of the rental market, which causes the same troublesome issues as those with authoritative institutions for co-living residents. Negotiating these challenges represents an unavoidable challenge that co-living residents must confront as they navigate the complexities of their chosen living arrangement.

These encountered challenges cast a revealing light on the less-explored aspects of co-living, exposing its darker side. Research on youth organizations often emphasizes the structures, activities, and management of these entities, portraying a positive image and suggesting avenues for organizational development (Yang and Guo 2023). Similarly, on social media platforms, youth organizations are often portrayed as efficiently functioning machines (e.g., the one about the interview process of co-living in chapter 1). However, this narrative does not encompass the entirety of the story. Residents within these organizations grapple with a myriad of more practical, mundane, and vexing issues in their day-to-day lives, constituting the drawbacks of youth organizations. The challenges faced by co-living residents are intrinsically linked to the prevailing power dynamics in society. This chapter aims to illuminate the less visible aspects of their struggles. Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognize the dialectical relationship between the dark and bright sides. Confronted with challenges, co-living residents collaboratively navigate these issues, fostering a sense of belonging and collective empowerment within co-living life.

In this chapter, I will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the challenges confronting co-living residents, examining them from three distinct angles: interactions with neighbors, encounters with authoritative institutions, and navigating the complexities of the rental market, involving house owners and agents. Additionally, I will shed light on the collective strategies employed by co-living residents to address these challenges. My argument posits that these challenges underscore the intricate negotiation between co-living, as an emerging institution, and established social structures amidst contemporary social transformations in China. Within this dynamic, co-living residents engage in both compromise and resistance as they navigate the

interstices of power, revealing a collective strategy and agency employed by young migrants in urban environments to secure their survival.

Misunderstanding and Compromising: Interactions with Neighbors

Neighbors stand out as the individuals most frequently encountered by co-living residents. Principal among the conflicts between co-living residents and their neighbors is the noise generated by collective and public activities within co-living houses. Given that these activities often extend into the late hours, and numerous people enter and exit co-living spaces, neighboring residents often experience disturbances. On certain occasions, neighbors express their complaints directly. For instance, during a visit by Zizhi, a close friend of EHT, a lively conversation ensued between Zizhi and Qinjiao. Spontaneously, they decided to engage in karaoke, utilizing the equipment in the living room. Unfortunately, the volume of the karaoke was excessive for the confined space and residential surroundings. To compound matters, they inadvertently left the gate of EHT open. In response, a neighbor opened his door and yelled, "Keep the noise down." Sensing their oversight, Zizhi and Qinjiao promptly closed the door and lowered their voices while singing. A similar issue persisted in EHF, housed in an antiquated villa within the former French Concession of Shanghai, characterized by suboptimal soundproofing. The raucous nature of public activities conducted within EHF disturbed neighbors to the extent that some filed complaints and even reported the matter to the police station. Consequently, residents had to curtail the frequency of public activities to minimize reports from disgruntled neighbors.

Residents found themselves in a dilemma, seeking to strike a balance between engaging in public activities and mitigating noise disturbances. However, the issue extended beyond noise

concerns, as residents became subjects of scrutiny by their neighbors, creating an intractable situation. A neighbor adjacent to EHT installed a surveillance camera capable of capturing images of the gate area. Residents remained oblivious to this surveillance until the homeowner shared snapshots from the surveillance camera on the group WeChat of house owners, expressing dissatisfaction with the residents' conduct. In one image, Houpu, Jingmo, and another individual were observed smoking in the corridor. The neighbor lodged a complaint, stating, "These are your (the house owner of EHT) tenants. They frequently smoke in front of the windows in the corridor at night and leave a lot of cigarette butts." Another image portrayed two unidentified individuals kissing outside the gate of EHT. However, these individuals were not residents, and due to the low picture quality of the surveillance camera, residents could not identify them. Learning that their actions were under surveillance by certain neighbors, co-living residents became indignant, feeling unjustly accused for behaviors they could not comprehend. Moreover, the surveillance infringed upon the privacy of co-living residents, as areas within the gate of EHT were also within the surveillance camera's purview when the gate was open. During a communal COVID test session conducted downstairs in the building, residents were photographed, extending beyond mere curiosity to suspicion and distrust toward youths of different genders cohabiting. But residents had no idea how to defend themselves in these cases.

Residents of EHF were not so lucky as their counterparts at EHT because the challenges faced by them extended beyond private disputes, reaching into the realm of authority. Neighbors of EHF reported them to the police, prompting Chishao, a resident and one of the founders of EHF, to visit the police station in response to the complaint. The neighbors' concerns revolved around the perceived excess number of residents in the house, along with the cohabitation of

both male and female residents, leading to suspicions of inappropriate romantic relationships (luangao nannv guanxi, the legal and social implications of this allegation are explained in greater detail below). Additionally, some suspected EHF of being a fraudulent organization. Despite Chishao's efforts to clarify the concept of co-living and the nature of their relationships to policemen, the opinions of the house owner and neighbors remained unchanged. In December 2022, residents received notice from the house owner that they had to vacate the premises by the end of the month due to the owner's weariness of the continuous police reports. Consequently, residents, who had called EHF home for three years, were compelled to relocate to a new residence.

Why were co-living residents suspected by their neighbors of some sort of wrongdoing? Why do neighbors ask for the involvement of local authorities? The suspicions and actions directed against co-living residents by their neighbors can be attributed both to the neighbors' lack of understanding of their avant-garde co-living lifestyle and more general issues faced by urban tenants.

The term "inappropriate romantic relationships" (luangao nannv guanxi) used by neighbors in their reports to the police underscores the generational conflicts and conservative perceptions of gender relations. The notion of "inappropriateness" in relationships between individuals of different genders outside of marriage is deeply rooted in traditional values that persisted in China until relatively recently. In the 1980s, engaging in relationships outside of wedlock, especially for unmarried and marginalized men, was deemed not only morally problematic but also illegal. The term "hooligan" (liumang) was applied broadly and ambiguously to cover a range of behaviors considered abnormal and threatening to social

stability. The state, even before officially criminalizing hooliganism in 1979, had been punishing such behaviors since the 1950s, incorporating actions like flirting, looting, and theft (Tanner 2000). Some home parties between young men and women were considered problematic and even criminal in the 1980s, and some individuals were sentenced to death under the “Strike Hard” (yanda) campaign.³⁰ While societal attitudes began to shift in the 1990s, allowing for more freedom in emotional expression, intimacy, and premarital relationships (Yan 2002), not all generations embraced these changes. The young co-living residents grew up in an era when intimate relationships are free and open, whereas the elder neighbors experienced the era when open intimate relationships were illegal. The challenges faced by co-living residents illuminate the lingering generational conflicts regarding the living arrangements of single youth of different genders. Co-living residents, in their experimentation with establishing intimate but non-sexual relationships, face scrutiny from outsiders who still harbor conservative views on gender relations.

The location of co-living houses in the central districts of Shanghai further exposes residents to elderly locals who have lived in the area for decades. These neighbors often hold conservative beliefs shaped by their own experiences. The example of an elderly male neighbor from EHF highlights the disparity in understanding between the older generation and the co-living residents. This neighbor, who had resided in his house for seventy years, became involved in an interesting encounter. During a discussion between Ziyuan and Meiren with a repairman about the possibility of opening a window on the roof, the elderly neighbor, positioned on his

³⁰ “Strike Hard” (yanda) refers to an anti-crime campaign launched in China during the 1980s. The campaign aimed to eliminate widespread criminal activities, instill moral values in the population, and maintain societal stability. While the campaign successfully addressed some serious crimes, such as decreasing violent incidents, it also resulted in numerous cases of injustice and bloodshed.

balcony, interjected, stating, "It is not easy to open a window on the roof." He earnestly halted Ziyuan and Meiren in their discussion but suddenly inquired about their occupations in Shanghai. Ziyuan informed the old man that he worked at Shanghai Jiaotong University (SJTU), a prestigious institution in China. Witnessing this, the old man's expression transformed from a frown to admiration, exclaiming, "Excellent young guy, excellent young guy." Following this, Ziyuan provided information about another resident working at Huawei, a well-known Chinese high-tech company, eliciting another thumbs-up and words of praise from the elderly neighbor. Ziyuan then shared that Chishao worked at NVIDIA Corporation in Shanghai, Fengshi was employed as a film editor, and Changshan pursued studies in anthropology in the United States. The elderly man appeared perplexed and offered no comment on NVIDIA, film editing, and anthropology, indicating a lack of familiarity with these fields. Instead, he reiterated his admiration, stating, "SJTU is an excellent university. Working in Huawei is so brilliant," while giving a thumbs-up. This exchange highlighted the generational and knowledge gaps between the elderly neighbor, grounded in his understanding of well-known entities, and the diverse, modern professions of the co-living residents. For individuals like this elderly neighbor, co-living and the non-traditional relationships among residents challenge their expectations, leading to misunderstanding and, in some cases, suspicion. The clash between evolving societal norms and deeply ingrained perceptions underscores the complexity of navigating cultural shifts in urban settings.

Beyond the specific misunderstandings surrounding co-living, the distrust directed at co-living residents is deeply rooted in the broader issue of mistrust between house owners and tenants in urban settings. Li Zhang's research (2010), conducted in urban areas in Yunnan

province, illustrates how the concept of housing has evolved to become a new marker of social class since the 2000s in China. Within urban environments, individuals from the same social class often cluster in similar communities, imbuing their residential choices with class-related meanings. This trend is intrinsically tied to the marketization of housing, which began in the late 1990s in China. No longer were urban dwellers provided housing through their work units as a form of social welfare; instead, they had to purchase their own housing. This shift in housing dynamics led to the emergence of a new identity – that of the "house owner" (yezhu),³¹ supplanting the traditional designation of "resident" and enjoying specific rights and privileges within the community (Sun 2016). Consequently, neighborhoods transformed from spaces characterized by neighborly relationships and acquaintance connections in China into spaces defined by interactions between house owners and tenants. This shift is particularly pronounced in metropolises like Shanghai, where a substantial influx of migrants has created a more marked heterogeneity based on economic ability. Under the prevailing market economy's logic, where individuals are judged on their economic standing, a social gulf has come to exist between house owners and tenants (Cai and He 2014). This phenomenon has given rise to a form of exclusion for tenants within a "double binary structure" (Hou 2007; Li 2002). Tenants face exclusion on two fronts: first, within the urban-rural structure, and second, within the native-immigrant structure. Despite residing in these communities, tenants lack the right to participate in discussions on public affairs. The dominant influence of house owners in collective decision-making stems from their ownership of real estate. This gap in rights creates a clear hierarchy,

³¹ With the rapid development of housing market in China in recent decades, some urban house owners own additional dwellings. So they live in one and rent the rest to earn rental from migrants. In the co-living cases, the house owners are individual owner rather than capitalist investors who purchase a lot of housing stock.

leaving tenants with limited influence on community matters. House owners, holding the reins of decision-making, often perceive tenants as untrustworthy outsiders. This dual exclusion does not solely impact lower-income immigrants but also extends to young immigrants with white collar work, like the co-living residents, leading to internal urban exclusion and the creation of various social strata (Li and Wang 2014).

From a more micro and empirical perspective, the tension between homeowners and tenants can be attributed to the inherent conflict between the desire for stability on the part of homeowners and the mobility characteristic of tenants. Homeowners typically seek to establish a stable and familiar living environment within their chosen communities. However, this aspiration for stability and familiarity is disrupted by the constant turnover of tenant residents. This situation introduces heightened levels of uncertainty and insecurity for homeowners. On the other hand, tenants, who are predominantly young individuals relocating to urban areas for employment opportunities, experience mobility as an integral aspect of their lives. They often change jobs frequently, and the rising cost of rent encourages them to relocate to more affordable living situations. Consequently, homeowners and tenants find themselves in fundamentally opposing situations in terms of their housing needs and experiences. This underlying tension is central to understanding the dynamics of relationships between these two groups in urban settings.

The exposure of the surveillance monitoring pictures by a neighbor of EHT is a telling example of the prevailing mistrust directed at tenants. Some house owners opted to express their frustrations directly to the tenants in the shared WeChat group for residents, where both house owners and tenants participated, during the COVID-19 lockdown, which coincided with the

height of the quarantine. Given that the pandemic was predominantly transmitted through the mobility of individuals, and tenants were generally more mobile than their house owner counterparts, tenants were singled out as potential carriers of the virus into the community. During these exchanges in the group, a particularly irate resident resorted to using offensive language against tenants. He employed the term "tenants" as a derogatory label and categorically dismissed any opinions opposing his own, thereby stifling any opposing viewpoints.

"My goal is to protect the most basic rights of the homeowners. Right now, even our most basic rights are hard to guarantee, and I really don't know what those people are fxxking talking about. If you are a homeowner, we should unite; if you are not a homeowner, please keep fxxking quiet."

"May I ask whether you all are homeowners or tenants? If you are homeowners and are scolding me, I don't mind, but are the tenants interfering too much? If you haven't experienced it, please keep fxxking quiet." (data from the WeChat group, 20220314)

The conflicts between house owners and tenants deeply unsettled co-living residents. Jingmo, for instance, pointed out that the discord was exacerbated by certain house owners who displayed exclusivity and prejudice towards tenants. This, in turn, reduced tenants' inclination to contribute to maintaining a harmonious community living environment. Furthermore, Kongqing raised valid concerns about the rationality of the house owner committee (yeweihui). He argued that many house owners did not actually reside in the community but continued to enjoy the privileges associated with community management. This arrangement struck him as unreasonable because these non-resident house owners were out of touch with the community's actual conditions. In Kongqing's opinion, it would be more appropriate to establish a "residents'

committee" where those who lived in the community, regardless of whether they were house owners or tenants, held equal management rights. Some scholars who study the rental housing market have advocated for the concept of "equitable rights of rent and sale" (zuzhou tongquan), implying that tenants should enjoy the same management rights as house owners.

Indeed, residents often find it challenging to alter the deep-seated structural conflicts between house owners and tenants. While they cannot entirely resolve these conflicts, they can take certain steps to foster better relationships with their neighbors, which may contribute to the latter's greater understanding and acceptance of their way of life. In light of their experiences with neighbor conflicts and eviction due to the homeowner's complaints, residents at EHF decided to write a letter of self-introduction and goodwill when moving to their new residence. The letter was crafted to introduce themselves to their new neighbors and convey their aspirations for positive neighborly relations. It read as follows:

Dear Neighbor,

Hello! We are young individuals studying and working in Shanghai. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to live together in unit 2006. We hope for your understanding and support in the days to come.

We are a group of warm and friendly young people from various backgrounds. Among us, you'll find a recently returned Huawei engineer who studied in the United States, a psychology student working as a research assistant at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, a leader of a non-profit organization who graduated from Nanjing University, an entrepreneur involved in startup investments and proficient in four languages, an American Ivy League anthropology Ph.D. candidate who loves dancing, a filmmaker with a presence on Bilibili (a Chinese video-sharing

platform), a therapist who studied in Canada and returned to China, and an insurance industry professional who completed studies in the UK.

During our daily lives, we sometimes share meals and conversations in our home.

Considering that the soundproofing in the building isn't perfect, there may be times when we inadvertently disturb your peace. We will do our best to avoid causing any inconvenience, but if we ever disrupt your quiet living environment, please don't hesitate to let us know, and we will be sure to be more considerate.

Lastly, if you have any needs or require assistance, please feel free to reach out to us. We wish you a pleasant and happy life!

This letter was a collaborative effort by the residents of EHF, reflecting their collective intention to establish positive relationships with their new neighbors. The process of creating this letter involved all residents, each contributing their thoughts and ideas. Here's a breakdown of how the letter was developed:

Initiation: Ziyuan initially proposed the idea of writing a letter to introduce themselves to their new neighbors. His suggestion aimed to make a positive first impression on the neighbors. Other residents agreed with the idea and decided to draft handwritten letters to convey their sincerity.

Drafting the Letter: Chuanlian took the lead in drafting the first version of the letter. In this version, they presented themselves as a group of young migrants to Shanghai. They mentioned that they might have occasional visitors due to their aversion to loneliness, which could potentially disrupt the neighbors. The letter requested the neighbors' understanding and encouraged them to communicate any disturbances.

Detailed Self-Introduction: Building on Chuanlian's version, Ziyuan suggested that they provide

a more detailed self-introduction, highlighting their careers and educational backgrounds. He observed that emphasizing their professional and educational achievements had a positive impact on interactions, based on his previous experience with the elderly neighbor. Chishao followed Ziyuan in noting that even policemen changed to friendly attitudes when their background was known. Changshan had some reservations about providing detailed information about everyone, as the number of residents compared to the house's size might overwhelm the neighbors. It was agreed to include the background information of only some residents to prevent confusion.

Revisions: The residents considered the order of introduction, with Chuanlian, an engineer at Huawei, chosen to make the first impression. Fanlv made a revision to emphasize their friendliness and hospitality, inviting neighbors to visit them. However, most residents were concerned about potential risks in inviting neighbors, as they were unsure of their intentions. Ziyuan revised Fanlv's version by placing the background information first and promising to minimize disturbances.

Writing the Letter: Fanlv was responsible for writing the final version, as her calligraphy was better, and she had some attractive letter paper. She prepared four copies of the letter, and Fengshi wrote a special one for the next-door neighbor, about whom they were particularly concerned.

Delivery: Fengshi and Fanlv personally delivered the letters and flowers to five households on the same floor. Additionally, they purchased bouquets of flowers, as suggested by Meiren. Their efforts were met with varying responses: two neighbors appreciated their friendliness, while two others did not react enthusiastically and declined to accept the gifts (one house was vacant).

The experience of being forced to leave their previous residence left a deep and multifaceted impact on the residents' mindset as they began living with new neighbors. Their reactions were marked by a combination of factors. On one hand, this experience underscored the importance of establishing harmonious relations with their new neighbors. As a result, they approached their initial interactions with great care and consideration, demonstrated by their meticulous preparation of a "gift" for their neighbors. The residents recognized that they needed to make a positive first impression to prevent potential conflicts. This carefulness is further evident in their collective contributions to revising the introductory letter, where every word was weighed to convey the right message. On the other hand, this experience made the residents more mindful of self-protection and privacy. They were concerned about revealing too much personal information, as overexposure could potentially be risky. As Changshan suggested, it was not good to mention all residents. When Fanlv suggested adding "welcome to knock on our door" to show their hospitality, Xixian dissented that "it is unnecessarily too enthusiastic." The residents sought a strategic balance between openness and self-protection. This balancing act demonstrates that the specter of distrust among neighbors still lingered in their minds, reminding them to be cautious in their new living situation.

In addition to sending letters to their new neighbors, the residents of EHF implemented a practice of maintaining silence when they walked through the public corridor outside of their house. This silent approach was adopted to avoid disturbing their neighbors and was humorously referred to as the "silent corridor." They made sure to inform all newcomers and visitors about this unspoken rule. Essentially, it functioned as an informal "by-law" unique to EHF. There were occasions when residents returned home together and engaged in lively conversations. However,

as soon as they exited the elevator and entered the corridor, they would self-consciously fall silent and move briskly to avoid making noise. Once safely inside their apartments, their cheerful discussions would resume.

Management and Cooperation: Pressure from Authorities

In their discussion about the letters to neighbors, Changshan expressed concern about not revealing the number of residents in the co-living house. She said, “I'm concerned about our numbers. Let's not forget that we're walking a fine line with what might be considered illegal group renting. When the residents' committee inquired about the total number of people residing in our house, I couldn't help but feel uneasy as I cautiously responded, 'eight.'” Why did Changshan so worry about exposing the number? What did she mean by “illegal group rent”? It is related to the governmental policies concerning residential rentals.

In accordance with the renting policies in Shanghai, there exist two forms of collective renting: "shared renting" (hezu) and "group renting" (qunzu). Shared, or joint renting, is considered legal, while group renting is categorized as illegal. However, the criteria for distinguishing between these two forms is more complex than merely counting the number of tenants involved. According to the *Implementation Opinions on Strengthening the Comprehensive Management of Rented Housing in Residential Communities in Shanghai*, as well as the revised *Shanghai Residential Housing Lease Management Measures*, jointly issued by ten departments including the Shanghai Municipal Comprehensive Management Office, the Shanghai High People's Court, the Shanghai Housing Security and Management Bureau, and the Shanghai Public Security Bureau, the criteria for identifying group renting in Shanghai's central

urban areas and suburban towns within residential communities include the following circumstances:

1. Setting up collective dormitories for employees within residential houses.
2. Partitioning a room originally designed for one living space and renting it out after subdividing it or a similar modification, or renting it out based on beds.
3. Renting out spaces originally designed for non-residential purposes, such as kitchens, bathrooms, balconies, and underground storage rooms, for residential purposes.
4. Average living space per person in any rented room is less than five square meters.
5. The number of residents in any rented room exceeds two people, except for those with legal obligations for support, care, or guardianship.

The emergence of group renting in cities can be attributed to various factors, primarily driven by economic benefits for both house owners and tenants. For house owners, the appeal lies in the prospect of increasing their rental income. They often modify their properties to create additional rooms by dividing larger spaces into smaller ones or by converting kitchens and living rooms into bedrooms. This allows them to accommodate more tenants, thereby increasing their rental earnings.³² Tenants, on the other hand, are drawn to group renting because it typically offers more affordable rent. Although living conditions may be compromised in such arrangements, the cost savings can make urban living more accessible for many. This

³² In China, the ongoing processes of urbanization and developments in the housing market have led to a situation where some individuals own multiple houses. Instead of residing in all their properties, these house owners choose to live in one and rent out the others. Due to their non-residential status in the rented houses, some house owners exhibit minimal concern for the living conditions of their tenants. The level of involvement varies, with certain house owners covering repair costs, while others may not. To streamline the renting process, many house owners delegate property management responsibilities to letting agencies. These agencies, acting as intermediaries, sometimes take the initiative to modify or reconstruct the houses to accommodate more residents, thereby maximizing rental income for themselves.

affordability factor makes group renting a popular choice among tenants. Xiebai, an active participant in the public activities of EHT, shared his personal experience in an article titled, "A Half Balcony." The title humorously suggests that his room was so small that it was essentially only half of a standard bedroom, as it had been subdivided by the house owner, so he only had a half balcony. In EHF, residents had even divided a balcony and converted part of it into a small room to accommodate an additional resident, allowing them to share the expensive rent more affordably. Changshan was the one living in the "half balcony," and therefore was particularly concerned about the issues related to group renting within EHF.

Group renting arrangements can indeed introduce safety and criminal risks due to the close living conditions and shared spaces. As illustrated in Xiebai's case, he experienced theft of his laptop, and the perpetrator turned out to be one of his roommates, another young migrant. This incident led to criminal charges and imprisonment for the perpetrator. In response to these potential risks, local governments, often in collaboration with residents' committees of local communities, have implemented measures to manage and regulate group renting (Bing 2012). These measures aim to ensure safety, security, and the overall stability of society within densely populated urban areas. However, it's important to note that the management of group renting is not solely concerned with safety. It also has broader implications as it pertains to the governance of urban migrants. This includes addressing issues related to the legality and regulation of group renting, as well as the broader socio-economic and demographic changes that arise from increased urbanization and migration.

The management of migrants, including refugees, has been a prominent topic in migration studies, both in the West and in China. In Europe and the U.S., efforts to manage

migrants often aim to incorporate them into local societies and involve diversity management strategies that can vary based on local culture (Wrench 2007). However, the practical implementation of these management policies often leads to unintended consequences. For instance, in the UK, policies aimed at managing refugees and asylum-seekers have, in some cases, eroded the rights of asylum-seekers (Flynn 2005). China, given its significant internal migration from rural to urban areas, grapples with managing the influx of migrants through policy measures. Conducting fieldwork in the same cohort of people—immigrants from Zhejiang province in Beijing—Biao Xiang (2005) and Li Zhang (2001) both reveal how the state labeled immigrants as a "mobile population," creating a new social category in the late 1990s. These policies focus on incorporating migrants into the management of governments rather than urban society. The management of migrants often emerges from a fear of "mobile strangers" in the city. Consequently, immigrants are subject to government supervision through registration, neighborhood monitoring, and even certification for child-rearing practices among women. Moreover, the gathering area of Zhejiang immigrants is faced with demolition and reconstruction under the pretext of social management and urbanization. A similar situation arose in 2017 when the Beijing government proposed the purging of the so-called "low-end population" consisting of manual laborers with low incomes and education levels. However, scholars have pointed out that such management could negatively impact urban life by diminishing the essential contributions of these workers (Hu 2015). In essence, these "invisible" laborers, like sanitation workers in New York City, play a crucial role in maintaining the fundamental aspects of urban life, such as cleanliness (Nagle 2014; Shao 2013).

The concept of urban management aiming to eliminate the "low-end population" is controversial, but it aligns with the broader goal of creating more modern and advanced cities. This management approach extends to the regulation of group renting, seen as a way to address the living conditions associated with the "low-end population." The COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine measures have accelerated state control (Yang et al. 2021). To trace positive cases and those in contact with infected individuals, local governments require precise household information. During the quarantine period, residents are confined to their homes, which facilitates government staff and residents' committee members' access to detailed household data. As a result, local authorities and residents' committees gain a clear understanding of the rental conditions of each household and can take action to address illegal arrangements.

Co-living residents faced potential scrutiny from the local government regarding their group renting arrangements. However, their collective response to this supervision and the actions taken by the local government and residents' committees reveal a more nuanced relationship. How do co-living residents deal with the supervision collectively? How do the local government and residents' committee manage group renting in practice? How do they interact with co-living residents? I argue that co-living is subjected to checks and supervision but not necessarily rigorous management. There are two primary reasons for this. First, co-living residents decided to cooperate with the local government to ensure their survival and continue their arrangements, indicating a degree of negotiation and compromise. Second, the co-living model does not align neatly with the government's "low-end population" management logic, making it a less prominent target for management efforts.

Cooperation with the local residents' committee emerged as a strategic approach that co-living residents adopted to ensure their survival within the challenging conditions of EHF. The living arrangements in this co-living space were technically illegal due to the unauthorized transformation of half of the balcony into a small room and the addition of an extra resident to reduce the average rent for individual residents. These violations placed them at significant risk of being reported to and managed by both the local residents' committee and the district government. However, the local residents' committee took a surprisingly lenient stance. Instead of reporting the illegal conditions of EHF to the district government, the committee recognized an opportunity to utilize the energetic and youthful co-living residents, particularly during the lockdown periods when volunteers were in high demand.³³ In this manner, an intricate and delicate balance was struck between co-living residents and the residents' committee. The residents' committee chose not to expose the illegal aspects of EHF, while the residents, in return, offered themselves as "compulsory" volunteers for the committee.

Through this collaborative relationship, co-living residents secured protection from the local residents' committee. The committee's personnel played a crucial role in helping the residents navigate the scrutiny and management imposed by the district government.³⁴ They advised the co-living residents that, when asked about the number of occupants, they should

³³ From April 1 to June 1, 2022, Shanghai, a renowned international metropolis with a population of 25 million, experienced a lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this challenging period, residents of the city spontaneously organized themselves to navigate through the hardships brought about by material shortages and the psychological pressures of confinement. For a more comprehensive exploration of their experiences during the lockdown and how residents collaborated through volunteer services, please refer to the forthcoming chapter.

³⁴ The residents' committees are the most grassroots-level organizations with access to information about local households. While they are legally autonomous organizations of local residents, in practice, they have affiliations with district governments. Consequently, they often collaborate with district governments on various management activities.

respond with "five" instead of "eight," as the former number was deemed safe in the eyes of government authorities. In August 2022, EHF faced an inspection by the police. The residents adhered to the advice and reported that there were five occupants in total. Upon inspection, the police verified that there were indeed five rooms within the house, allowing EHF to successfully navigate this inspection.

Why would the local residents' committee choose to tolerate co-living at the beginning? The local residents' committee's initial tolerance of co-living can be attributed to several factors that go beyond the enthusiastic contributions of co-living residents to volunteer activities. Deeper reasons are rooted in the management logic and practices of local governments: First, local governments typically target the "lower population" who serve in lower-class jobs. Co-living residents, who are white-collar workers and live a middle-class lifestyle, do not fit this target profile. Second, due to a shortage of manpower, it is unrealistic for district governments to inspect and manage all cases of group renting. Therefore, they only deal with cases that are reported and lead to numerous community complaints. The staff's workload is substantial, involving house visits to check living conditions, determining whether it qualifies as group renting, reporting to the local district government, collaborating with the district government for further investigations, and more. As such, they prefer to minimize reports on group renting unless the living conditions are genuinely precarious. Third, district governments typically play a more coordinating role than a punitive one in these matters. They do not take a firm stance with a single stakeholder but rather coordinate among various stakeholders in the renting process, including house owners, letting agencies, tenants, and local residents. As long as all stakeholders are satisfied with the final outcomes, the actual living conditions become less critical.

The situation of EHT provides a clear illustration of the logic and practices of the management approach. Prior to the quarantine, residents of EHT were not subject to the oversight of the local residents' committee. However, this changed after the quarantine period. Two staff members from the local residents' committee visited the house one day. They entered the living room and looked around, remarking, "Your living condition is so atmospheric (you qingdiao)" when they observed the elaborately furnished living room with items like guitars, projectors, and screens. They counted the number of rooms, registered residents' information, and departed without providing an evaluation of group renting. On the same day, two notices from the "Group Renting Rectification Department of the District Government" were affixed to the door of EHT. One notice indicated that there were illegal phenomena in the house, classified into five categories:

"Collective employee dormitories established within residential communities."

"Renting out after illegal partitioning and construction."

"Altering the original design and intended use of the property."

"Failing to complete registration procedures with the public security department and relevant authorities when renting or subletting a property."

"Other." referring to less severe cases of illegality.

EHT fell into the last category, "others," indicating that their illegality was less severe than those in the first four categories. Another information sheet clarified what the "others" category entailed. The district government required residents to register their personal information at the Group Renting Management office, which was a relatively minor issue. However, the important

question remained: Why did the local authorities decide to conduct this check in the first place, given that they did not initially recognize EHT as group renting?

I managed to contact one of the staff members from the residents' committee through WeChat to understand the reason behind this check. The staff member was friendly and suggested that residents could send her their names and ID card numbers directly. She would then report this information to the district government to resolve the problem. This approach was proposed to make it more convenient for residents, as coordinating a collective registration time would be challenging for individuals with work commitments. I asked her why residents received such a notice from the local government. She explained that it was because some residents within the community had reported numerous households as being involved in group renting. However, she believed that the reports were not entirely accurate. Many of these reports lacked certainty, and as a result, they had to visit each household to verify their living conditions. She expressed some frustration about the situation by sending a facepalm emoji, indicating that not all reports were justified, but the additional workload for her and her colleagues had increased due to these reports.

A couple of days later, the staff informed me that the local district government would conduct a double check of the conditions of EHT. However, she assured me that co-living residents would not face any punishment because their living conditions were not a priority for the district government's management. The double-check was simply a procedural requirement that the local government needed to fulfill. One evening, a group of officers from the district government, accompanied by a staff member from the residents' committee, as well as dozens of security guards and police officers, arrived at EHT. They gathered outside of the house and did

not enter, even though they were invited to do so by the residents. The head of the team politely explained that entering might make the room dirty. The leading officer requested the rent contract and took a photograph of it, suggesting that EHF was considered unproblematic now that there was a valid contract. They left shortly after checking the contract. Following this visit, EHF did not receive any further reports or information from residents or the residents' committee regarding group renting. The issue appeared to have been resolved.

The district government's requirement for officers to conduct a double check highlights the coordinating role it plays in the management of group renting. On one hand, they needed to provide satisfactory responses to those who had reported the issues. Thus, they took certain actions to inspect and address the subjects that were reported. In this case, they posted information on the door of EHT as a public announcement and conducted the double-check of its conditions. On the other hand, the district government was fully aware that the living conditions of co-living houses were not their primary target in the management of group renting. Therefore, they categorized the issue as "other" and simply requested that residents register with the district government. The lack of registration status was not, in practice, an illegal situation. This approach allowed both the residents' committee and the district government to satisfy the parties involved.

In summary, co-living residents passed through the inspections of local authorities, despite technically violating some regulations, such as "partitioning a room originally designed for living space" and "renting out spaces originally designed for non-residential purposes," both because of their actively cooperative actions and the management logic underlying the inspections. Co-living houses are, in essence, quite different from typical group renting situations

where dozens of residents share a living space, such as hostels and collective dormitories.³⁵ As the staff of the local residents' committee described, the setup in EHT was seen as "romantic" due to its distinctive furnishings. Because of this, co-living houses were excluded from the list of group renting properties after an assessment. In addition, the use of a facepalm emoji by the staff of the residents' committee suggests that they felt compelled, rather than eager, to check each household that was reported by community residents. They were also frustrated by unreasonable reports, as they did not want to side exclusively with local residents. Furthermore, the residents' committees play a coordinating role between reporters and those who are reported. The notices from the local district government indicate a problem with co-living, but it is viewed as one of the least significant issues. Both the reporters and co-living residents ended up satisfied with the results.

Arrogance and Negotiation: Pressures from House Owners and Letting Agencies

As renters, it is inevitable for co-living residents to talk and negotiate with house owners and letting agencies. Different parties have opposite interests and negotiate with their bargaining power. For co-living residents, they have the least bargaining power, so they have to work collectively to confront difficult situations.

Co-living residents often face the risk of being evicted or experiencing other changes initiated by house owners. As aforementioned, residents of EHF were evicted because of the

³⁵ Hostels and collective dormitories that accommodate dozens of long-term residents in urban areas often feature six to ten people sharing a single bedroom. This arrangement can make the living space quite crowded and disorderly. Residents in these conditions typically work in lower-skilled manual labor positions in cities. In some cases, business owners may rent a house and convert it into a collective dormitory for their employees. For instance, within the same building as Experimental House, there was a household where fourteen girls lived. All of them were employed at a barber's shop and worked as waitresses. These living conditions can be extremely cramped and are generally considered more problematic and challenging to manage than co-living situations.

annoyance of the house owner over frequent complaint reports. In the case of EHT, the residents had to move twice within two years. The first move was prompted by an house owner who violated the contract. One resident, Jingmo, recalled the experience, "My eyes lit up when I suddenly found a house with 12 rooms online. I told myself, 'This is our co-op house.' Twelve people would have a sense of community. So, I contacted the house owner immediately and asked Qinjiao and some others to check the house... We hurried to rent the house because there was competition from other potential renters. Perhaps due to our inexperience and my limited familiarity with the standards of renting in China since I had returned not long ago, we did not thoroughly evaluate the house owner but rented the house. We paid the down payment and moved in. However, the living conditions were intolerable. We requested the house owner to make repairs, but she never took it seriously." Zisu, another resident at that time, revealed that there were numerous unfair terms in the contract, including conditions that prohibited them from changing residents and required them to rent for at least two years. Zisu put forward her disagreements and negotiated with the house owner, but the owner refused to compromise. This situation illustrates the challenges and risks faced by co-living residents, particularly when dealing with uncooperative house owners and unfavorable rental agreements.

These difficulties and challenges faced by co-living residents sometimes lead to internal conflicts and cause some residents to retreat and leave the co-living houses. Zhaoyan expressed her frustration with the situation, particularly with roommates who were not actively engaged in the co-living community, "I was frustrated with my own issues at that moment and had to deal with the renting issues. Some roommates were not suited for such a community because they never contributed anything. They never participated in meetings and did not reply to messages in

group chats. Some residents left, which increased the economic and bargaining burden on others. We negotiated with the house owner to get our down payment back, but the house owner was very rude and told us to leave if we did not want to live there. We had to search for new houses at that moment, so we left the house almost overnight.” Zhaoyan described the situation as "making a hasty escape during the night," indicating the embarrassment and urgency they felt due to the circumstances they were facing.

The second move experienced by residents of EHT was initiated by the house owner's decision to sell the property. With the changed circumstances, the co-living residents had the opportunity to negotiate a new contract with the house owner. This time, they worked together to discuss some strategies. Ruiren, Zhaoyan and Kongqing, who were available to meet the house owner, planned their key points and strategies. They decided to focus on three main issues: rent, repairs, and contract renewal. The house owner said she only had received 14200 RMB/month (\$2085) since she rented the house to the letting agency three years ago. Now that the agency had asked the residents for 18500RMB/month, the new rent could be the middle (16000 RMB/month (\$2350)), which saved some money for co-living residents and increased the rent for her.

However, Ruiren and Zhaoyan believed that there was room to further lower the rent from the middle price, so they established 15,000 RMB as their bottom line. If the final rent exceeded this amount, they would opt to search for another house. The residents were more flexible regarding repairs and the length of the contract renewal. If the house owner followed their plan on the rent, they could cover the repairs and make some compromise regarding the length of renewal. During the negotiation with the house owner, Zhaoyan served as the spokesperson for the collective. She tactically highlighted the economic losses experienced by everyone due to the pandemic and

emphasized the residents' good maintenance of the property, making them valuable tenants. The house owner acknowledged the residents' performance and accepted their proposal of 15,000 RMB per month for rent. Costly repairs would be covered by the house owner, while inexpensive ones would be paid for by the co-living residents. The negotiations went smoothly, with both sides achieving satisfaction, particularly the co-living residents who now enjoyed significantly lower rent.

These contrasting cases highlight the importance of the collective bargaining power of co-living residents. However, house owners usually hold the upper hand in negotiations because they own the properties. Co-living residents typically face challenges in negotiating with house owners, and their ability to influence terms is largely dependent on the house owner's willingness to cooperate. In the case of EHT, a smooth negotiation notwithstanding, the house owner managed to sell the house around six months after the negotiation, which necessitated residents finding a new home.

Co-living residents also heavily depend on letting agencies to facilitate their rental arrangements. Letting agencies act as intermediaries between house owners and tenants, and their importance has grown in tandem with the significant expansion of the real estate property market in recent decades. The number of letting agencies in China has correspondingly surged, estimated at around 1.45 million.³⁶ These agencies engage in various real estate activities, including property leasing and sales, and they profit from rental and sales transactions. To maximize their profits, letting agencies often exploit the information gap that exists between house owners and tenants or buyers. This information gap can lead to mistrust among these

³⁶ The data resource: <http://house.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0911/c164220-30284846.html>

stakeholders, including house owners, tenants, and even employees within the letting agencies themselves (Xie and Lin 2022; Xing 2020). As a result, legal and economic conflicts between house owners and tenants can arise. Well-documented cases of such conflicts have been observed in China, such as the high-profile bankruptcy of the letting agency "Danke" in 2020. The collapse of "Danke" had significant repercussions, causing financial losses for tenants who had prepaid rent but were unable to recover their payments, as well as for house owners who did not receive their expected rental income from the agency. This situation escalated, leading some house owners to lock their properties and evict tenants. In an ironic turn of events, house owners and tenants, who should have both been considered victims of the letting agency's bankruptcy, found themselves at odds with each other. This unfortunate incident underscored the complexities and challenges within rental markets in China, revealing a range of issues, including information asymmetry, distrust, and legal and economic conflicts.

The unreliable nature of the rental market has made rental activities fraught with high risks and uncertainties. When the co-living residents of EHF sought to rent their second house, they encountered a letting agency that promised to help them find an ideal property quickly. This agency followed through on its promise and informed Fengshi, one of the residents who had been in contact with them, to inspect a house with the condition that Fengshi had to sign the contract promptly. Fengshi felt anxious but was enticed by the prospect of securing a new house, especially when demand was high. He asked his fellow resident, Ziyuan, to accompany him and instructed him not to bring their phones along. Fengshi's rationale for leaving their phones behind was driven by a fear that the other party might be kidnappers who would deceive them into signing a contract and then abduct them for ransom. In his mind, not having their phones

with them would prevent the kidnappers from blackmailing their friends and families in the event of an abduction. Fortunately, the other party turned out to be genuine house owners who offered a reasonable rental price. However, Fegnshi's initial thoughts and fears shed light on the widespread nervousness and uncertainty that can exist between tenants and letting agencies, highlighting the prevailing lack of trust in the rental market.

The residents of EHT did not have the same fortune as Fengshi when they "made a hasty escape during the night" and found a new place. In their rush to secure a new home, Zhaoyan discovered a property with the assistance of a letting agency that claimed the residents of the house were secondary property owners. Faced with their precarious situation, the co-living residents decided to rent this property from the supposed secondary house owners. However, it turned out that these so-called secondary house owners were actually another group of tenants, and they deceived both Zhaoyan and the other co-living residents, as well as the real secondary house owner, who was another letting agency. From the perspective of the co-living residents, these deceptive tenants falsely claimed to be the secondary house owners and charged the co-living residents the higher rent they had demanded. Meanwhile, from the standpoint of the real secondary house owner, which was the letting agency, these deceptive tenants falsely asserted that they were still residing in the property, paying a portion of the money they received from the co-living residents to the letting agency. The presence of numerous intermediaries in this situation significantly increased the costs for the co-living residents. It is estimated that co-living residents had to pay approximately \$700 more each month due to these intermediaries' actions. This illustrates the complexity and lack of transparency in the rental market, where deception and misrepresentation can lead to significant financial burdens for tenants.

The residents of EHT uncovered the deception when they accidentally made contact with the real secondary house owner. They decided to directly sign a new rental contract with the genuine secondary house owner, bypassing the deceptive middlemen. However, when the letting agency learned of the rent that the co-living residents had been paying to the cheater, they also sought to charge the same rent, leading to a deadlock in the negotiations. In response to this situation, the co-living residents decided to contact the real house owner directly in an effort to eliminate all intermediaries. The WeChat group established during the pandemic played a significant role in this process. One of the residents, Kongqing, picked up on hints provided by the real house owner's words in the WeChat group and tentatively began following her, which eventually led to a visit and re-negotiation of contract by the co-living residents as mentioned above.

Confronting Risks Collectively: Strategies for Survival of Co-living

Co-living in contemporary China represents an emerging and alternative rental lifestyle that occupies a somewhat ambiguous space between legal and illegal renting. Consequently, co-living residents are frequently faced with challenges and risks within the rental market, which can be classified into two categories: the general issues shared by all urban tenants and the unique challenges stemming from the co-living lifestyle. As discussed in this chapter, these challenges arise from the complex dynamics among various stakeholders within the rental market, a landscape that has evolved due to the marketization of housing in China since the late 1990s. The process of marketization has given rise to new types of neighborhoods, redefined the roles and identities of house owners, altered rental relationships, and led to the proliferation of letting agencies. Generally, like other urban tenants, co-living residents have less bargaining

power when faced with letting agencies and house owners due to their lack of information within the housing market and no ownership of estate properties. In particular, as an experimental lifestyle that deviates from the conventional expression of youth in public, co-living residents are faced with special issues like the suspicion and reports from neighbors, which, in turn, leads to increased intervention by local authorities.

Co-living residents have managed to survive in an environment fraught with suspicion, distrust, surveillance, and potential traps set by neighbors, authorities, and the rental market. Several factors have contributed to their ability to navigate these challenges. First, their middle-class identity plays a significant role in shielding them from heightened scrutiny and mistrust once their careers and educational backgrounds become known. This middle-class status serves as a protective factor and ensures that they remain outside the scope of management focused on the "lower-population." In addition, the most critical factor in enhancing the bargaining power of co-living residents is their collective strength. They have turned the challenges and risks they face into opportunities for collaboration, which, in turn, strengthens their sense of belonging and intimacy. By working together on various activities such as writing letters to new neighbors, volunteering for the residents' committee, and devising strategies to deal with letting agencies and house owners, co-living residents have fostered a strong collective identity. This collective identity, in turn, amplifies their bargaining power when confronting these risks and challenges.

The co-living lifestyle, as observed in this context, is far from a utopian ideal for the youth. Instead, it is intricately connected to various institutions and the people in their immediate environment. Through these connections, co-living residents are exposed to both power dynamics and risks, and it is through these connections that they acquire the resources to

confront and overcome those risks. The survival of co-living is contingent upon addressing these seemingly trivial issues. Unlike some idealized portrayals of co-living found in journal reports, this account of co-living in contemporary China highlights the reality of a lifestyle filled with risks and the strategies employed to navigate those risks. It paints a comprehensive picture of co-living in its true context.

6 Through the Risks We Go: Collectivity during the Lockdown of Shanghai

Introduction

As the proceeding chapter reveals, co-living residents are confronted with myriad challenges from neighbors, authorities and the housing market. Residents can work collectively to cope with some of the challenges, whereas others are beyond their control (specifically, the authorities' judgements about whether their rental arrangements count as legal shared renting). At the same time, there are some more authoritarian power and public risks that have influence on the co-living life in an unpredictable way and therefore are out of the control of residents. In this chapter, I will discuss how co-living residents navigate the challenges posed by more authoritarian powers and public risks that are often beyond their control. I will use the example of the quarantine policies and lockdown imposed by the Chinese state during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on how co-living residents faced and managed this situation collectively. I suggest that co-living serves as an organizational buffer between individuals and the state, providing them with material, emotional, and social protections when confronted with various risks. I argue that it works through both inward solidarity of residents when they act collectively, and outward connections with more people in the community. During the lockdown, on the one hand, they shared limited materials with each other, and the extended time spent together due to the quarantine encouraged increased communication and bonding among residents, strengthening their connections. On the other hand, residents actively engaged as volunteers in their community, contributing positively to the local neighborhood and improving the image of tenants in the eyes of local residents. This active participation in community service also led to

various rewards for co-living residents during the lockdown in Shanghai, which helped them go through the lockdown effectively.

The quarantine policies and the lockdown of Shanghai during the COVID-19 pandemic

The Chinese government implemented a "zero COVID policy" during the pandemic, which required centralized quarantine for every confirmed case of COVID-19 and close contacts (mijie) of the cases (within 1m of the confirmed cases). Additionally, individuals who had contact with close contacts, known as secondary contacts (ci mijie), were placed under home quarantine (Tang et al. 2020). The impact of positive cases, close contacts, and secondary contacts extended beyond individuals and affected entire communities. Residents living in the same building as positive cases and close contacts were required to undergo home quarantine for one week. Meanwhile, residents in the same building as secondary contacts had home quarantine for two days.³⁷ Given the significant number of individuals affected by quarantine measures, experiencing quarantine became relatively common during my fieldwork. I myself went through home quarantine three times, twice for two days and once for one week, along with another 6 residents at EHT.

In 2022, Shanghai experienced a significant lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the Shanghai government was previously known for its precise contact tracing and control of the virus, the situation in March 2022 spiraled out of control. As a result, the entire city, which is an international metropolis with a population of 25 million people, went into lockdown for two

³⁷ The policy described is based on the eighth version of the COVID-19 control plan implemented by the central Chinese government in 2021. This plan served as the primary policy for COVID-19 control throughout my fieldwork. However, it's worth noting that this policy was later revised, and the "zero COVID policy" itself was ultimately discontinued at the end of 2022.

months, from April 1st to June 1st. During this period, residents were not allowed to leave their homes except for COVID-19 testing. The government took responsibility for distributing food and essential supplies, and some supermarkets gradually resumed their services, but purchases could only be made online. The lockdown was an unexpected experience, so residents had to quickly prepare to ensure their health and stock up on enough food to sustain themselves during this period.³⁸ During the lockdown in the community where co-living residents lived, a volunteer team was established, with the leadership of the residents' committee, to assist with COVID-19 testing and other daily issues, serving as the bridge between the residents' committee and residents. This team consisted of 21 volunteers, including three co-living residents—Ruiren, Faxia, and me. The volunteers began their work on the first day of the lockdown, focusing on testing and resource distribution to support the community during this challenging period.

As the lockdown continued, more challenges began to emerge that were beyond the capacity of volunteers and the residents' committee.³⁹ The most pressing issues included material shortages and the mental strain of being confined. The government-distributed food supply was insufficient, leading to competition for limited resources through online platforms and self-organized group purchases (*tuangou*) to meet basic needs. It was especially challenging for co-living where so many people lived together and demanded large amounts of food. In addition to material shortages, mental pressure became a significant challenge, particularly for those who

³⁸ Just like the short-term quarantines, I also experienced the extended lockdown in EHT, alongside Jingmo, Kongqing, Ruiren, Zhaoyan, Faxia, and Xinyi. My deep involvement in the lockdown and the collective activities within EHT led to my inclusion of first-person narratives in this chapter.

³⁹ Initially, the government informed people that the lockdown would be in place for just four days. However, as the number of positive cases continued to rise, the lockdown was extended. In the end, the 4-day lockdown stretched into an unexpected two-month ordeal, only concluding once the number of positive cases reached zero.

were unable to work during the lockdown (Gan et al. 2022; Wang et al. 2021). For co-living residents, this situation was no different. Zhaoyan worked in a startup focused on advertising. The lockdown halted her work related to creating advertisement videos, leaving her with no income. "My sleep quality deteriorated, partially due to work-related stress, and my overall mood significantly suffered because of the lockdown. In the past, I used to travel with just a backpack to various cities, feeling secure and confident that I could handle any challenges as long as I had the means. However, the pandemic shattered that sense of security for me. It felt like a profound loss of trust in the stability and security of the entire social system." Another resident, Faxia, had quit her job before the lockdown, believing it would provide her with more time for other pursuits. However, she found that being confined during the lockdown was inefficient for getting things done. "I experienced a sense of being trapped in my own world, battling self-conflict and self-blame. It felt like a relentless drain on my energy over those two months. Even though I believed I had managed to regain some semblance of emotional equilibrium, I couldn't help but notice a noticeable decline in my enthusiasm compared to before. My inner energy seemed to wane. Furthermore, the uncertainties brought about by the pandemic left my future plans in limbo – questions about which direction Shanghai would take, how well the city would recover post-lockdown, and whether I would continue to reside in Shanghai loomed large."

When faced with so many difficulties, what was co-living life during the long lockdown? How did co-living residents deal with the lockdown collectively? What was the consequence of the engagement of co-living residents in community through volunteer service? What was the role co-living life plays in public risks such as the lockdown? In the following sections, I will

describe how they cope with these challenges collectively. They engaged in activities such as collective food purchasing, distribution, and consumption to address food supply issues. They also participated in collective entertainment to help manage emotional pressures. Furthermore, co-living residents actively engaged with their community through activities like material exchange, volunteer service, and caring for the elderly. These inward and outward activities played a crucial role in helping individuals navigate the lockdown, strengthen their connections, foster positive neighbor relations, and ameliorate some of the challenges they faced.

Going through difficulties collectively: collective movements during the lockdown

During the lockdown, co-living residents, like other Shanghai citizens, quickly realized they were facing a food shortage. The government initially distributed some food to residents, but this distribution was based on households rather than individual needs. Each household received the same amount of food, regardless of how many residents were living in it. This distribution method was insufficient for co-living residents, who had one of the largest numbers of residents per household in the community. To address the food shortage, residents organized collective efforts to live a kind of "communist life." They employed three main approaches to acquire food: group purchases, online platforms, and the black market, and shared any food they purchased collectively. These strategies were essential for securing enough food during the lockdown.

The concept of group purchases quickly gained traction in response to the food shortage. During the lockdown, the delivery capacity was limited, so delivery drivers preferred to send larger quantities of food to communities. This required residents to collectively place orders to

meet the minimum delivery requirements. Co-living residents, with their large household, were in a favorable position and often became the primary drivers of group purchases. Because of their significant orders, they were sometimes referred to as "dahu renjia" (big household).⁴⁰ In this system, every co-living resident closely monitored the latest group purchase information through WeChat. When useful materials or food supplies became available, the first resident to notice these items would inform others and ask for confirmation regarding the total quantity needed. Gathering input from all residents, the designated leader would then make the group purchase on behalf of the co-living house. This leader often made the initial payment, and the rest of the residents would reimburse their respective shares later. This collaborative approach helped the residents efficiently acquire the supplies they needed during the lockdown.

Online platforms were another important resource for supplication. The battle for online platform purchases during the lockdown was intense and challenging, akin to a daily "war without smoke." Given the limited supply, buyers were in fierce competition, and the speed of internet connectivity and the ability to click the "pay" button quickly were crucial. These platforms opened at different times each day, with some starting as early as 6 am. To ensure they would not miss out, residents set multiple alarm clocks. For example, I had five alarm clocks set at 6 am, 6:30 am, 8 am, 8:30 am, and 1 pm, corresponding to the opening times of four online platforms (one of which had two opening periods). Early risers in the co-living house were responsible for battling on these online platforms on behalf of the entire household, usually it

⁴⁰ "Dahu renjia," which literally translates to "large household," has a specific historical connotation in China. It traditionally referred to local wealthy and influential households, including landlords and noble families. These were the households that held significant economic and social power. The term "Dahu renjia" was amusingly applied to co-living residents, highlighting the contrast between their middle-class status and the traditional connotation of the term. It became a playful and humorous way for co-living residents to describe themselves as they made significant group purchases during the lockdown.

was Kongqing's and my tasks as we could get up early. Residents prepared by listing what they needed the night before. But they wouldn't know what was available for purchase until the platforms opened. To gain an advantage, buyers checked the selling list in advance and added their own items and those requested by other residents to their cart. When the alarm clocks rang, buyers had to click the "pay" button rapidly and repeatedly, often encountering messages like "Network Busy, Please Try Again." After hundreds of attempts within a few minutes, many buyers often found that most of what they wanted had already been sold out. The experience was akin to a daily lottery, with residents never knowing what they would be able to purchase, and their mood for the following day often hinged on whether they were successful in acquiring the items they needed.

Another channel was "black markets." Black markets, in this case, typically referred to shops or businesses that operated without government permission, often selling non-essential items such as snacks, cigarettes, and beer. Access to these black markets was usually possible only for residents in communities with less strict lockdown measures. Fortunately, co-living residents of EHT lived in such a community. Ruiren was adept at seeking out these black markets during the lockdown. He would venture out at night to find sources for essential goods. One day in May, Ruiren, Xinyi, Kongqing, and I embarked on a black market excursion to pick up items Ruiren had ordered. He had contacted the sellers through WeChat and paid in advance online. With proof of payment, the sellers informed him of a meeting place. The black market was situated around two miles from our house. To avoid encountering the police checkpoints that verified the "certification of pass," a government-issued permit for certain individuals, we could not walk along the main streets. We made our way through smaller, less-traveled streets towards

our destination. We passed by numerous gated communities where a large number of packages were piled up outside the gates. There were a few pedestrians, aside from delivery personnel, some accompanied by their dogs. Most of the regular shops were closed. At a crossroads, we encountered a police car waiting at a red light, just like us, not too close to us but on the same street. Ruiren, with his experience as a "sneaker," informed us that the police often checked the "certification of pass" for people waiting at traffic lights alongside the road rather than pedestrians. We grew cautious and kept our eyes on the police car, wondering if officers would approach us. Thankfully, the police car simply drove past when the green light appeared, allowing us to continue on our way. Upon arriving at the black market, we discovered that the term "black market" was somewhat misleading. It consisted of a car with a man standing beside it. The car's trunk and doors were open, and they were filled with snacks, beverages, beers, cigarettes, and other food items. Ruiren presented his payment information and collected the items he had purchased. Xinyi wanted to buy some cigarettes, but the businessman didn't have the means to process the payment. So Ruiren facilitated the transaction by making a WeChat payment on the spot, although it was directed to the businessman's absent wife. This approach allowed them to divide the costs and supplies, making use of a personal vehicle to store all the items, thus minimizing suspicion in case of police checks.

After purchasing food, the residents would typically divide it equally among themselves. They had discussions about how to fairly distribute the food, especially when they received vegetable and meat packages through group purchases. Initially, they proposed that all food bought through group purchases should be covered by collective funding. However, they soon realized that the rapid consumption of the food was straining their public funding. As a result,

they came up with another proposal, suggesting that all collectively purchased food could be equally divided, and each resident would pay based on the value of the section they received. This value was determined based on the price of the items on online platforms, with some adjustments to ensure fairness. For example, if there was one kilogram of string beans in the package purchased through group buying, and the price of string beans on an online platform was 10.9 yuan for every 300 grams (\$1.52 for every 300 grams),⁴¹ the total cost of one kilogram of string beans would be 32.7 yuan (\$4.56). They would then calculate the total cost of the package if each item was bought separately on the online platform. In this case, the package's total cost was 221 yuan (\$30.80), while the actual price of the package they purchased was 188 yuan (\$26.20). Taking into consideration the proportion between the online price and the real price of the package, they would determine the final price of the string beans, which would be 32.3 yuan (\$4.50). So, the resident who took the string beans would pay 32.3 yuan (\$4.50) to the person who purchased the package on behalf of the co-living house. If there were any items left, those would be covered by the collective funding. This approach ensured a fair distribution of the collective food purchases.

Figure 11: The price of one group purchase of vegetables

Item	Price(RMB)	Owner
String bean	32.3	Ruiren & Zhaoyan
Potato	11.1	The collective
Broccoli	4.8	Zhaoyan
Dried Tofu	4.5	Faxia
Thick bean curd sheets	26.8	Ruiren, Kongqing & Xinyi

⁴¹ The currency is based on the situation in Jan. 2023 when I revised this section.

Item	Price(RMB)	Owner
Tofu	6.1	Xinyi

Note: The potato was not taken by anyone because there was too much. So the public funding covered it, and anyone could use it.

If the division of vegetables followed the market economy in contemporary China, the division of meat among the residents was reminiscent of a time in "communist China" when planned economy was the norm. Typically, when they purchased meat through group buying, it came as a single large piece. In a manner reminiscent of the planned economy era (1949-1978), when people received food based on their needs from collective production teams in villages, residents would cut the meat into smaller pieces and divide it based on individual requirements. On one occasion, Kongqing acted as the butcher, meticulously cutting the meat into seven small pieces that were as similar as possible to ensure that everyone received a fair share. Simultaneously, I placed the small meat pieces on a scale, recorded their weight, and calculated the price of each piece. The meat pieces were then laid out on a table, and each resident took one and paid the calculated price based on the proportion of their division to the total weight of the meat. This scene reminded Kongqing of a plot from a soap opera about socialist China he had watched, where villagers were waiting for their share of meat during the Spring Festival under the planned economy.

The distribution of food was more about sharing costs than simply sharing food. Although the raw food was divided among the co-living residents, they typically consumed it collectively by having dinner together, with each resident contributing some food to their shared meal. At the beginning of the lockdown, most residents had dinner separately, following their own individual dinner schedules. However, as they spent more time locked indoors, with their

daily routines primarily consisting of sleeping and eating, their dinner schedules gradually synchronized. This led them to start cooking and having dinner together every day, which later became a tacit agreement among the residents. Usually, around 4 pm in the afternoon, residents began planning dinner and checked their food stocks to determine what they could contribute to that evening's meal. Residents took turns providing different types of meat or vegetables based on what they had in their stock. If a resident was experiencing a food shortage and could not contribute, they could "purchase" some food from another resident by paying the resident who was willing to contribute more. Then, some residents took on the task of cooking, and those who did not contribute to cooking would wash dishes after dinner. Zhaoyan, who didn't particularly enjoy cooking, often took on the role of washing dishes. However, over time, Zhaoyan also learned to cook under the guidance of other residents.

Figure 12: The division of labor amongst residents of EHT for one collective dinner

Meal	Chef	Contributor
Braised pork belly (hongshaorou)	Jingmo	Ruiren & Jingmo
Stir-fried Celery with Eggs	Kongqing	Kongqing
Grilled eggplants	Ruiren	Zhaoyan
Stewed potato, pock and string beans	Ruiren	Ruiren & Haoyan
Fried dumplings	Xinyi	Xinyi
Stir-fried vegetables	Xinyi	Xinyi
Pancake	Haoyan	The Collective

Meal	Chef	Contributor
Braised pork rib	Haoyan	Haoyan

Note: Here is the menu for the first collective dinner that took place half a month after the lockdown. Six residents participated in cooking and enjoying the dinner, while Faxia was busy with her work at that time. With two ovens available—one electric oven and an air fryer—two residents could cook simultaneously on both appliances. This allowed for various dishes to be roasted in the electric oven and air fryer at the same time. Before digging in, the residents took a group photo with their meals to commemorate this special feast during the lockdown. Zhaoyan remarked that the dinner was even more lavish and nutritious than their typical meals.

Amidst the food shortages, even regular fast-food options like KFC became scarce and valuable during the lockdown. For the co-living residents, sharing the limited supply of KFC turned into a special ritual. Their excitement was palpable when they discovered a group purchase option for KFC in mid-April, despite the limited menu choices. They initially ordered five combos but received only two, as the leader of the group purchase wanted to include more households in the KFC sharing. When the KFC delivery arrived, I was on a phone call in my room, and Jingmo came to knock on my door, letting me know that the others were waiting for me. I hurriedly ended the call and joined them. But Faxia was still in the bathroom and could not rush out, everyone waited patiently, staring at the two large KFC combo bags filled with fried chicken wings, contemplating the difficulties of life during the lockdown. No one touched the food until everyone was present. Once Faxia was ready, the ritual commenced. Residents had a brief division of labor first. Zhaoyan and Xinyi were responsible for opening the KFC bags and taking out the four boxes of fried chicken wings. Then Jingmo, Faxia, Zhaoyan, and I opened the four boxes. Kongqing and Ruiren captured the moments by taking photos and recording videos.

When all the food was laid out on the table, and with cheers, the co-living residents enjoyed their KFC together.

As previously mentioned, mental pressure was a significant issue for many people during the lockdown, especially those who were isolated in their homes. Fortunately, co-living residents did not experience loneliness, as they had roommates with whom to chat and play. They regularly discussed and vented their frustrations about the lockdown policies and shared online jokes, which helped release their pressure and anger. Fengshi, who lived in EHF, had a similar experience to his counterparts in EHT. He mentioned, "We eight residents lived together and always found something to do when we were bored. So, my mental state was pretty good, except I had to deal with work... It was like a fluctuation between happiness and unhappiness. But generally, the whole situation was pretty good. Or in other words, the unhappiness was released, suspended, or even resolved. We had lots of entertainment, just like the entertainment we had ordinarily, such as table games, video games, or sports. In the late period, studying was also one of the entertainment choices, like learning new knowledge or improving cooking and life skills, which was fun. I also chatted, communicated, watched TV and short online videos to kill the time. All in all, there was plenty of entertainment." Despite his mostly positive description of life during the lockdown, Fengshi hesitated every time he said he had a good mental state. He expressed uncertainty, saying, "I was not sure if it was good to say so," and "So the result was positive, well, I did not know why." His hesitation stemmed from an awareness that his circumstances were uncommon. However, this uncommon scenario underscores the ability of co-living residents to maintain a comparatively relaxed mental state in contrast to many Shanghai

citizens. This highlights the benefits of co-living in assisting individuals to cope with mental pressures during periods of risk and crisis.

As Fengshi mentioned, co-living residents engaged in various forms of collective entertainment during the lockdown. These activities were even more frequent as everyone stayed at home during this period. One popular form of collective entertainment was watching soap operas together. The content of soap operas often stimulated discussions and conversations among the residents, sometimes serving as background noise while they engaged in other activities. Typically, residents stopped watching as soon as dinner was over and went about their own tasks. However, during the lockdown, with residents having less to do, some of them chose to remain in front of the screen, continuing to watch the soap operas. This gradually became a daily activity. After finishing their dinners, those residents who participated in cooking moved to the sofas to enjoy the ongoing soap opera, while those who did not contribute to cooking took on the task of washing the dishes in the kitchen. Once the dishes were cleaned, the dishwashers would join the watchers in the living room. Sometimes, they watched until late at night, particularly when the soap opera reached a suspenseful climax that left everyone curious about what would happen next. The discussions and comments on the soap operas sparked conversations among the residents, occasionally leading to debates, but overall, it provided a happy and engaging aspect of co-living life during the lockdown.

The collective life during the lockdown intensified the closeness among the co-living residents as they engaged in frequent communications and shared activities. “It was a different experience from our usual routines,” Meriden suggested, “and the forced togetherness had a profoundly positive impact on our relationships. We found ourselves cooking and sharing meals,

watching movies, and engaging in lively discussions daily. The atmosphere felt akin to a closely-knit family, but with a unique and intense twist.”

Co-living life offers several advantages compared to living alone, especially during a lockdown. Co-living residents can share information, provide mutual support, and organize collective activities to alleviate the boredom and loneliness that often accompany lockdowns. The close, face-to-face interactions they enjoy are especially valuable when external social connections are severed due to lockdown restrictions. As a result, the collective lifestyle helps to mitigate the challenges and risks associated with lockdowns by providing social and emotional support within the co-living community. Furthermore, co-living residents did not confine themselves to their homes during the pandemic. They actively engaged with their local community, even as tenants rather than homeowners, through activities such as material exchange, volunteer service, and caring for the elderly. These activities helped strengthen their relationships with neighbors and homeowners and contributed to resolving some of the challenges they faced (as discussed in Chapter 5). In the next section, I will explore their community engagement through the lens of the classical gift-exchange paradigm in anthropology and exchange theory, shedding light on how their efforts enhance neighborly relations as a form of reciprocity.

Gift and social exchange: Engagement in community in the midst of the lockdown

During the lockdown, when both the market and government struggled to effectively supply food and other public services, exchange became a vital mechanism for mutual support. Co-living residents actively engaged in exchanges with their neighbors. The exchanges consisted of three aspects: material exchanges, volunteer services and elder care. Through the exchanges,

co-living residents established more connections with neighbors. For example, as mentioned in chapter 2, residents discovered that the wife of the neighbor was a hardworking and fashionable middle-class woman. When Ruren mentioned that the doctoral resident (myself) was responsible for baking the pancakes, the hostess revealed her familiarity with the popular American sitcom *Friends*, which was surprising, as it was typically associated with a younger audience.

The interactions between co-living residents and their neighbors manifest through two distinct threads of exchange. The first thread encompasses individual exchanges and concurrent social exchanges characterized by social solidarity (Blau, 1964). These exchanges foster emotional bonds among individuals through the mechanism of reciprocity, contributing to the "micro social order" within groups (Lawler Thye and Yoon 2008). Marshall Sahlins delineates three types of reciprocity: generalized reciprocity, balanced reciprocity, and negative reciprocity (Sahlins 1972). During the lockdown period, both generalized and balanced reciprocity were evident among residents. Generalized reciprocity was observed in volunteer services and elder care, enhancing solidarity between volunteers and residents (Molm Collett and Schaefer 2007), while balanced reciprocity manifested in material exchanges among individual residents. These exchanges, initially occurring at the individual level, resulted in affective connections and the establishment of new social solidarity within the community (Lawler 2001).

The second thread involves gift exchange, reminiscent of "archaic" forms of exchange as theorized by Marcel Mauss. In his classical analysis, Mauss (1966) posits that gift exchange, part of the "system of prestations," underpins social relationships and is intertwined with the spirit of gifts, morality, individual spirit, myths, and symbolic systems. The principle of reciprocity dictates that received gifts must be reciprocated, creating an intrinsic link between the exchange

of goods and social relationships. As Mauss contends, "it takes the form of interest in the objects exchanged; the objects are never completely separated from the men who exchange them; the communion and alliance they establish are well-nigh indissoluble" (Mauss 1966: 31).

Jonathan Parry (1986) serves as a valuable reminder of Marcel Mauss's emphasis on holism and relationalism as fundamental features of the "system of prestation." Parry notes that the exchange of gifts is initially a collective exchange before transitioning to individual exchanges. "For it is groups, and not individuals, which carry on exchange, make contracts, and are bound by obligations...Further, what they exchange is not exclusively goods and wealth, real and personal property, and things of economic value...Finally, although the prestations and counter-prestations take place under a voluntary guise they are in essence strictly obligatory, and their sanction is private or open warfare" (Mauss 1966, 3). In this sense, gift exchanges, different from those exchange formats of exchange theory, symbolize connections between two groups or identities rather than individuals.

While as Parry posits, the traditional concept of gift-exchange, as elucidated by Mauss, has indeed been fractured, in the context of the co-living community during the lockdown, the gift-exchange thread gains significance. The exchanges extended beyond individual interactions among residents to encompass two distinct identities in the community—house owners and tenants. Co-living residents, acting as tenants, encountered distrust and challenges in the community, as detailed in the last chapter. Consequently, their participation in exchanges, spanning material exchange, volunteer services, and elder care, transcended individual interactions and contributed to fostering connections not only at the individual level but also

group level—between house owners and tenants—thereby promoting connectivity between these two groups.

Despite the food shortage during the lockdown, residents continued to share food with those in dire need rather than keeping food and other materials. One resident, in particular, consistently and enthusiastically shared updates about every food exchange she had with other residents:

Enjoy the wonderful feeling of mutual exchange and assistance. 💕

I happily accept the gift of 4 green radishes and green chilies. I like these, thank you! 🙌 🌹 🙏

I also need to commend Mrs. J. My cornstarch was running out, and she had just half a small bowl left, but she shared some with me. Today, the shredded meat I cooked was much tenderer!

Thanks again! 🙌 🙏

The day before yesterday, I called the building security about the bread my husband had; there were only 3 left. Mrs. T, upon hearing the news downstairs, immediately brought five or six slices of toast bread! I was so touched; I want to thank her through this platform! 🙌 🌹 🙏. (data from WeChat group 20220421)

Zhaoyan once exchanged some cooking wine with soy sauce with the residents. After the exchange, that resident posted a message in WeChat group, expressing, "We experienced the neighborly friendship of sharing items with one another." Given the age gap between them, Zhaoyan felt somewhat surprised by the enthusiasm in the message. Nevertheless, she responded politely with a shaking hands emoji to convey her happiness about the collaboration. While not

everyone shared their exchanges in the WeChat group as openly as that resident, such exchanges were a common and frequent occurrence among all residents, including those of us in co-living arrangements.

The instances of material exchanges within the community underscore the fact that the primary purpose of these exchanges during the lockdown was not accumulation but rather distribution. Residents aimed to share items with others rather than amass goods for themselves. Parry suggests that "the gift *must* be alienated, should *never* return, and should endlessly be handed on" (Parry, 1986, original italics). Viewed from a Sinic perspective, particularly through the lens of Laozi, a Chinese classic, which differs from the conventional gift paradigm, Yongjia Liang (2022) proposes the concept of "non-accumulation," which aligns with the fundamental logic underpinning kula rings. Accumulation is discouraged as it could tarnish individual reputations and devalue the kula shell and name. Instead, the kula shell must be circulated and exchanged, as it is through this process that personal fame can be accrued, albeit fleetingly, as it often fades upon the individual's death (Liang, 2022).

In this process, a reputation for generosity began to accumulate. During the lockdown, some residents actively participated in online battles for food supplies on various platforms. Despite not personally accumulating extra food, they managed to secure additional items for fellow residents by successfully navigating the challenging online purchasing processes. These individuals gained recognition and earned the title of "golden figure" within community. Their online prowess in quickly clicking the "pay" button was exceptional, and their reputation for helping others grew (see the proceeding section of online purchase in this chapter). For example, on a platform called Dingdong Maicai, there were two purchase rounds each day, one at 6:30 am

and the other at 8:30 am. Those who successfully purchased items in the first round often extended their support to others in the second round if they still needed items. If someone failed to secure their desired items in the first round, they would seek assistance by posting requests like, "Would any 'golden figure' be willing to purchase xxx for me on Dingdong Maicai? Thank you." Those who had succeeded in their first-round purchases were more than willing to help their less fortunate counterparts. This willingness to assist and share contributed to the reputation of these "golden figures" as selfless and resourceful individuals.

The accumulation of fame and reputation played a significant role in strengthening the relationships among the residents (Lawler 2001; Lawler et al. 2008). This dynamic is characteristic of *guanxi*, the Chinese concept of interpersonal relationships (Yan 1996). In gift exchange processes, *guanxi* serves as the social contract, in Parry's sense, that Chinese individuals use to navigate interactions and relationships. Yunxiang Yan has described *guanxi* networks as having a dynamic quality, where the significance of relationships depends on the exchange of gifts. These networks consist of a "personal core," a "reliable area," and an "effective area," each of which carries different implications for the meaning of gift exchange. Through the act of gift exchange, individuals can enter into different areas of relationships within these networks. In the Chinese context, it is concepts like *renqing* (favor) and *mianzi* (face), in lieu of gift spirit, that motivate the exchange of gifts and shape the morality of interactions. During the lockdown, co-living residents used gift exchange as a means to enter into the *guanxi* networks of their neighbors, including homeowners, by offering gifts and assistance to other residents.

More important promotion of neighborhood relations is resulted from the devotion of time and effort, more than materials, of co-living residents through elder care and volunteer service. The volunteer services and elder-caring serve as gift of co-living residents, as the identity of tenants. They received good reputation and discounted rent as payback from house owners of other households and the house owner of the house for co-living, another group identity in this exchange process. Ruiren took it upon himself to establish an elder care group within the community during the lockdown. This initiative stemmed from the vulnerability of the elderly residents in the midst of the pandemic, who faced not only health risks but also difficulties in adapting to rapidly changing technology and information dissemination through smartphones. As smartphones became the primary source of information sharing for government policies and food purchases, the elderly, who were not as proficient with these devices, found themselves left behind. The information explosion and the complexity of smartphone operations posed significant challenges for them. Ruiren recognized these challenges and decided to create an elder care group to address the needs of the elderly in the community. Ruiren's interest in elder care was not merely coincidental. He had previously written a term paper on the subject during his undergraduate studies. Additionally, his own maternal grandmother was an elderly individual living alone, which made him keenly aware of the difficulties faced by older people. When he discovered that some elderly residents in the community were enduring the lockdown without the company of their children, he felt compelled to take action. In addition, Ruiren had some contact information for individual deliverers. By doing so, he managed to secure extra supplies beyond what was available through group purchases and government distribution. This

additional material allowed him to address the specific needs of the elderly residents more effectively.

Ruiren took the initiative to draft a scenario outlining the goals, responsibilities, and potential risks associated with the elder care group. The scenario emphasized the importance of providing assistance to the elders without causing any disruptions to their lives. It also stressed the need to maintain the dignity of the elders and explore acceptable approaches to offering assistance. Furthermore, it made clear that members had the option to leave the group if they found interactions with the elders to be personally challenging. Recognizing the importance of learning from experts in the field of elder care, Ruiren sought advice from a friend who worked as a social worker specializing in elder care. This consultation allowed him to gain valuable insights and experience. Once he felt adequately prepared, Ruiren proposed the creation of the elder caring group in the community's WeChat volunteer group in which both the staffs of residents' committee and volunteers were actively participated. So, he could learn the opinions of the staff if they would like to support him, and if some volunteers would like to assist with elder care. This initiative garnered the support of twelve volunteers, including four co-living residents (Ruiren, Xinyi, Faxia and me). Ruiren subsequently provided the volunteers with instructions on how to assess the needs and conditions of the elderly residents, along with the assistance measures he had prepared:

- 1. At the beginning of the call, explain that you are a volunteer assisting the neighborhood committee in investigating and understanding the elderly's living conditions to make the other person feel comfortable talking to you.*

2. *During the call, gather information based on the following key points. Maintain politeness and effective communication skills. If there is a language barrier, mention in the group that a revisit should be scheduled.*
3. *The areas of concern include:*
 - (1) *Inquire about the elderly person's health condition, such as whether there is a shortage of medication or any urgent needs. Ask if there is someone taking care of them in case of mobility issues.*
 - (2) *Ask about their current living conditions, such as whether they have enough food, and inquire about what they have eaten recently.*
 - (3) *Check if the elderly person has maintained contact with family members. Record emergency contact information as necessary.*
 - (4) *Provide explanations about the current lockdown situation as appropriate to alleviate any psychological stress the elderly person may be feeling.*
 - (5) *Before concluding the call, ask the elderly person to jot down your contact number and let them know they can call this number if they have any questions or need assistance.*

The residents' committee shared the roster of elders living alone in the community, a total of eleven households. Among them, some elders had live-in caregivers, a situation slightly better than that of those living alone. A critical aspect of our assistance involved obtaining medicines for the elders. Due to the extended lockdown and the confinement of family members to their own homes, a shortage of medications emerged as a pressing and potentially life-threatening issue for the elderly. Consequently, the elder care team took on the responsibility of ensuring a steady supply of essential medications for them.

Faxia helped two elders in obtaining medicine from hospitals. It proved to be a meaningful and rewarding experience for her. As Faxia put it, "I consider helping elders a duty. Aging is inevitable, and as we grow older, the likelihood of needing assistance increases. Recognizing that I too will become old one day, I believe in offering support to the elderly. Joining the elder caring team was a decision I made without much contemplation. The main distinction I've observed between older individuals and the youth is their profound gratitude for any assistance. They don't take your efforts for granted. Even a small gesture is met with repeated expressions of gratitude, which pleasantly surprised me. I've heard some people suggest that volunteering is motivated by a desire for reputation or financial gain. While such motives may exist, they are not applicable to me. I view help as something that should be shared and passed down through generations. Having received assistance from others, I feel it's my duty to extend that help to more people."

Her experiences with helping the elders changed her views on elders and overcame her fearfulness of hospitals during the lockdown. "At the outset, I felt a bit nervous as it was my first time undertaking this responsibility. Managing numerous medical records and credit cards of the elders, I was concerned about the possibility of mixing them up or misplacing them. However, I soon discovered that hospitals had implemented special procedures for our assistance, streamlining the process. Rather than navigating different departments, I could conveniently obtain all the required medicines in one designated area. The hospital staff were supportive, offering helpful suggestions and guidance for a quicker and more efficient experience. Despite initial concerns about the risk of the pandemic in hospital settings due to the high number of positive cases, my perspective changed once I was on-site. Surprisingly, hospitals turned out to

be among the safest areas, with thorough and frequent disinfection protocols in place. This realization added an interesting dimension to the experience, particularly as I became more familiar with the entire process."

Faxia's contribution received payback from the elders she helped. "One of the households belonged to an elderly oil painting artist. Each time I visited to deliver his medicine, he would warmly invite me into his home, engaging in extensive conversations. Initially, he intended to offer me money for my assistance, but I declined. Instead, I shared my passion for painting with him, which delighted him, and he automatically considered me his disciple. It's amusing to note that I never formally asked him to be my teacher (Faxia chuckled). He would carefully select some of his works for me to draw and provide precise, professional feedback on my efforts. Occasionally, he showcased his artwork on WeChat. Even after the lockdown, we continued to stay connected. Another household, while not as enthusiastic as the artist, expressed their appreciation differently. They consistently shared food with me during the lockdown, extending invitations to their home whenever they cooked something special."

Ruiren, in contrast to Faxia's personal connections cultivated through her assistance to elders, received public commendation from residents due to his volunteer service. One day, an elder expressed his gratitude through messages in WeChat group, acknowledging the help provided by two volunteers, one of whom was Ruiren.

"The pandemic is relentless, yet neighbors are compassionate. While we are staying at home for epidemic prevention, what used to be a distant relationship between people has now turned into mutual support among us.

Volunteer Ruiren called me multiple times, asking if there's anything I need help with. Never having met him in person, how could I trouble him? The day before yesterday, he called again, asking if there's anything he can do for me, such as getting medication. It was then that I realized I was out of medicine. He immediately offered to pick up the prescription for me. He ran around for two consecutive days. On the first day, he didn't get all the medications, and he even encountered rain midway. On the second day, he specifically went to a hospital, waited in a long line, and finally got everything.

The volunteer L is also enthusiastic and helpful, tirelessly serving all of us. In fact, all the volunteers in our community are like this. They are warm-hearted, delight in helping others, and dedicate themselves to serving everyone. True feelings are revealed in adversity, and the pandemic exposes people's true nature.

Here, I would like to express my gratitude to Ruiren and Liuzhi, and all the volunteers!”

Many residents joined in, and the commendation expanded to encompass all acts of kindness from neighbors and the leaders of the group purchase.

"Thumbs up to all the volunteers in Changhua! 👍👍👍

“Applause for the team leaders and the helpful neighbors 🙌🙌🙌

“From the initial disruptions during the first lockdown to the current harmonious neighborhood, our community is becoming better and better. ✨” (data from WeChat group, 20220427)

Co-living residents garnered praise and built positive relationships with neighbors through their volunteer services and elder care efforts. Their positive image became so deeply

ingrained in the minds of neighbors that even their personal activities were misunderstood as acts of service. Fengshi shared an amusing anecdote from the lockdown about an incident where he and Meiren were hauling materials they had personally purchased downstairs. Observing residents misunderstood their actions as volunteer work, they expressed their appreciation by shouting from their windows. Though Fengshi and Meiren felt embarrassed, they chose not to correct the misunderstanding to avoid further awkwardness but responded to the neighbors politely. This incident illustrates the co-living residents' significant involvement in the community. Through their volunteer work, they became acquainted with other residents, and their hardworking nature led neighbors to perceive all their actions as acts of volunteering. Such kind of appreciative passion on residents highlighted the emotional bonding between residents through exchange (Stewart and Schultze, 2019; Yao et al. 2017). Consequently, they exchanged goodwill for their efforts, fostered positive relationships, and reshaped the perception of tenants in the minds of residents, offering some relief from the challenges they faced in their daily lives (as discussed in Chapter 5).

The recognition and praise were not the sole rewards for co-living residents; they also reaped tangible benefits through material distributions in the community. When surplus materials were available from the government, fellow volunteers often made a conscious effort to provide additional supplies for co-living residents, understanding their greater needs. Particularly in the later stages of the lockdown when resources were more abundant, co-living residents routinely received double portions of materials, and no one dissented. On one occasion, while I distributed vegetables and brought two boxes of vegetables (double the usual amount) back to EHT, another resident volunteer who led the distribution discreetly directed me downstairs without specifying

why. To my surprise, he handed me an additional box of vegetables and some extra materials, resulting in co-living residents receiving triple the usual amount that time—and this was not an isolated occurrence. Another significant practical advantage that co-living residents gained from their volunteer work was a reduction in rent. As discussed in the previous chapter, when co-living residents engaged in discussions about negotiating a new lease with the property owner, she readily accepted their proposal. A key factor behind her agreement was the belief that co-living residents enhanced her “face” (mianzi) during the lockdown. Other residents had informed her about the community service efforts of co-living residents, prompting her to “repay” them through a reduction in rent.

The lockdown unexpectedly created a situation in which the modern market economy ceased to function, and “the system of prestation,” as per Mauss' concept, resurfaced. As Parry suggests, the gift-exchange process is a system that encompasses every individual, and subsequently, individual behaviors are motivated by the system. The lockdown serves as a vivid example of this process. Firstly, the exchange of materials becomes essential for individual survival during the lockdown, involving everyone in the process. It functions as a system to ensure the survival and solidarity of individuals (Goh et al. 2019). From an individual perspective, gift-exchange occurs through the avenues of material exchange, fostering good relationships, and ultimately building a positive reputation. In the Chinese context, considering the perspective of *guanxi*, tenants initially stand outside the *guanxi* networks of homeowners and other local residents. However, during the lockdown, tenants transition into the role of gift-givers—providing life materials, engaging in volunteer services, and offering elder care. These actions are undertaken to contribute time and energy in exchange for the trust of homeowners. Through

this gift-giving dynamic, tenants break down the barriers between homeowners and tenants, integrating into the guanxi network of homeowners in the same community. At the same time, some homeowners also actively establish relations with tenants for functional purposes. For instance, certain group tenants, due to their larger numbers and consumption, frequently purchase food, enjoying access to fresh produce. Homeowners with smaller households join them in these purchases, leading to a symbiotic relationship. It's important to note that the gift-exchange between co-living residents and their neighbors is embedded in an initially tense and hierarchical neighborhood relationship, as discussed in the preceding chapter. Through gift-exchange, these tense relations are alleviated (Zhou and Dong, 2023). As one resident expressed in a WeChat group message, "From the initial disruptions during the first lockdown to the current harmonious neighborhood, our community is becoming better and better." Therefore, the spirit of volunteerism represents a hybrid of multiple motivations, including autonomous choices for oneself, the pursuit of rights, and active engagement in the community (Wang 2014). Through volunteer service and participation in public affairs, co-living residents not only help others but also garner material benefits and enhance their own reputations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I delve into co-living as an organizational buffer positioned between individuals and the state. The direct interactions between individuals and the state stem from the process of individualization in Chinese society, as underscored by Yunxiang Yan (2009, 2010). Yan argues that the Chinese individualization process is instigated by the state, contrasting with the bottom-up approach in the West (Yan 2010). Despite the notion of "Socialism from afar" (Zhang and Ong 2008), the state permeates private and intimate spheres through channels like

social media, guiding the individualization of individuals in their everyday lives (Kong 2012; Sun and Lei 2017). Consequently, transformations in private life are intricately linked and influenced by shifts in national policies and laws (Yan 2009a). As a process initiated by the state for the sake of modernization, individualization becomes a partially unexpected consequence, lacking the institutional and ideological basis found in the welfare state and individualism (Yan 2010a: 510). In his "Individualization 2.0," Yan further asserts that without sufficient re-embedding mechanisms, individuals revert to families—a traditional social category from which people disembedded decades ago—to seek refuge from risks. This gives rise to neo-familism in contemporary Chinese society (Yan 2021a). With no alternative re-embedding mechanisms beyond the family, the state successfully promotes loyalty and a sense of belonging among individuals, leading to the emergence of nationalism as compensation for the absence of re-embedding mechanisms (Yan 2021c: 58).

In a society undergoing individualization, individuals still rely on institutions to mitigate risks (Bauman 2000; Giddens 1991; Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim 2002). In the Chinese context, co-living presents an alternative within "Individualization 2.0" that extends beyond the state and family. The co-living lifestyle itself functions as a re-embedding mechanism, offering residents a collective means to address risks stemming from the state, particularly the grassroots governments embodied by the community and the housing market—both of which are strongly influenced by state policies. This role of co-living becomes particularly evident during the lockdown, as discussed in this chapter.

In practice, the risk-buffering role of co-living life operates through two distinct approaches. Internally, co-living residents collectively navigated material shortages and mental

pressures, albeit somewhat compelled. They engaged in joint purchasing, distribution, and consumption of limited food resources and partook in shared entertainment to alleviate the mental strain of a stressful situation. Consequently, they ultimately led more comfortable lives compared to other Shanghai citizens, benefiting from enhanced collective support. Externally, co-living residents proactively extended connections to others, seeking additional support. Employing a gift-exchange process, they actively assisted fellow community members during the lockdown, participating in material exchanges, volunteering, and caring for the elderly. As a result, they cultivated amicable relationships, earned a positive reputation within the community, and reaped tangible benefits in return.

In summary, when faced with the challenges imposed by the lockdown, an institutional risk stemming from national policies, co-living residents joined forces to navigate the difficult times. This underscores the resilience of co-living life and highlights the pivotal role of mutual support within the co-living community (Fuschillo and D'Antone 2023; Horak and Vanhooren 2023). In this context, co-living in major cities such as Shanghai emerge as crucial institutional buffers between individuals and the state, offering protection against risks originating from state and other institutional actions. This dynamic suggests the emergence of a new matrix of social organizations in contemporary China.

Conclusion: Into the Future We Look—Understanding Co-living and Youth in Mobility

It is time to say goodbye.

As depicted in Chansu's images (referenced in Chapter 1), the challenge of establishing a sense of self within the orbit of others' boundaries is a recurring theme, emphasizing the nuanced navigation required to maintain mutual respect and harmony. Together, we have delved into both the domestic interactions of co-living residents and the dilemmas they encounter in co-living life. It's essential to reiterate that co-living life is an experimental and transitional lifestyle explored by these young residents, not a lifelong commitment. Among the more than 20 residents who have lived at EHT, only three—Jingmo, Zhaoyan, and Kongqing—resided from the beginning to the end, (spanning from July 2021 to March 2023). Most residents stayed at EHT or EHF for approximately half to one year. For co-living residents, the co-living experience represents just one phase of their lives, and they will eventually transition to new life chapters.

How should we understand the intimate but short-term relationships in co-living life? What is the meaning of such experimental and transitional living arrangement for the youth? Typically, short-term relationships are overlooked in studies, as there is an assumption that they have minimal impact on individuals' personalities and values. Similarly, organizations with highly mobile members are often viewed as unstable. However, in contemporary China, mobility is the prevalent condition for youth in urban areas who frequently move between cities, establishing connections that may be short-lived. As highlighted in Chapter 3, youth can cultivate intimate relationships with strangers, demonstrating that short-term connections and intimacy are not mutually exclusive. Some short-term relationships may evolve into long-term friendships,

and the concept of friendships everywhere, rather than long-term associations with a specific group of people in one city, forms the social connections of today's youth. Therefore, studying how intimate relationships are established in short-term connections through the lens of co-living offers insights into the social connection matrix of urban youth. Moreover, the co-living experience proves beneficial for residents in terms of familial relations and individual intimacy, albeit in short-term relationships. According to Kongqing, co-living life served as a rehearsal for family life in the future. Dealing with everyday issues in co-living helps residents anticipate potential familial challenges with their future partners. Changshan shared that co-living taught her valuable lessons in communication, particularly regarding Chinese relationships (*guanxi*) and establishing intimacy with others.

In this concluding section, I will revisit the co-living life analyzed in this dissertation by taking the mobility of residents into consideration to deepen our understanding of youth lives and organizations in contemporary China. Therefore, this conclusion goes beyond summarizing the preceding chapters; it also involves an analysis of co-living institutions and residents' changing situations. Firstly, I will analyze the meaning of mobility for individual residents and co-living institutions. Subsequently, I will delve into the title of this dissertation, "collective individualization," examining it as both the cause and consequence of youth preferences, behaviors, and thoughts in contemporary China, with co-living lifestyle as a representative case. Last, but not least, there will be an epilogue discussing the opening and closing dynamics of co-living houses as a reflection of the developmental trajectory of co-living in China.

The rites of leaving

When a resident decides to leave, it is a requirement to notify others about the departure date at least one month in advance. This practice serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it allows ample time for other residents to find a replacement, mitigating potential economic losses resulting from vacant rooms. Secondly, it provides an opportunity for the remaining residents to prepare for changes in their co-living arrangements. For residents in specific roles, such as a financial manager, departing residents take measures to ensure a smooth transition of responsibilities. Such transition of responsibilities is a kind of rite of leaving for residents. For instance, when Houpu, the first financial manager of EHT, prepared to leave, he transferred his role to me, deeming me qualified for the position. Houpu provided a comprehensive orientation, detailing the financial charts, and outlining the crucial elements to be recorded monthly, including co-living house expenditures and income. He emphasized the intricacies of rent and contributions from each resident, stressing the importance of meticulous accounting. Once I was acquainted with the financial status, Houpu transferred the remaining balance from the collective funding account to mine. This practice of responsible handover was reiterated when I later departed, transferring the collective funding responsibilities to Kongqing.

At EHF, a unique rite of leaving emerged when a resident decided to leave—the creation of a "family portrait." The inaugural occurrence of this ritual took place in September 2022 when Nanjing, a former resident, was set to embark on a journey to Britain. Several other residents, including myself, were also on the verge of leaving around the same time. To commemorate this juncture, residents devised a plan to capture a family portrait that would encapsulate the intersection of current and former residents. A total of ten individuals, both current and former residents, participated in this memorable occasion. To ensure a seamless arrangement for the

portrait, Fengshi and Ziyuan, two residents, dedicated the previous night to rehearsing the positioning of each participant. They proposed and experimented with various layouts, utilizing the camera to gauge the visual impact. After careful consideration, a final arrangement was settled upon, with five individuals in the foreground and five in the background. Fengshi proactively rented a tripod to ensure the stability of the camera. The actual portrait session took place in the early morning, accommodating the work schedules of some residents. Despite the early wake-up call, all participants managed to adorn the portrait with radiant smiles, encapsulating a moment of shared history.

The tradition of taking a family portrait upon a resident's departure proved to be both interesting and meaningful for the residents of EHF. This collective activity fostered the active participation of all residents and contributed to an increased sense of belonging within the community. Moreover, it served as a tangible record of their co-living experiences. Fengshi expressed a desire to consistently occupy the same position in each family portrait, aspiring to witness the changes in himself juxtaposed with different individuals surrounding him over time. Fengshi has many family portraits as I write this dissertation. Some portraits featured familiar faces, while others introduced new participants, collectively documenting the dynamic evolution of their co-living life.

The rites of leaving, despite being labeled as such, effectively contribute to the ongoing continuity of co-living. One of the functions of the rites of passage is the continuation of the collective, which reinforces social support and positive social representations. Firstly, the transfer of responsibilities, serving as a form of rite of passage, ensures the uninterrupted functioning of co-living houses. The departure of certain residents does not disrupt the day-to-day operations, as

the management seamlessly transitions to new individuals. Secondly, these rituals maintain emotional connections between departing and remaining residents. The family portraits serve as a visual chronicle of the collective co-living experiences of this group of youth. They not only record the history of co-living but also communicate to current residents that, when their time comes to leave, they too will be commemorated in a similar fashion, becoming a lasting part of the collective memory. Thus, the family portrait simultaneously strengthens the sense of collective identity while marking the departure of specific residents.

Mobility and “Delayed” Life

In light of the mobility of residents, co-living is a transitional living arrangement for those in their twenties or thirties. Why are they willing to stay in such transitional arrangements? What is the meaning of such transitional living arrangements for the Chinese youth? In Australia, 21 percent of 20–24 year-olds lived in peer-shared households in 2000, representing 39 percent of young people not residing with their parents, a significant rise from 17.5 percent in 1980 (Burke et al. 2002; Heath 2009). In the UK, increasing numbers of middle-class youth are opting for shared living due to anticipated mobility for better job opportunities, improved living conditions at a reasonable cost, and expanded social networks. This trend has influenced intimacy patterns, contributing to higher rates of singledom and delayed marriage, which in turn enhances the flexibility of life trajectories (Heath and Kenyon 2001).

The surge in co-living in contemporary China appears to align with these global trends, offering Chinese youth a flexible life trajectory and the opportunity to delay marriage and family formation. As Bauman suggests, it is a “fluid” situation where “full of opportunities - each one more appetizing and alluring than the previous one, each 'compensating for the last, and

providing grounds for shifting towards the next - is an exhilarating experience... They had better stay liquid and fluid and have a 'use-by' date attached, lest they render the remaining opportunities off-limits and nip the future adventure in the bud" (Bauman 2000: 62). This is exemplified in Liuzhi's observations on the distinctiveness of co-living.

"The uniqueness of co-living may not lie in the particularity of the residents' life experiences, as it has already attracted people from various backgrounds and experiences. I believe it is about the uniqueness of 'lifestyle orientation.'" Some people have a lack of interest in co-living, and their indifference stems from the fact that they have already formed their preferred social orientation and circles. They are more inclined to build their 'connections' through work and business activities, continuously enriching their social identity. Simultaneously, such social behavior provides various meaningful conveniences for their future life and career. Perhaps, this can be termed as a 'pragmatic orientation,' a term that can also be described with the trending concept of 'long-termism' in today's context.

In contrast to 'long-termism,' interactions within co-living are more focused on the 'present.' I want to create happiness together with everyone in the moment; I want to participate in formulating rules when I am present or residing... At this point, individual expressions are more direct, and the roommate relationships established place greater emphasis on the immediate interactions during co-living. Once a person leaves this space, the roommate relationship comes to an end. Whether there will be subsequent developments is quite serendipitous and is not a primary consideration during co-living. What matters most is 'How comfortable am I living here?' and 'How can I make it even more comfortable?' Perhaps, choosing co-living can be seen as an 'experience-oriented' approach. Maybe 'pure' is also a fitting description. Looking at the

entire process of living, beyond the acts of acceptance/selection, there are actions involving striving (application/interview), participation (public affairs), and creation (activities). The entire living experience becomes more complex but also more 'interesting.' Those with an 'experience-oriented' mindset are the ones who can enjoy these interesting aspects.

The previous slogan of Experimental Houses was 'Explore more possibilities in life.' 'More' implies the need to experience more, as there is no definitive 'best' or 'most suitable' option yet. There is still passion to explore and experience. This kind of life state often happens during vibrant youth. The positioning of the youth space is very accurate. Life stages are not fixed.” (data from Liuzhi’s writing on Notion).

Liuzhi's emphasis on the "present" as opposed to "long-termism" underscores the transient and exploratory nature of co-living for its residents. The idea of establishing a long-term living arrangement is not at the forefront of residents' minds. Instead, they view co-living as an experiential phase, a temporary stop in their life journey, and one of the many possibilities available to them during their "vibrant youth" period. Fengshi echoes this sentiment, noting that the mechanisms in place within co-living, such as interviews and written by-laws, are not designed for lifelong living arrangements akin to family or partner relationships. If residents were to envision a lifelong co-living commitment, adjustments to these rules would be necessary.

For co-living residents, the meaning of co-living lies in the transitional nature itself. They relish the opportunity to navigate their twenties and early thirties, exploring diverse possibilities and seizing opportunities while they are still vibrant and passionate. This open-ended approach to life allows them to savor the present in co-living, where numerous interesting experiences and connections await. When new opportunities beckon elsewhere, residents embark on new pursuits

without hesitation, bidding farewell to co-living as they continue their dynamic journey of exploration. The narrative of mobility is exemplified by Xiangru's reflection on her co-living experience, Xiangru contemplates her own personality and desires to maintain a critical distance from her experiences, acknowledging the importance of preserving sensitivity to avoid becoming too deeply involved. "For a while, I didn't ponder these questions (leaving and mobility), perhaps because my life was tranquil and satisfying. Yet, to some degree, I wish to retain a sensitivity that enables me to adopt a critical stance, avoiding complete immersion and safeguarding the prospect of departure." Xiangru's reference to "leaving" extends beyond the conclusion of her co-living experience; it encapsulates a departure from the entirety of her current life circumstances. Her words paint a vivid portrait of her fluid disposition, where she expresses a preference for a certain distance, affording her the convenience of departure from not just co-living but from all aspects of her current existence. This fluidity in perspective underscores Xiangru's openness to new possibilities and a readiness to embrace change whenever and wherever it may present itself.

The mobility embraced by these young individuals does not imply a lack of goals, plans, or enthusiasm for various aspects of their lives. Instead, it reflects an ideology I refer to as "guest heart" (*kexin*),⁴² wherein young people perceive themselves as temporary guests in the places they inhabit, the job positions they hold, and the relationships in which they engage. As guests, they view their current circumstances as transient, with an eventual departure on the horizon. Moreover, they do not shoulder the full responsibility for all issues, recognizing that they are not

⁴² "Kexin" originates from a poem titled "Work on the Chinese New Year Eve," penned by Shi Gao, a poet of the Tang Dynasty (681-907 AD). In the poem, the author reflects on his state of flow and the accompanying sense of solitude.

the masters or owners of every situation. This de-emphasizing of the gravity of jobs and competitive matters prompts them to seek other meaningful pursuits. Therefore, the narratives of co-living residents highlight mobility as both the essence of their lives and a strategic approach to alleviate work-related pressures. By keeping their life plans open, they can venture into new life possibilities when they perceive dissatisfaction with their current circumstances.

This flexibility provides a release from the responsibilities and pressures associated with their existing jobs or social relationships, which serves as a strategy of anti-involution (fan neijuan)⁴³. Involution, as an academic concept, originated with Alexander Goldenweiser (1936), who employed it to analyze the self-replication and elaboration in primitive societies. Subsequently, Clifford Geertz (1962) incorporated "involution" into anthropological discourse through his examination of rice production in Southeastern Asia. In this context, involution refers to the phenomenon where individuals channel more energy into the elaboration of production's marginal value rather than its expansion. Consequently, despite increased efforts, there is no corresponding rise in agricultural harvests. Building on Geertz's work, Philip Huang applied the concept to analyze the historical agricultural production mode in the Yangtze Delta. Huang posited that the emphasis on the elaboration of marginal agricultural value contributed to a rigid peasant economy in China, leaving little room for transformative changes (Huang 1985).

Involution, originally an anthropological concept, gained traction in China in 2020 as people grappled with stress from a competitive job market, limited educational opportunities, and resource scarcity. The term refers to a situation where individuals invest more time and energy, such as overtime work,⁴³ without receiving proportionate benefits. Anthropologist Biao Xiang

⁴³ People call overtime work "996", meaning working from 9am to 9pm, 6 days a week.

attributes the sense of involution to limited and homogeneous opportunities, coupled with a lack of viable alternatives. People find themselves compelled to compete for a limited pool of desirable opportunities, unable to quit the competition due to a scarcity of survival options.⁴⁴ It is a mandatory game that people dislike but feel compelled to play. Xiang's analysis captures the essence of contemporary Chinese society, where many, particularly the youth, are attempting to break free from this cycle. While the idea of quitting is more ideological than practical at present, some young individuals believe they can leave their current jobs at any time and seek opportunities in other cities—a form of quitting through mobility. This mindset allows them to remain relatively indifferent to issues like promotion and workplace conflicts. Chansu, described her approach to work with a "quit mood," accepting assigned tasks but rejecting overwork that encroached on her personal time. "I worked with a 'quit' mood. So, I said 'yes' to all work assigned to me but said 'no' to any overwork that encroached on my spare and personal time. By doing so, I felt relaxed in working. Looking back, this approach prevented me from becoming the cog that I feared becoming. It taught me how to negotiate with people from different standpoints and power relations. I realized that my colleague sitting at the next table also shared the same 'quit' mindset, and our relationship became harmonious. We could voice our complaints about our superiors and engage in straightforward conversations, making my work environment more comfortable." This alternative avenue provided her with the psychological freedom to consider quitting her current job, even though it was not a necessity. These notions of quitting, whether practical or not, are seen as a form of anti-involution practice for her.

⁴⁴ https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_9648585?from=timeline

The mobility minds of co-living residents are both the causes and consequences of the delayed life trajectories of youth in contemporary China. In sharing my observations on the phenomenon of "domestic social connections" with the residents of EHF, I sought their insights on the matter. Zhuru provided a compelling explanation for this trend, highlighting distinctions between those who choose to remain in Shanghai after completing their education and co-living residents. According to Zhuru, individuals opting to stay in Shanghai post-education have specific goals such as building an established social network, investing in homeownership, and fostering familial bonds within the city. For this subset, the transient and rental-oriented nature of co-living holds less appeal. Zhuru astutely noted that co-living residents, on the other hand, typically do not envision a long-term residency in Shanghai. Instead, for most co-living residents, their time in Shanghai is marked by a transient quality, serving as a stepping stone as they seek enhanced career prospects. Marriage and familial establishment are less appealing for co-living residents and will be delayed correspondingly.

As discussed in Chapter 2, co-living residents exhibit various attitudes toward marriage and childbearing. Individuals like Ruiren and Zhaoyan, both in their mid-twenties, expressed that considerations about marriage were premature for them. Similarly, Faxia, in her thirties, recalled her experiences and societal expectations. Her parents, adhering to traditional values, attempted to facilitate matches for her during her university years, a strategy met with resistance. Faxia highlighted her preference to delay marriage, citing the lack of compatibility with her parents and their less-than-ideal marriage. The trend of delayed marriage has been observed globally, including in China. In China, the mean age of first marriage for men has risen from 23.57 in 1990 to 25.86 in 2010 and further to 29.38 in 2020. Similarly, the age for women has seen a rise

from 22.15 in 1990 to 23.89 in 2010 and reached 27.95 in 2020 (Chen and Zhang 2022; He and Tan 2021). For the majority of co-living residents in their mid-twenties, marriage and family establishment remain distant considerations. This evolving societal landscape, marked by delayed marriage, provides individuals with the opportunity to explore diverse life trajectories during their twenties. The shift away from the conventional notion of early marriage enables them to prioritize personal growth, career development, and varied experiences before embarking on more traditional life paths.

What should be noted is that the mobility of residents does not sever their ties with co-living or with fellow residents completely, but illuminates a more flexible accessibility to co-living. They maintain connections through online platforms such as WeChat groups, Notion, and Zoom, engaging in frequent communication. These connections hold both symbolic and practical significance for the residents given their individual circumstances. Liuzhi, for instance, lived in EHF for two distinct periods. Her decision to return for the second time was motivated by both familiar and new reasons. Initially enrolling during her quest to leave her hometown for more vibrant opportunities in big cities in China, she spent two years in Beijing, holding various jobs such as a teaching assistant and a researcher. During her time in Beijing, she developed positive experiences in co-living institutions and youth hostels. Upon moving to Shanghai, she joined EHF in July 2020, aiming to replicate the joy she found in co-living in Beijing. After two years of working in Shanghai, Liuzhi returned to her hometown, feeling uncertain about her career path. Taking a break to reassess her plans, she eventually decided to come back to Shanghai in search of better job opportunities. Exploring diverse roles, she worked as a volunteer for a pharmaceutical company, took on part-time employment at a second-hand store, and eventually

returned to insurance sales, this time specializing in life insurance. Simultaneously, her family purchased a house in suburban Shanghai, but its impractical location led her to choose EHF for her residence once again. Reflecting on this return, Liuzhi emphasized that it was not merely a repetition of her past life. Despite being a former resident, she underwent a noticeable transformation, evident in her altered personality and identity. Enthusiastically, she shared, "I thought I had undergone significant changes. I feel more active and relaxed now, although I was nice all the time, lol. There are new friends, but also familiar faces. I am very happy." For Liuzhi, co-living represents not only a phase in her Shanghai journey but also a potential new chapter. Returning for the second time, she faced different life circumstances, including a new job, ownership of a house in Shanghai, and a resolved decision to stay in the city after her hiatus in her hometown. Despite these shifts, her motivation for selecting co-living remains consistent—a desire for a more relaxed environment and meaningful connections.

“The Ship of Theseus”: the co-living institutions with mobile residents

In the last section, the mobility of residents depicts a complicated dynamic situation of co-living. Residents consider mobility both as the meaning of their young lives and as a strategy to explore more possibilities and decrease pressures of current life. With delayed marriage, family formation, and childbearing, youth have more time and space to select their life trajectories. Within such context, co-living serves as one possibility of their life and one stop on the way they go to their future. During this process, the detachment and connection with co-living are complicated based on individual situations of residents and out of multiple considerations, both realistic and emotional. What about the co-living institutions themselves with the mobility of residents? What are the changes of co-living in such context of mobility?

Will they decline or prosper or remain the same? This is the classic question of “The Ship of Theseus.”

"The Ship of Theseus" is a thought experiment and philosophical paradox that explores the nature of identity and persistence through change. The scenario involves a ship, originally owned by the mythical Greek hero Theseus, which undergoes gradual replacement of its parts over time. The core question raised by the thought experiment is: If all the components of the ship are replaced, is it still the same ship? In co-living context, if all the residents are changed, is the co-living institution still the same institution? When a visitor posed the same question about the fate of EHF, Fengshi offered a thoughtful perspective. He remarked, "EHF is more than just a name; it's a dynamic space. Trying to consider 'EHF' independently of its residents is akin to observing an electron without recognizing its perpetual motion. Co-living houses, by their very nature, are spaces in constant flux, shaped by the continuous mobility of their members. In this context, the Ship of Theseus analogy loses its relevance, as it doesn't align with the fluid and mobile nature inherent in co-living communities, especially those comprising young individuals." Fengshi's perspective on the Ship of Theseus highlights a fundamental difference in the context of co-living institutions. The traditional analogy assumes an original stable situation and explores subsequent changes, a concept that does not seamlessly align with the inherent changing nature of co-living spaces. Changing has its own meaning for organizations. As Ziyuan aptly expressed, "You will forget the weight of a bottle of water when holding it for too long. But you can re-feel it when you shake it upside down. This is called perturbation.⁴⁵ When a resident leaves and a newcomer moves in, there is a perturbation in co-living." Ziyuan's metaphor

⁴⁵ Ziyuan talked about perturbation in the biological sense. In biology, perturbation experiments involve intentionally disturbing a biological system to observe its response.

emphasizes the constant state of change in co-living, requiring residents to adapt to frequent shifts.

The ebb and flow of residents in co-living life bring about a complex interplay of emotions—simultaneously a sense of loss and a promise of new beginnings. Fengshi, having been a resident at EHF for the longest duration, expressed the discomfort he feels each time someone departs. This sentiment echoes the inevitable sadness associated with severed connections. However, this very mobility injects co-living with a continual stream of fresh possibilities as new individuals join the community. Monitoring the developments at EHF through Notion after my departure, it is evident that these transitions are not merely personal but also transformative for the collective. Innovations introduced by newcomers, such as Chansu's "coffee group" and Baiwei's contributions to Notion Ai, exemplify the dynamic nature of co-living. The infusion of diverse talents, ranging from barista skills to programming expertise, enriches the communal experience. The coalescence of generations within co-living communities enhances the vibrancy and diversity of shared living, collectively steering it toward more colorful dimensions.

Conclusion: collective individualization—individual issues, collective solutions

The intricate interplay of mobility among residents and the ever-evolving nature of co-living institutions introduces further layers of complexity to the narrative presented in this dissertation. The bonds they forge, the familial intimacy they cultivate, the unique blend of camaraderie and strangership experienced through shared activities—all of these unfold in a transient and impermanent phase of the youths' lives. Their collective endeavors are not geared toward lifelong commitments but are rather expressions of a temporary and experimental

lifestyle. What propels them to invest so passionately in these collective but fleeting arrangements? What purpose does this temporary construct serve, and what insights can we glean from the mobile nature of co-living in contemporary Chinese society? Through the narratives of co-living and the individual stories of its residents, these inquiries prompt us to delve into the complex hybridity of individual and collective experiences among the youth in contemporary China. This exploration leads us to the concept of "collective individualization," as introduced in the dissertation's introduction. This phenomenon, shaped by the stories of co-living, offers a lens through which we can examine the individualization path in Chinese society, the development of co-living in Chinese context and the intricate dynamics of individual agency and structural influence exposed on individuals within contemporary Chinese society. In the concluding section, I will summarize the significance of the co-living life presented in this dissertation from these three aspects.

Individualization and collectivity

As explored in the introduction, individuals in contemporary China navigate a path of individualization marked by the awareness of individual rights and the pursuit of "living one's own life," albeit grappling with dilemmas such as the absence of robust social welfare and re-embedding mechanisms. Individuals are living their own life but faced with risks by themselves as well. In this context, the study of co-living lifestyles and arrangements unveils a distinctive Chinese approach to individualization on two fronts. Firstly, it introduces a novel re-embedding mechanism beyond the family structure for Chinese youth. Secondly, it sheds light on the dynamic interplay between collectivity and individualization within the Chinese context,

illustrating how Chinese youth seek individual development and fulfillment through collective avenues.

First, as a re-embedding mechanism, co-living life serves as a shield against economic, emotional, and social pressures on youth in metropolises. Positioned as a strategy for youth to mitigate the high costs of living in metropolises while enjoying relatively comfortable conditions, co-living facilitates an environment of emotional and social support among residents (Heath 2009). This support extends from intimate, family-like relationships within the household, as detailed in Chapter 2, to connections with strangers through public activities, as outlined in Chapter 3. The emphasis on communication, public space design, and organized activities promotes sociality among the residents. Moreover, co-living becomes a powerful resource in the face of risks, such as those posed by authorities, rental markets, and national policies, as explored in Chapters 5 and 6. The collective resilience formed through shared efforts becomes particularly evident during unexpected events, like the lockdown in Shanghai, where collective living enhanced residents' well-being. In contemporary Chinese society, with the retreat of the state from lots of social welfare fields like housing, individuals invent their own way to promote security and decrease risks occurred in daily life. Thus, co-living emerges as a re-embedding mechanism that is especially crucial for youth working or studying alone in metropolises, providing a support structure beyond traditional family ties. This re-embedding within self-organized institutions, rather than the welfare state or other abstract systems, aligns with the concept of "life politics" as proposed by Giddens (1991).

Co-living, in this sense, is snapshot of the peer organizations in contemporary China where youth can join and communicate with others beyond family. Although comparatively

small, there are myriad youth spaces in Shanghai where youth can host public activities, and even some temporary rallies, like the one on the Halloween eve in Shanghai in 2023.⁴⁶ Youth can autonomously self-organize themselves, and these activities serve as the release of their pressure in daily life.

Seeking support from nearby people rather than from the state or family is a characteristic of co-living. The second characteristic lies in the emphasis on collectivity of the re-embedment mechanism—the co-living. Unlike the collective era of socialist China, co-living residents prioritize collectivity based on both pragmatic and ideational considerations. Ideationally, youth want an equal, communicative, intimate living environment in metropolises. They get bored with indifferent or even conflictual roommate relationships. By calling it co-living, they distinguish their arrangement from group rent and have different mechanisms to guarantee friendly relationships with roommates, as discussed in chapter 1. The equal, democratic and communicative atmosphere in co-living promote the interactions of residents and guarantee the operation of collective life. The interviews, as a rite of passage, guarantee the newcomers share some interests with current residents and further guarantee close relationships. So, too, do the written by-laws, the records on Notion and shared flexible working schedules, and the “domestic connections” of residents. Pragmatically, collectivity is a tool employed to address challenges and sustain co-living arrangements. Fengshi suggests that the democratic practices within co-living are born out of necessity, serving as the most effective strategy to maintain harmonious relationships and uphold the collective lifestyle. As highlighted in Chapter 1, intimacy within co-living demands active individual engagement. Collectivity, in this context, is both actively

⁴⁶ The report of the cosplay rally. <https://time.com/6338264/after-a-more-political-halloween-in-shanghai-now-comes-the-crackdown/>

established by individuals to foster relationships and shields against challenges; it becomes a force that compels individuals to engage.

Furthermore, what should be emphasized is that collectivity in co-living is instrumental—a means to an end, with individual fulfillment as the ultimate goal. The collectivity is a tool; the individuality is the purpose. The actions of co-living residents converge towards meeting individual economic, emotional, and social needs, which distinguish the collectivity in co-living from that in socialist China. The collectivity is not out of ideology but arises from individual demand. The demarcation between individual and collective affairs is clear, exemplified by Ziyuan's dilemma detailed in chapter 2. Why was Ziyuan involved in the dilemmas between co-living and his research? Ziyuan's case of leaving provides a good opposite example. Ziyuan's dilemma is caused by the deep involvement of collective affairs and therefore influences his individual affairs, that is, his doctoral research. Therefore, Ziyuan had to make a clear cut between his personal research and the collective affairs in co-living by moving out for a period. Through Ziyuan's case, we can see that there are conflicts between individual interests and collective interests in co-living. Residents maintain openness to new opportunities and leave co-living when entering new life stages, reinforcing that co-living is a weigh station in their life trajectories, a tool to achieve their urban dreams. Few residents view co-living as the ultimate life goal, and as a result, conflicts arise between individual and collective interests. The delicate balance between individual and collective pursuits illustrates the essence of "collective individualization" highlighted in this dissertation—a dynamic emerging from the individualization process, where individuals, endowed with greater life choices, opt for the collective as a pathway. In this nuanced understanding, co-living represents not only a potential

trajectory of individualization but also a dynamic interplay between individual and collective dynamics within contemporary Chinese society.

The study of co-living

The examination of co-living through the framework of collective individualization not only contributes valuable insights to the global co-living literature but also offers a distinct perspective compared to existing studies. As reviewed in the introduction, previous research has highlighted various social and political roles of co-living across different societies. These studies generally fall under the "emancipatory politics approach" to co-living, where co-living institutions are positioned as mechanisms for resisting political institutions, challenging mainstream values, or addressing social inequalities.

In contrast, the co-living phenomenon explored in this dissertation introduces an alternative perspective—the "life politics approach." Unlike co-living communities in other contexts, contemporary Chinese co-living does not primarily function as a form of political resistance against authorities, capitalist structures, or mainstream familial norms. Instead, it centers on the everyday act of living itself. Co-living residents, through self-organizing into co-living groups, leverage co-living as a means to enhance their quality of life and establish connections with others. Their practices are notably devoid of explicit political implications, a strategic choice likely influenced by the political censorship prevalent in contemporary Chinese society. While Chinese co-living institutions navigate challenges with authorities, the interactions are more about survival than political resistance.

Despite this strategic avoidance of explicit political engagement, the "life politics approach" demonstrates that co-living can still play a significant role in individuals' lives by

focusing on life's intrinsic value. Moreover, this approach offers inspiration for the broader landscape of shared households, which are increasingly prevalent in both Western and Chinese societies. The purpose of shared households, often centered around sociality, economic considerations, and comfortable living conditions, shares similarities with Chinese co-living. The creative integration of youth spaces, public activities, and collective daily records in Chinese co-living provides a richer understanding of the possibilities within such arrangements, extending beyond cultural and geographic boundaries.

This study contributes to the co-living literature by portraying co-living as not just a singular social phenomenon influenced by structural factors but also as a lens through which to observe and understand broader societal dynamics. Co-living serves as a mirror reflecting gender interactions and tensions in daily life (Chapter 4), offering insights into the functioning of local authorities through the lens of group renting management (Chapter 5), and illuminating the promotion of neighbor relationships through gift-exchange during the Shanghai lockdown (Chapter 6). Consequently, the study of co-living transcends its immediate context and becomes a tool for understanding the intricacies of the societies in which co-living practices are embedded.

The structural transformations and individual agency through co-living

The emergence of co-living in contemporary Chinese society can be attributed to a confluence of economic, social, and cultural transformations. Similar to the development of shared households and co-housing arrangements worldwide, the rise of co-living in China is intricately linked to urbanization, the marketization of housing, increased mobility, the flourishing sharing economy, and shifts in the labor market, particularly the rise of freelancers

and flexible working conditions (Corfe 2019; Heath 2004; Pepper and Manji 2019). One of the primary economical driving factors is the soaring cost of housing, making it economically challenging for young individuals to afford their own homes. In response, co-living emerges as a pragmatic and cost-effective strategy to attain improved living conditions. Simultaneously, the escalating pressures in the workforce and a growing sense of loneliness among the youth contribute to a preference for collective living arrangements, providing emotional and social support that may be lacking in solo living. Furthermore, culturally, the youth, often viewed as the "only hope" within families operating under the "One Child Policy," face the dual expectations of individual self-fulfillment and familial obligations. Establishing a firm foothold in urban areas becomes both a personal goal and a duty to their families. Consequently, co-living becomes a strategic response by the youth to navigate structural pressures imposed upon them. In a scenario where home ownership and family establishment may be financially out of reach, renting becomes the sole viable option for urban living, with co-living emerging as a specific alternative. Hence, it is not surprising that the trend of co-living has gained prominence only in the recent decade in China.

As a consequence of these social transformations, co-living not only responds to changing societal dynamics but also actively contributes to further transformations, particularly in shaping the perspectives of youth regarding familial relationships and interactions with strangers, as expounded in chapters 2 and 3. In chapter 2, it is proposed that the narratives co-living residents employ, both consciously and unconsciously, serve as reflections of the evolving concept of family within the framework of neo-familism prevalent in their natal families. The youth redefine the notion of family, extending it beyond traditional blood ties and marital

connections. Instead, they emphasize groups that can offer both economic and emotional support. Within the context of neo-familism, characterized by rising attention to the youngest generation in families and heightened emotional interactions across generations, the youth find themselves receiving substantial economic and emotional support from their families. Even for those not benefiting directly from their natal families' support (e.g., Faxia), the conceptualization of family extends to their co-living arrangements. While these individuals might not share conventional views on family formation, childbearing, and childrearing, they collectively view co-living houses as a surrogate family. The rationale lies in the fact that co-living life facilitates economic support through communal funding systems and emotional support through interactions with fellow residents.

The practice of co-living, as expressed through familial narratives, suggests that the youth harbor a broader imagination of familial relationships beyond the confines of traditional structures based solely on blood and marital ties. This expanded imagination not only reflects a transformation in the understanding of family but also introduces new possibilities for family formation in the future. Aligned with the trend of delayed marriage, family formation, and childbearing, this innovative conception of family, stemming from the shift toward neo-familism, is poised to challenge the conventional format of families in Chinese society. While the idea of lifelong co-living remains in the realm of discussion rather than practice, its emergence signifies a noteworthy social ideation that could potentially translate into social practice in the future. It is crucial to note that the familial narrative portrayed through co-living is distinctively exclusive of traditional notions of marriage and childbearing. This exclusivity might contribute to a further decline in marriage and birth rates within Chinese society. In this way, co-living sheds light on

the intricate connection between structural pressures—such as soaring housing prices and work-related stress—and the declining marriage and birth rates observed in contemporary China.

The strangership cultivated in co-living communities also signifies a shift in attitudes toward strangers among the youth, influenced by ongoing structural transformations. The processes of urbanization and increased mobility expose individuals to a greater number of strangers in their urban lives. Consequently, strangers assume a significant role in their social interactions and the development of meaningful relationships. As outlined in Chapter 3, co-living residents actively engage in furnishing public spaces, organizing communal activities, and designing specific areas to foster communication among strangers. This intentional effort contributes to the cultivation of intimate strangerships and the expansion of social networks for both residents and participants.

Given the context of urban life in Shanghai, where many residents have few pre-existing connections, strangers become essential resources for forging new friendships and meeting social needs. The creation of intimate relationships within co-living settings often begins with interactions between strangers, whether they are roommates or participants in public activities. As discussed earlier, the concept of strangership in co-living differs from the indifferent strangership observed in metropolises, as analyzed by Simmel (1950[1908]), transcends the marginal status of strangers in traditional Chinese society (Fei 1992), and contrasts with the portrayal of dangerous strangers depicted in modern Chinese media propaganda (Lee 2014). What emerges is a form of stranger intimacy that emphasizes close and amicable connections with strangers. This willingness to establish intimate strangerships reflects a growing sense of trust in strangers. Residents are open to inviting strangers into their private spaces, including

their homes and even their bedrooms, if guests express interest in the co-living experience. This evolving form of strangership represents a novel social dynamic in contemporary Chinese society. It implies an increasing level of social trust, a departure from traditional connection formats such as guanxi or acquaintance-based connections among the youth. These transformations in social connections may, in turn, contribute to further societal changes that are difficult to predict in the present context.

In summary, this dissertation serves as a lens to examine an experimental lifestyle embraced by the youth in Shanghai through the prism of co-living. It delves into the peer intimacy they actively seek in their daily lives, the challenges they encounter, and, more expansively, it explores the youth's adaptive strategies for urban survival, their evolving notions of family, strangers, and living arrangements. Consequently, the study not only focuses on co-living as a phenomenon but also extends its gaze beyond, offering insights into broader social transformations unfolding in contemporary Chinese society. As co-living continues to evolve under the influence of various structural and individual factors, it remains a dynamic subject that warrants further exploration in future research endeavors.

The epilogue

The narrative of my dissertation research on co-living concludes here, but the trajectory of co-living persists. As an emerging living arrangement, the development of co-living in urban China is an ongoing story. While it is premature to draw definitive conclusions about its trajectory, the mobility of residents and co-living houses offers glimpses into the dynamics of its development thus far.

There is evidence of both the establishment of new co-living houses and transformations within existing ones. Towards the end of my initial on-site fieldwork in August 2022, residents of EHF were contemplating the creation of a new co-living space. Although they did not plan to reside there themselves, they intended to recruit new co-living residents and guide them based on their collective experiences. The catalyst for this initiative was a conversation with a couch surfer who expressed aspirations for creating a youth space akin to co-living but lacked a clear plan. This encounter prompted residents of EHF to recognize their wealth of co-living expertise and motivated them to experiment with establishing a new co-living institution—a venture to determine if their co-living model could flourish in a different context. Fengshi and Meiren, co-living residents of EHF, spearheaded the recruitment of four core members for the new co-living house through a series of interviews. The decision-making regarding specific areas within the house was driven by the needs and preferences of these core members. Collaboratively, they assessed potential houses, leveraging the experience of EHF to determine if the conditions were conducive to co-living. For instance, during one house review, they deliberated on the impact of a dark living room, considering how residents might favor individual bright rooms over a collectively used dark space. Despite such considerations, they ultimately selected a suite with a satisfactory house structure and reasonable rent. The subsequent responsibilities, such as recruiting additional members through interviews, were delegated to the newcomers. This process led to the establishment of a new co-living house, named Experimental House O. On the first anniversary of Experimental House O, Hupo, one of the founding members, penned a summary that was published on their WeChat account:

“In the last year, Experimental House O had 12 residents, served 17 “family members.” The shortest resident stayed for 1 day, and the longest stayed for one year already. The age gap of residents is across two decades (from post-80s to post 00s). And we held more than 50 public activities here...

The world is in turmoil, with warmth and coldness in human affairs.

Love specific people, do specific things, live a specific life.

To resist those grand, abstract things that try to make us negative.

In uncertain times, living a determined life.

Grateful for the ordinary life and meeting you all.

Like a ship with an anchor, like trees growing on a shattered island.

Wishing you good health and all things to be safe.

Cheers to the anniversary next year!” (data from the WeChat account of Sven)

When I revisited my fieldwork sites one year later (in summer 2023). I learned that both Fengshi of EHF and Lee, from Experimental House S, had the idea of “1+N” mode of co-living. They planned to establish new co-living institutions surrounding the old ones (e.g., in the same community) so that residents can have more visits and interactions with each other. Lee managed to rent another house in the same building and establish the Experimental House S 2.0. Fengshi also established a new co-living house, despite not in the same community of EHF.

The landscape of co-living underwent changes with the opening of new establishments and the closure of existing ones. In 2020, there was a significant closure of co-living houses in Beijing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Shanghai, the co-living scene remained dynamic, witnessing the emergence of temporary co-living organizations for international students who

were unable to pursue studies abroad during the pandemic. Chensha, a former resident of EHT, initiated one such co-living house. However, these temporary setups ceased when international students resumed their studies overseas. For enduring co-living houses, changing residences was inevitable. The co-living house of EHT where I had ever lived closed because the house was sold by the owner (refer to Chapter 5). Despite this, most residents remained committed to the idea of co-living. Zhaoyan and Jingmo, residents of EHT from its inception to closure, decided to continue co-living and established EHT 2.0. Zhaoyan explained her motivation, stating, "Co-living gives youth a feeling of home, and makes them stay in large cities."

This dissertation demonstrates that co-living residents strive to create an intimate environment for urban living conditions, experimenting with a lifestyle that offers emotional and social support. However, as pioneers in this evolving field, they grapple with various dilemmas arising from transformative notions and conflicts of interest within the rental market. As an emerging organization and lifestyle, predicting the future development of co-living in contemporary China remains challenging. What is certain is that co-living has emerged from the social transformations in Chinese society, fueled by the increasing consciousness of individual rights and the challenges of urban living. It is poised to continue promoting transformations within Chinese society.

In essence, the story remains open-ended, much like the lives of individual residents who remain receptive to opportunities and possibilities. They are migrating youth with dreams and life strategies in action. As a researcher who experienced co-living alongside these youth, I wish them all a bright tomorrow. I will use one sentence from an ancient Chinese article to end this dissertation:

“Meeting by chance like duckweed and water, all nodding acquaintances in a foreign land.”

(pingshui xiangfeng, jinshi taxiang zhi ke)

Bibliography

- Ache, Peter and Fedrowitz, Micha. 2012. "The development of co-housing initiatives in Germany." *Built Environment* 38(3): 395–412. <https://doi.org/10.2148/benv.38.3.395>
- Ahmed, Sara. 2000. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Aron, Arthur, Melinat, Edward, Aron, Elaine N., Vallone, Robert D., and Bator, Renee J. 1997. "The experimental generation of interpersonal closeness: A procedure and some preliminary findings." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 23: 363-377. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167297234003>
- Barlow, Tani. 1994. "Theorizing Woman: *Funü, Guojia, Jiating*." in *Body, Subject & Power in China*, edited by Angela Zito and Tani Barlow, 253-289. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bauman, Zygmunt.
1988. "Strangers: The Social Construction of Universality and Particularity." *Telos* 78:7–42. doi: 10.3817/1288078007
1990. *Thinking Sociologically*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.
2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
2001. *The Individualized Society*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
2002. "Individually, Together." In *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, xiv-xix. Beck, Ulrich and Beck-Gernsheim, Elisabeth. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

2011. *Collateral Damage: Social Inequalities in a Global Age*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Beck, Ulrich. 1992 *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. Trans. Mark Ritter. London: Sage Publications.
- Beck, Ulrich and Beck-Gernsheim, Elisabeth. 2002. *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bengtson, Vern L. 2001. "Beyond the Nuclear Family: The Increasing Importance of Multigenerational Bonds." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63 (1): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00001.x>
- Bing, Ngeow Chow. 2012. "The Residents' Committee in China's Political System: Democracy, Stability, Mobilization." *Issues & Studies* 48(2): 71–126 [https://doi.org/10.7033/ISE.201206_48\(2\).0003](https://doi.org/10.7033/ISE.201206_48(2).0003)
- Bishop, Peter D., Jason, Leonard A., Ferrari, Joseph R., Huang Cheng F. 1998. "A survival analysis of communal-living, self-help, addiction recovery participants." *American Journal of Community Psychology*. 26(6): 803–821. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022241712065>
- Blau, Peter. 1964. *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. John Wiley & Sons Inc. New York.
- Boonstra, Beitske. 2016. "Mapping Trajectories of Becoming: Four Forms of Behaviour in Co-Housing Initiatives." *Town Planning Review* 87(3): 275–296. doi:10.3828/tpr.2016.20
- Bray, Franscesca. 1997. "The Inner Quarters: Oppression or Freedom?" in *House Home Family: Living and Being Chinese*, edited by Ronald G. Knapp and Kai-Yin Lo, 259-79. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

- Bregnbæk, Susanne. 2016. *Fragile Elite: The Dilemmas of China's Top University Students*. Stanford University Press.
- Bresson, Sabrina and Denèfle, Sylvette. 2015. "Diversity of self-managed co-housing initiatives in France." *Urban Research & Practice* 8(1): 5-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2015.1011423>
- Burkitt, Ian.
1997. "Social Relationships and Emotions." *Sociology*, 31 (1), 37–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038597031001004>
2002. "Complex Emotions: Relations, Feelings and Images in Emotional Experience." In *Emotions and Sociology*, edited by J. Barbalet, 151-168. New York: Oxford: Blackwell.
- Butler, Judith. 1988. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40(4): 519-531. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>
- Burke Terry, Pinkney Sarah and Ewing Scott. 2002. *Rent Assistance and Young People's Decision Making*. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.
- Cai, He and He, Xiaxu. 2014. "Urban Community Heterogeneity and Community Cohesion —— A Study on Community Neighbor Relations." (Chengshi shequ yizhixing yu shequ ningjuli) *Journal of Sun Yat-Sen University (Social science edition)* 54, 133-151. DOI:10.13471/j.cnki.jsysusse.2014.02.014
- Chan, Kam Wing. 2019. "China's hukou system at 60: continuity and reform." In *Handbook on Urban Development in China*, edited by Ray Yep, June Wang and Thomas Jonhson, 59-79. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781786431639.00011>

Chen, Wei and Zhang, Fengfei. 2022. "Marriage Delay in China:Trends and Patterns."
(zhongguo renkou de chuhun tuichi qushi yu tezheng) *Population Research*. 46(4): 14-26.

Chevtaeva, Ekaterina. 2021. "Coworking and coliving: The attraction for digital nomad tourists."
In *Information and communication technologies in tourism 2021*, edited by Wolfgang,
Wörndl, Chulmo, Koo, and Jason L, Steinmetz, 202–209. Springer, Chan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65785-7_17

Chevtaeva, Ekaterina and Denizci-Guillet, Basak. 2021. "Digital nomads' lifestyles and
coworkation." *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, 21: 100633. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2021.100633>

Cohen, Myron L. 1976. *House United, House Divided: The Chinese Family in Taiwan*. New
York: Columbia University Press.

Cole, Elizabeth R. 2008. "Coalitions as a Model for Intersectionality: From Practice to
Theory." *Sex Roles* 59: 443–453. doi: 10.1007/s11199-008-9419-1

Collins, Randal. 2004. *Interaction ritual chains*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Corfe, Scott. 2019. "Co-Living: A Solution to the Housing Crisis? London: Social Market
Foundation." Available at: <http://www.smf.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2019/02/Co-Living.pdf>.

Cornfield, Noreen. 1983. "The Success of Urban Communes." *Journal of Marriage and Family*.
45(1): 115-126. <https://doi.org/10.2307/351300>

Craib, Ian.
1995. "Some Comments on the Sociology of Emotions." *Sociology*, 29(1): 151-158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038595029001010>

1997. "Social Constructionism as Social Psychosis." *Sociology*, 31(1): 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038597031001002>
- Dasimah, Bt Omar. 2008. "Communal Living Environment in Low Cost Housing Development in Malaysia." *Asian Social Science*, 4(10): 98-105.
- Davis, Deborah. 2005. "Urban consumer culture." *The China Quarterly* 183: 692–694.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741005000421>
- Davis, Deborah and Harrell, Stevan (ed.). 1993. *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*. University of California Press.
- Davis, John and Warring, Anette. 2011. "Living Utopia." *Cultural and Social History* 8(4): 513-530. <https://doi.org/10.2752/147800411X13105523597841>
- de Almeida, Marcos A., Correia, António, Schneider, Daniel, and de Souza, Jano M. 2021. Covid-19 as opportunity to test digital nomad lifestyle. 2021 IEEE 24th International Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work in Design (CSCWD), Dalian, China
- Delaplace Grégory. 2012. "Parasitic Chinese, vengeful Russians: Ghosts, strangers, and reciprocity in Mongolia". *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18(1): 131–144. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2012.01768.x>
- Don, Flynn. 2005. "New borders, new management: The dilemmas of modern immigration policies." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(3): 463-490. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000337849>
- Dong, Jingwei. 2014. Individualization: The New Trend of New Generations of Migrant Workers. (getihua: xinshengdai liudong renkou de xinqushi). *Zhejiang Academic Journal* 4: 189-194. DOI:10.16235/j.cnki.33-1005/c.2014.04.025

- Droste, Christiane. 2015. "German co-housing: an opportunity for municipalities to foster socially inclusive urban development?" *Urban Research & Practice* 8(1): 79-92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2015.1011428>
- Duncombe, Jean. and Marsden, Dennis. 1993. "Love and intimacy: The Gender Division of Emotion and 'Emotion Work'", *Sociology* 27(2): 221–242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038593027002003>
- Duneier, Mitchell. 1999. *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Duranti, Alessandro. 2010. "Husserl, intersubjectivity and anthropology." *Anthropological Theory* 10 (1): 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499610370517>
- Dutton, Michael. 2009. "Passionately governmental: Maoism and the structured intensities of revolutionary governmentality." In *China's governmentalities: Governing change, changing government*, edited by Elaine Jeffreys, 24–37. London: Routledge.
- Dykstra, Pearl A. and Fokkema, Tineke. 2011. "Relationships between parents and their adult children: A West European typology of late-life families." *Ageing & Society* 31: 545– 569. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X10001108>
- Eklund, Lisa. 2018. "Filial daughter? Filial son? How China's young urban elite negotiate intergenerational obligations." *NORA-Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 26(4), 295–312. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2018.1534887>
- Engels, Friedrich. 1972[1902]. *Origin of the family, private property, and the state* (in the light of the researches of Lewis H. Morgan). New York: International.
- Evans, Harriet. 2008. *The subject of gender: Daughters and mothers in urban China*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

- Faier, Lieba and Rofel, Lisa. 2014. "Ethnographies of encounter." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43: 363–377. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102313-030210>
- Fei, Xiaotong. 1992[1947] *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*. Gary Hamilton and Wang Zheng, trans. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ferrari, Joseph R., Jason, Leonard A., Nelson, Rebecca, Curtin-Davis, Margaret, Marsh, Patricia and Smith, Barbara. 1999. "An Exploratory Analysis of Women and Men Within a Self-Help, Communal-Living Recovery Setting: A New Beginning in a New House." *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*. 25(2): 305-317. <https://doi.org/10.1081/ADA-100101862>
- Ferrari, Joseph R., Stevens, Edward B. and Jason, Leonard A. 2009. "The Role of Self-Regulation in Abstinence Maintenance: Effects of Communal Living on Self-Regulation." *Journal of Groups in Addiction & Recovery*. 4(1-2): 32-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15560350802712371>
- Fominaya, Cristina F. 2010. "Collective identity in social movements: Central concepts and debates." *Sociology Compass*. 4(6), 393–404. doi:10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00287.x
- Fong, Vanessa.
2002. "China's one-child policy and the empowerment of urban daughters." *American Anthropologist*, 104: 1098-1109. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2002.104.4.1098>
2004. *Only hope: Coming of age under China's one-child policy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Fuschillo, Gregorio and D'Antone, Simona. 2023. "Consumption networks in times of social distancing: Towards entrained solidarity." *Marketing Theory* 23(2):343–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705931221137730>

- Gan, Yiqun, Ma, Jinjin, Wu, Jianhui, Chen, Yidi, Zhu, Huanya and Hall, Brian J. 2020. “Immediate and delayed psychological effects of province-wide lockdown and personal quarantine during the COVID-19 outbreak in China.” *Psychological Medicine*. 52(7):1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291720003116>
- Geertz, Clifford. 1963. *Agricultural Involution: The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.
- Gergen, Kenneth J. 1995. “Metaphor and monophony in the 20th-century psychology of emotions.” *History of the Human Sciences*, 8: 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/095269519500800201>
- Giddens, Anthony.
1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
1991. *Modernity and Self- Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Goh, Debbie, Ling, Richard, Huang, Liuyu and Liew, Doris. 2019. “News sharing as reciprocal exchanges in social cohesion maintenance.” *Information, Communication & Society*. 22(8):1128–1144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1406973>
- Goldenweiser, Alexander A. 1936. “Loose end of a theory on the individual pattern and involution in primitive society.” in *Essays in anthropology presented to A. L. Kroeber*, edited by Robert H. Lowie, 99-104. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Griffiths, Paul E., and Scarantino, Andrea. 2009. "Emotions in the wild." In *The Cambridge handbook of situated cognition*, edited by Philip Robbins and Murat Aydede, 437–453.

Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Guo, Man, Chi, Iris, and Silverstein, Merril. 2012. "The structure of intergenerational relations in rural China: A latent class analysis." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74(5): 1114–1128. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2012.01014.x>

Hahn, Christina and Elshult, Katarina. 2016. "The Puzzle of China's Leftover Women." <http://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/8882495>.

Hamamura, Takeshi and Xu, Yi. 2015. "Changes in Chinese culture as examined through changes in personal pronoun usage." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 46: 930–941. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022115592968>

Hansen, Linda Prueitt. 2010. "Where Have All the Utopias Gone? Ritual, Solidarity, and Longevity in a Multifaith Commune in New Mexico." *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 266.

Hansen, Mette Halskov. 2013. "Learning Individualism-Hesse, Confucius, and Pep-Rallies in a Chinese Rural High School." *The China Quarterly* 213: 60-77. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741013000015>

Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies*, 14(3):575-599

Hardy, Anne, Bennett, Andy, and Robards, Brady. 2018. "Introducing Contemporary Neo-Tribes." In *Neo-tribes: Consumption, Leisure and Tourism*, edited by Hardy, Anne, Bennett, Andy and Robards, Brady, 1-14. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

- He, Haishi and Tan, Chris K. 2021. "Strangers in the Borderlands: WeChat and ethical ambiguity in Yunnan, China." *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 14(2): 123-138, DOI: 10.1080/17544750.2020.1769701
- He, Hong and Tan Tian. 2021. "The Trend of Mean Age at First Marriage and the Factor-Specific Contribution Rate of Late Marriage in China" (zhongguo.renkou pingjun chuhun nianling bianhua tedian ji wanhun de fenyinsu gongxianlv) *Population Journal* 43: 16-28. DOI: 10.16405/j.cnki.1004-129X.2021.05.002
- Heath, Sue.
2004. "Peer-shared households, quasi-communes and neo-tribes." *Current Sociology*, 52: 161–179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392104041799>
2009. "Young, free and single?" in *Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood, New perspectives and agendas*, edited by Andy Furlong, 211-16. Routledge.
- Heath, Sue and Kenyon, Liz. 2001. "Single Young Professionals and Shared Household Living." *Journal of Youth Studies*. 4(1): 83-100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260120028565>
- Hilder, Jason, Charles-Edwards, Elin, Sigler, Thomas and Metcalf, Bill. 2018. "Housemates, inmates and living mates: communal living in Australia." *Australian Planner* 55(1): 12-27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07293682.2018.1494612>
- Hollan, Douglas. 2020. "Emotional Entrainment in Crowds and Other Social Formations." in *Crowds: Ethnographic Encounters*, edited by Megan Steffen, 105-118. London: Routledge.
- Honderich, Ted. 1973. "Democratic Violence." *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. 2(2):190-214. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2265141>

- Hoppenbrouwer, Bas. 2019. "The Community Effects of Co-living: Exploring Opportunities for Dutch Developer-led Co-living in Fostering Community Building Among Residents." Master thesis, Nijmegen, Radboud University, Nijmegen School of Management.
- Horak, Martin and Vanhooren, Shanaya. 2023. "Somebody to Lean On: Community Ties, Social Exchange, and Practical Help during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *City & Community*, 23(1): 3-25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15356841231159370>
- Horgan, Mervyn. 2012. "Strangers and Strangership." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 33 (6): 607–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2012.735110>
- Hou, Li. 2007. "From Urban and Rural Dual Structure to Urban Dual Structure and It's Influences." (cong chengxiang eryuan jiegou dao chengshi eryuan jiegou jiqi yingxiang) *Population Journal* 2: 32-36. 10.16405/j.cnki.1004-129x.2007.02.006
- Hsu, Francis L. K. 1948 *Under the Ancestors' Shadow: Kinship, Personality, and Social Mobility in Village China*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hu, Qi. 2015. "Introspection on Low-end Labor Regulation of Megacity in Our Country." (du woguo chaoda chengshi diduan laodongli tiaokong de fansi) *Scientific Development* 10: 97-104.
- Huang, Philip C. C. 1985. *The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- Jansen, Harrie A.M. 1980. "Communes." *Alternative Lifestyles* 3(3): 255-277. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01083059>
- Jarvis, Helen. 2015. "Towards a deeper understanding of the social architecture of co-housing: evidence from the UK, USA and Australia." *Urban Research & Practice* 8(1): 93-105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2015.1011429>

- Jason, Leonard A., Olson, Bradley D., Ferrari, Joseph R., and Lo Sasso, Anthony T. 2006. "Communal housing settings enhance substance abuse recovery." *American Journal of Public Health*, 91(10): 1727–1729. doi: [10.2105/AJPH.2005.070839](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2005.070839)
- Jiang, Ting, Miao, Li and Fu Xiaoxiao. 2022. "Tourism and Yuan-based strangership." *Annals of Tourism Research* 94: 103401. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2022.103401>
- Johnson, Amanda Walker. 2017. "Resituating the Crossroads: Theoretical Innovations in Black Feminist Ethnography." *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 19 (4): 401–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2018.1434350>
- Jung, Shaw-wu. 2020. "From resistance to co-living: rural activism in contemporary Hong Kong." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 21(3): 406-424. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2020.1796353>
- Karadima, Dora and Bofylatos, Spyros. 2019. "Co-living as a means to re-engagement. A literature review." *The Design Journal*, 22(1): 751-762. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14606925.2019.1595397>
- Koch, Regan and Miles, Sam. 2021. "Inviting the stranger in: Intimacy, digital technology and new geographies of encounter." *Progress in Human Geography* 45(6): 1379-1401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132520961881>
- Koefoed, Lasse and Simonsen, Kirsten. 2011 "‘The stranger’, the city and the nation: On the possibilities of identification and belonging." *European and Regional Studies* 18(4): 343–357. DOI: [10.1177/0309132520961881](https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132520961881)

- Kong, Travis S.K. 2012. "Reinventing the Self under Socialism: Migrant Male Sex Workers ("Money Boys") in China." *Critical Asian Studies* 44(2): 283-308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2012.672829>
- Korpela Salla. 2012. Casa Malta: A case study of a contemporary co-housing project in Helsinki. *Built Environment* 38(3): 336–344. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2148/benv.38.3.336>
- Krokfors, Karin. 2012. "Co-housing in the making." *Built Environment* 38(3): 309–314. <https://doi.org/10.2148/benv.38.3.309>
- Lawler, Edward J. 2001. "An affect theory of social exchange." *American Journal of Sociology* 107(2):321–352. <https://doi.org/10.1086/324071>
- Lawler, Edward J, Thye Shane R and Yoon, Jeongkoo. 2008. Social exchange and micro social order. *American Sociological Review*. 73(4):519–542. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240807300401>
- Lee, Ahreum, Toombs, Austin L., Erickson, Ingrid, Nemer, David, Ho, Yu-shen, Jo, Eunkyung and Guo, Zhuang. 2019. "The social infrastructure of co-spaces: Home, work, and sociable places for digital nomads." *Proceedings of the ACM Human– Computer Interactions*. 3:1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3359244>
- Lee, Haiyan. 2014. *The stranger and the Chinese moral imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lee, Sangdon. 2016. "The Commune Movement during the 1960s and the 1970s in Britain, Denmark and the United States." PhD thesis. University of Leeds.
- Levine, Robert A. 1982. *Culture, behaviour, and personality: An introduction to the comparative study of psycho-social adaptation*, 2nd ed. New York: Aldine.

Levy, Robert I and Hollan, Douglas W. 2015. "Person-Centered Interviewing and Observation in Anthropology." in *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, edited by H. Russell Bernard, 333-364. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Li, Bin. 2002. "Social Exclusion Theory and the Housing Reform System in Chinese Cities." (shehui paichi lilun yu zhongguo chengshi zhufang gaige zhidu) *Social Science Research* 3: 106-110.

Li, Qiang and Wang, Hao. 2014. "The Four Worlds of Social Stratification Structure in China." (zhongguo shehui fengceng jigou de sige shijie) *Social Science Front.* 9: 174-187.

Li, Tian and Yan, Yunxiang. 2019. "The Self-Cultivation of a Socialist New Person in Maoist China: Evidence from a Family's Private Letters, 1961–1986." *China Journal* 82: 88–110.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/703196>

Lian, Si. 2009. *Ant Tribe (Yizu)*. Guangxi Normal University Press.

Liang, Yongjia. 2022. "Esteeming goods for non-accumulation, small realms with few people: Interpreting kula with Laozi." *American Anthropologist.* 124 (3): 456-466. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13761>

Liu, Fengshu.

2018. "An Expressive Turn with a Chinese Twist: Young Women and Other-sex Relations in Three Generations." *Sociology* 52:950–965. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038517702601>

2019. *Modernization as Lived Experiences: Three Generations of Young men and Women in China*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Liu, Jieyu. 2022. "Ageing and Familial Support: A Three-Generation Portrait from Rural and Urban China." *Ageing & Society* 42: 1–27. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X22000861>

Lu, Ming and Chen, Zhao. 2006. "Urbanization, urban-biased policies and urban-rural inequality in China: 1987-2001." *Chinese Economy* 39(3): 42- 63. <https://doi.org/10.2753/CES1097-1475390304>

Maffesoli, Michel.

1996. *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (D. Smith, Trans.). London: Sage.

2007. "Tribal aesthetic." *Consumer tribes*, edited by Bernard Cova, Robert Kozinets and Avi Shankar, 27-34. Oxford: Elsevier

2016. "From society to tribal communities." *The Sociological Review*, 64(4): 739-747. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12434>

Mahieu, Rilke, and Van Caudenberg, Rut. 2020. "Young refugees and locals living under the same roof: intercultural communal living as a catalyst for refugees' integration in European urban communities?" *Comparative Migration Studies* 8(12). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-019-0168-9>

Makimoto, Tsugio and Manners, David. 1997. *Digital Nomad*. Chichester, UK: Wiley.

Mancinelli, Fabiola. 2020. "Digital nomads: Freedom, responsibility and the neoliberal order." *Information Technology & Tourism*. 22: 417- 437. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-020-00174-2>

Martin, Fran. 2021. *Dreams of flight: The lives of Chinese women students in the west*. Duke University Press

Mathis, Glen M., Ferrari, Joseph R., Groh, David R. and Jason, Leonard A. 2009. "Hope and Substance Abuse Recovery: The Impact of Agency and Pathways within an Abstinent

Communal-Living Setting." *Journal of Groups in Addiction & Recovery*, 4(1-2): 42-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15560350802712389>

Mauss, Marcel. 1966. *The Gift*. Introduction by E. E. Evans-Pritchard. London: Cohen & West.

McDonald, Tom. 2019. "Strangership and social media: Moral imaginaries of gendered Strangers in rural China." *American Anthropologist* 121(1): 76–88. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13152>

Miller, Timothy. 1992. "The Roots of the 1960s Communal Revival." *American Studies*. 33(2): 73-93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40642473>

Molm, Linda D, Collett, Jessica L, Schaefer and David R. 2007. "Building solidarity through generalized exchange: a theory of reciprocity." *American Journal of Sociology*. 113(1):205–242. <https://doi.org/10.1086/517900>

Muraco, Anna. 2006. "Intentional families: Fictive kin ties between cross-gender, different sexual orientation friends." *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 68: 1313–1325. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00330.x>

Nagle, Robin. 2013. *Picking up: On the streets and behind the trucks with the sanitation workers of New York city*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Nash, Caleece, Jarrahi, Mohammad H., Sutherland, Will, and Phillips, Gabriela. 2018. "Digital Nomads beyond the Buzzword: Defining Digital Nomadic Work and Use of Digital Technologies." iConference 2018. Lecture Notes in Computer Science(), vol 10766. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78105-1_25

Ng, Mee Kam. 2015. "Knowledge and power in regenerating lived space in Treasure Hill, Taipei 1960s–2010: from squatter settlement to a co-living artist village." *Planning Perspectives* 30(2): 253-270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2014.934711>

Ortner, Sherry

1974. "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" in *Women Culture & Society*, edited by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, 67-87. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

1996. "So, is female to male as nature is to culture?" In *Making gender: The politics and erotics of culture*, edited by Sherry Ortner, 173–180. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Park, Albert. 2008. "Rural-urban inequality in China." In *China urbanizes: Consequences, strategies, and policies*, edited by Anthony J. Saich and Shahid Yusuf, 42-63. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Parry, Jonathan. 1986. "The Gift, the Indian Gift and the 'Indian Gift.'" 3: 453–73. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2803096>.

Parveen, Shahnaj. 2007. "Gender Awareness of Rural Women in Bangladesh." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 9(1): 253-269. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol9/iss1/14>

Pepper, Sam and Manji, Aaron. 2019. "Co-Living as an Emerging Market: An Assessment of Co-Living's Long-Term Resiliency." Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston, MA. <https://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/123605>

Polcin, Douglas L. 2009. "Communal-Living Settings for Adults Recovering from Substance Abuse." *Journal of Groups in Addiction & Recovery*. 4(1-2): 7-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15560350802712355>

Qi, Xiaoying. 2016. "Family bond and family obligation: Continuity and transformation." *Journal of Sociology* 52(1): 39–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783315587796>

Raskin, Allen, Schulterbrandt, Joy, Reatig, Natalie and McKeon, James J. 1969. "Replication of factors of psychopathology in interview, ward behavior and self-report ratings of hospitalized depressives." *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 148(1): 87–98.

Reichenberger, Ina. 2018. "Digital nomads – a quest for holistic freedom in work and leisure." *Annals of Leisure Research* 21(3): 364-380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2017.1358098>

Ren, Shuzheng. 2018. "Frequent Job Changing: A Study on the short-job-duration phenomenon of the new generation migrant workers in the era of individualization." (pinfan huangong: fetihua shidai xinshengdai nongmingong duangonghua xianxiang yanjiu) Dissertation. Central China Normal University.

Risman, Barbara J. 2004. "Gender as a social structure: Theory wrestling with activism." *Gender & Society*. 18: 429–450. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4149444>

Rofel, Lisa. 2007. *Desiring China: Experiments in neoliberalism, sexuality, and public culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Sahlins, Marshall. 1972. *Stone Age Economics*. Chicago: AldineAtherton

Sandstedt, Eva and Westin, Sara. 2015. "Beyond Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Cohousing Life in Contemporary Sweden." *Housing, Theory and Society* 32(2): 131-150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2015.1011687>

Santos, Goncalo D. D. 2006. "The Anthropology of Chinese Kinship: A Critical Overview." *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 5 (2): 275-333. DOI 10.1163/157006106778869298

Santos, Gonçalo D. and Harrell, Stevan (Eds.). 2017. *Transforming patriarchy: Chinese families in the twenty-first century*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

- Scheller, David and Thörn, Håkan. 2018. "Governing 'sustainable urban development' through self-build groups and cohousing: the cases of Hamburg and Gothenburg." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 42(5): 914–933. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12652>
- Schulterbrandt, Joy G. and Nichols, Edwin J. 1972. "Ethical and Ideological Problems for Communal Living- A Caveat." *The Family Coordinator* 21(4): 429-433. <https://doi.org/10.2307/582686>
- Shawkat, Shahan, Zaidi Abd Rozan, Mohd, Bt Salim, Naomie, and Muhammad Faisal Shehzad, Hafiz. 2021. "Digital Nomads: A Systematic Literature Review." *2021 7th International Conference on Research and Innovation in Information Systems (ICRIIS)*, Johor Bahru, Malaysia. 1-6, doi: 10.1109/ICRIIS53035.2021.9617008.
- Shey, Thomas H. 1977. "Why Communes Fail: A Comparative Analysis of the Viability of Danish and American Communes." *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 39(3): 605-613. <https://doi.org/10.2307/350914>
- Shield, Rob. 1996. "Foreword: Masses or Tribes." In *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, Michel Maffesoli (D. Smith, Trans.), ix-xii. London: Sage.
- Shao, Qin. 2013. *Shanghai Gone: Domicide and Defiance in a Chinese Megacity*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Simmel, Georg. 1950 [1908]. "The stranger." In: *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, edited and trans. by K Wolff, 402–408. New York: Free Press,.
- Slaby, Jan, Mühlhoff, Rainer and Wüschner, Philipp. 2019. "Affective arrangements." *Emotion Review* 11(1): 3-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073917722214>

Song, Geng. 2019. "Masculinizing Jianghu Spaces in the Past and Present: Homosociality, Nationalism and Chineseness." *Nannü* 21(1): 107-129. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15685268-00211P04>

Stafford, Charles. 2009. "Actually Existing Chinese Matriarchy." In *Chinese Kinship: Contemporary Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Susanne Brandtstädter and Goncalo Santos, 137-153. London: Routledge.

Statistics New Zealand. 2015. "Living outside the norm: An analysis of people living in temporary and communal dwellings, 2013 Census." Available from www.stats.govt.nz.

Stewart Maya and Schultze, Uirike. 2019. "Producing solidarity in social media activism: the case of my stealthy freedom." *Information and Organization* 29:100251. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2019.04.003>

Stichweh, Rudolf. 1997. "The stranger – on the sociology of indifference." *Thesis Eleven* 51: 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513697051000002>

Sun, Wanning and Lei Wei. 2017. "In Search of Intimacy in China: The Emergence of Advice Media for the Privatized Self." *Communication, Culture, and Critique* 10 (1): 20–38. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cccr.12150>

Sun, Xiangchen. 2015. "Individualism and Familism: Rethinking on the 100-Year Anniversary of New Culture Movement." (geti zhuyi yu jiating zhuyi: xinwenhua yundong bainian zaifansi) *Fudan Journal (Social Sciences)* 4: 62-69.

Sun, Yuezhu. 2017. "Among a Hundred Good Virtues, Filial Piety is the First- Contemporary Moral Discourses on Filial Piety in Urban China." *Anthropological Quarterly* 90(3): 771-799.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26645762>

Sun, Zhe. 2016. "Construction of the Housing Market and the Homeowner Society —The Case of Contemporary Shanghai." Doctoral Dissertations of East China Normal University.

Svistovski, France. 2020. "Burning down the Housing Market: Communal Living in New York." *University of St. Thomas Journal of Law and Public Policy* 47: 463-505.

Tang, Biao, Xia, Fan, Tang, Sanyi, Bragazzi, Nicola L, Li, Qian, Sun, Xiaodan, Liang, Juhua, Xiao, Yanni and Wu, Jianhong. 2020. "The effectiveness of quarantine and isolation determine the trend of the COVID-19 epidemics in the final phase of the current outbreak in China."

International Journal of Infectious Diseases. 95:288-293. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijid.2020.03.018>

Thompson, Beverly Y. 2018. "Digital nomads: employment in the online gig economy."

Glocalism Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation, 1: 1–26. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12893/gjcpi.2018.1.11>

Tian, Feng and Lin, Kaixuan. 2020. *Missing my Hometown: Research of Sanhe Dashen (Qi bu huai gui: sanhe dashen diaocha)*. Penguin Press.

Tummers, Lidewij.

2015. "Understanding co-housing from a planning perspective: why and how?" *Urban Research & Practice* 8(1): 64-78. DOI: 10.1080/17535069.2015.1011427

2016. "The re-emergence of self-managed co-housing in Europe: A critical review of co-housing research." *Urban Studies*, 53(10), 2023–2040. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098015586696>

Turner, Victor W. 1969. *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Chicago, IL: PAJ.

Ussel, J. Van. 1977. *Living in communes*. Deventer: Van Loghum Slaterus.

Vestbro, Dick Urban. (ed.) 2010. "Living Together – Cohousing Ideas and Realities Around the World." Proceedings from the international collaborative housing conference in Stockholm 5-9 May 2010. Stockholm: Royal Institute of Technology and Kollektivhus NU.

Viola, Judah J., Ferrari, Joseph R., Davis, Margaret I., and Jason, Leonard A. 2009. "Measuring In-Group and Out-Group Helping in Communal Living: Helping and Substance Abuse Recovery." *Journal of Groups in Addiction & Recovery*. 4(1-2): 110-128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15560350802712488>

von Zumbusch, Jennifer S. H. and Lalicic, Lidija. 2020. "The role of co-living spaces in digital nomads' well-being." *Information Technology & Tourism* 22(3): 439–453. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-020-00182-2>

Wang, Bin.

2014. "Volunteerism among New Generation Migrant Workers: a study about their motivations." (getihua de zhurenzhe: xinshengdai nongmingong congshi zhiyuan fuwu de dongji fenxi) *Journal of Shenzhen University (Humanities & Social Sciences)* 31(1): 119-125.

2016. "Individualization and its Management of Cyber Society in China." (woguo wangluo shehui de getihua jiqi zhili) *The Journal of Humanities* 2: 118-124. DOI: 10.15895/j.cnki.rwzz.2016.02.017

Wang, Blair, Schlagwein, Daniel, Cecez-Kecmanovic, Dubravka, and Cahalane, Michael. 2018. "Digital Work and High-tech Wanderers: Three Theoretical Framings and a Research Agenda for Digital Nomadism." Proceedings of the 29th Australasian Conference on Information Systems, Sydney, Australia.

Wang, Lei, Cui, Ying, Zhang, Li, Wang, Chao, Jiang, Yan, and Shi, Wei. 2013. "Influence of gender equity awareness on women's reproductive healthcare in rural areas of midwest China."

International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics 123(2):155–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgo.2013.05.023>

Wang, Xiying and Nehring, Daniel. 2014. "Individualization as an ambition: mapping the dating landscape in Beijing." *Modern China* 40(6): 578–604. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700413517618>

[10.1177/0097700413517618](https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700413517618)

Wang, Yunhe, Shi, Le, Que, Jianyu, Lu, Qingdong, Liu, Lin, Lu, Zhengan, Xu, Yingying, Liu, Jiajia, Sun, Yankun, Meng, Shiqiu, Yuan, Kai, Ran, Maosheng, Li, Lin, Bao, Yanping and Shi, Jie. 2021. "The impact of quarantine on mental health status among general population in China during the COVID-19 pandemic." *Molecular Psychiatry* 26: 4813–4822. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41380-021-01019-y>

Watson, James L. 1982. "Chinese Kinship Reconsidered: Anthropological Perspectives on Historical Research." *The China Quarterly*, 92: 589-622. doi:10.1017/S0305741000000965

Wei, Shangjin and Zhang, Xiaobo. 2009. "The competitive saving motive: Evidence from rising sex ratios and savings rates in China." National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 15093.

Wertsch, James V. and Roediger, Henry L. 2008. "Collective memory: Conceptual foundations and theoretical approaches." *Memory* 16(3): 318–326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210701801434>

[10.1080/09658210701801434](https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210701801434)

Whyte Martin King. 2005. "Continuity and change in urban Chinese family life." *China Journal*. 53:9–33. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20065990>

- Williams, Jo. 2005. "Designing Neighbourhoods for Social Interaction: The Case of Cohousing." *Journal of Urban Design* 10(2): 195-227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574800500086998>
- Wolf, Margery. 1972. *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*. Stanford; Stanford Univ. Press.
- Wrench, John. 2007 "The development of diversity management in Europe: convergence of constraints?" paper presented at the First International Diversity Summer School, University of Vienna, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 9–13
- Wu, Licai. 2014. "Individualization and the Development of Rural Religion in Contemporary China." (getihua yu dangdai zhongguo nongcun zongjiao fazhan). *Jiangnan Tribune* 3: 135-139.
- Xia, Meng. 2019. "Does a Different Household Registration Affect Migrants' Access to Basic Public Health Services 15 in China?" *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16(23): 4615. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16234615>
- Xiao, Suwei. 2016. "Intimate Power: The Intergenerational Cooperation and Conflicts in Childrearing among Urban Families in Contemporary China." *The Journal of Chinese Sociology* 3 (18): 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40711-016-0037-y>
- Xiao, Suwei and Guan, Cong. 2018. "Emotional Buffering, Middle-person Mediation and Formalized Democracy: Mechanisms of Intergenerational Coordination In Multi-generational Families." (qinggan huanchong zhongjianren tiaojie yu xingshi minzhuhua: kuadai tongzhu jiating de daiji guanxi xietiao jizhi) *Sociological Review of China* 6(5): 28-38.
- Xiang Biao.
2005. *Transcending Boundaries* [translated by Jim Weldon based on Kuayue Bianjie de Shequ, Three-joints Books 2000: Beijing:]. Brill Academic Publishers: Leiden

2021. "The nearby: A scope of seeing." *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, 8:147–65. https://doi.org/10.1386/jcca_00042_1

Xiang, Jiquan and Lu, Shuai. 2019. "Individualization and Management Transformation of Chinese Rural Society." (zhongguo xiangcun shehui de getihua yu zhili zhuanxing) *Qinghai Social Sciences* 5: 131-138. DOI: 10.14154/j.cnki.qss.2019.05.020

Xie, Caixia. 2018. "Individualization or Atomization: the Theoretical Threads and Historical Context." (getihua haishi yuanzihua: lilun puxi yu lishi yujing) *New Heights*. 37(3): 46-53.

Xie, Mingzhu and Lin, Feng. 2022. "Design of Supervision System for Illegal Operation of Real Estate Intermediary Based on Game Theory" (jiyu boyilun de fangchan zhongjie weigui jingying jiandu zhidu sheji) *Science Technology and Industry*. 22 (1), 149-152.

Xing, Siyu. 2020. "Disputes between landlords and tenants under the lack of control in real estate intermediary companies." (fangchan zhongjie qiye shikong xia fangdong yu zuke de quanyi jiufen) *Legality Version 2*: 201-202.

Xu, Deya and Wu, Fang. 2019. "Exploring the cosmopolitanism in China: examining *mosheng ren* ("the stranger") communication through Momo." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 36(2): 122-139. DOI: 10.1080/15295036.2019.1566629

Yan, Yunxiang.

1996. *The Flow of Gifts: Reciprocity and Social Networks in a Chinese Village*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

1997. "The Triumph of Conjuality: Structural Transformation of Family Relations in a Chinese Village." *Ethnology* 36(3): 191-212. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3773985>

2002. "Courtship, Love, and Premarital Sex in a North China Village." *China Journal* 48:29-53.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3182440>
2003. *Private life under socialism: love, intimacy, and family change in a Chinese village, 1949–1999*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
2005. "The individual and transformation of bridewealth in rural northern China." *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* 11: 637–658. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2005.00255.x>
- 2009a. *The Individualization of Chinese Society*. Oxford and London: Berg.
- 2009b. "The Good Samaritan's New Trouble: A Study of the Changing Moral Landscape in Contemporary China." *Social Anthropology* 17(1): 9–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8676.2008.00055.x>
- 2010a. "The Chinese Path to Individualization." *British Journal of Sociology* 61(3): 490–513.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2010.01323.x>
- 2010b. "Introduction: Conflicting Images of the Individual and Contested Process of Individualization" in *iChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*, edited by Mette Halskov Hansen and Rune Svarverud, 1-38. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
2011. "The Individualization of the Family in Rural China." *boundary 2* 38(1): 203–229. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-1262590>
2012. "Food Safety and Social Risk in Contemporary China." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 71: 705-729. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911812000678>
2013. "Parent-Driven Divorce and Individualisation among Urban Chinese Youth." *International Social Science Journal* 64(213–214): 317–30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/issj.12048>

2016. “Intergenerational Intimacy and Descending Familism in Rural North China.” *American Anthropologist* 118 (2): 244–257. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12527>
2017. “Doing Personhood in Chinese Culture: The Desiring Individual, Moralistic Self, and Relational Person.” *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 35(2): 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.3167/cja.2017.350202>
2018. “Neo-Familism And The State In Contemporary China.” *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic*, 47(3): 181–224. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45172908>
- 2021a. “Introduction: The Inverted Family, Post-Patriarchal Intergenerationality and Neo-Familism.” In *Chinese Families Upside Down: intergenerational Dynamic and Neo-Familism in the Early 21st Century*, edited by Yunxiang Yan, 1-30. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV.
- 2021b. “The Statist Model of Family Policy Making.” In *Chinese Families Upside Down: intergenerational Dynamic and Neo-Familism in the Early 21st Century*, edited by Yunxiang Yan, 223-252. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV.
- 2021c. “The Politics of Moral Crisis in Contemporary China.” *The China Journal* 85(1): 96-120. <https://doi.org/10.1086/711563>
- Yao, Jingjing, Zhang, Zhixue, Brett, Jeanne and Murnighan J.Keith. 2017. “Understanding the trust deficit in China: Mapping positive experience and trust in strangers.” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 143:85–97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2016.12.003>
- Yang, Chun and Guo, Liangwen. 2023. “The New Youth Self-organization and the Reconstruction of Public Space——Based on the Investigation of 706 Youth Space” (xinxing

qingnian zizuzhi yu gonggong kongjian zaizao) *China Youth Study* 1:52-61. DOI: 10.19633/j.cnki.11-2579/d.2023.0014

Tanner, Murray Scott. 2000. "State coercion and the balance of awe: the 1983–1986 'stern blows' anti-crime campaign." *The China Journal* 44, 93–125. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2667478>

Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. 1994. *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China*. Ithaca, NY : Cornell University Press.

Yang, Xiaojun. 2017. "The Impact of Household Registration System Reform on Population Immigration of Big Cities in China: An Empirical Study Based on Urban Panel Data from 2000 to 2014." (zhongguo huji zhidu gaige dui dachengshi renkou qianru de yingxiang jiyu 2000-2014 nian chengshi mianban shuju de shizheng fenxi) *Population Research* 41(1): 98-112.

Yang, Yudong. 2015. "Theory of Individualization in the Perspective of Rebuilding Chinese Lineages." (xiangcun zongzu zaizao shiyu zhongde getihua lilun) *Journal of Nanjing University (Philosophy, Humanities and Social Sciences)* 6: 58-67.

Yang, Zhenjie, Zhu, Guilin, Li, Linda Chelan and Sheng, Yilong. 2021. "Services and surveillance during the pandemic lockdown: Residents committees in Wuhan and Beijing." *China Information* 35(3): 420–440. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X211012822>

Yu, Jia and Xie, Yu. 2015. "Cohabitation in China: trends and determinants." *Population and Development Review* 41(4): 607–628. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2015.00087.x>

Zablocki, Benjamin,

1971. *The Joyful Community: An Account of the Bruderhof—A Communal Movement in its Third Generation*. Baltimore: Penguin Books.

1980. *Alienation and Charisma: A Study of Contemporary American Communes*. New York: The Free Press.

Zhang, Aihua and Yue, Shaohua. 2018. "Individualization or Familism: An Empirical Research on Intergenerational Relationships in Shang Village, Hebei province." (getihua yihuo jiating zhuyi: hebei shangcun daiji guanxi de shizheng diaocha) *Academia Bimestrie* 3: 141-146.

DOI:10.16091/j.cnki.cn32-1308/c.2018.06.023

Zhang, Li.

2001. *Strangers in the City: Reconfigurations of Space, Power, and Social Networks within China's Floating Population*. Stanford University Press.

2010. *In Search of Paradise: Middle Class Living in a Chinese Metropolis*. Cornell University Press.

Zhang, Li and Ong, Aihwa. 2008. *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Zhang, Liang. 2013. "Individualization and Rural Society Reconstruction in the Process of Modernization." (xiandaihua jincheng zhongde getihua yu xiangcun shehui chongjian) *Zhejiang Social Sciences* 3: 4-10. DOI:10.14167/j.zjss.2013.03.021

Zhang, Kun and Bélanger, Danièle. 2018. "Who Said I Was a Forced Bachelor?" Single Men's Voices and Strategies in Rural China. In *Scarce Women and Surplus Men in China and India—Macro Demographics versus Local Dynamics*, edited by Sharada Srinivasan and Shuzhuo Li, 67-84. Cham: Springer.

Zhao, Yanjie. 2019. "In Pursuit of Happiness: The Individual Purpose of Family Revolution around the May Fourth Movement." (weile rensheng xingfu: wusi shiqi jiating geming de geti

suqiu) *Journal of Central China Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences)* 58(1): 128-141.

Zhong, Xiaohui and Ho, Sik Ying. 2014. “Negotiative Intimacy: Expectations of Family Relationship and Filial Piety among Only-child Parents.” *Open Times* 1: 155–175. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1004-2938.2014.01.007>

Zhou, Jianwe and Yang, Shengxiang. 2020. “Reconstruction of the Foundation of Rural Social Governance under the View of Individualization.” (getihua shijiao xiade xiangcun shehui zhili jichu de chonggou) *Journal of Yunnan Agricultural University(Social Science)* 14(3): 8-12. DOI:10.3969/j.issn.1004-390X(s).201909061

Zhou, Youjia and Dong, Chen. 2023. “Nourishing social solidarity in exchanging gifts: a study on social exchange in Shanghai communities during COVID-19 lockdown.” *Humanities & Sciences Communications* 10:627. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02152-5>

Zhou, Zepeng and Xiao, Suowei. 2022. “Experiencing Authenticity:The Sociability and Double Life of Migrant Youth in Beijing.” (tiyan benzhenxing: beipiao qingnian de shehui jiaowang yu shuangchong shenghuo) *China Journal of Sociology* 4: 104-133. DOI:10.15992/j.cnki.31-1123/c.2022.04.007

Zhu, Jinghui and Zhu, Qiaoyan. 2013. “Mild Rationality:On the Contemporary Rural Family Generation Relationships in Zhejiang.” (wenhe de lixing: dangdai zhejiang nongcun jiating daiji guanxi yanjiu) *Zhejiang Social Science* 10: 99-129. DOI:10.14167/j.zjss.2013.10.023

Zuo, Xiayun, Lou, Chaohua, Gao, Ersheng, Lian, Qiguo, and Shah, Iqbal H. 2018. “Gender role attitudes, awareness and experiences of non-consensual sex among university students in Shanghai, China.” *Reproductive Health* 15: 49. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-018-0491-x>