"I can give you money but there is no use. The best thing I [can] give you is education." Negotiating Educational Migration and Gender in a Chinese Malaysian family

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, Singapore has steadily become a popular destination for migrants. While the reasons for migrating to Singapore are many and contextual, labour and education have been the primary driving factors for attracting migrants from around the world to Singapore. Although a popular migrants' destination, education and migration policies in Singapore are often gendered, and are negotiated along and across other axes of identification and differentiation such as ethnicity and ideas of 'modernity'. This article analyses gendered educational migration from Malaysia to Singapore focusing particularly on how educational migration leads to female self-transformation. Specifically, I argue that social actors negotiate educational migration within their gendered family constellations. The article first contextualises the empirical material by illustrating socio-historical processes in Singapore and Malaysia. In the next sections, I discuss my ethnographic methods and examine a brief history of the state of research in gender and educational migration. In conclusion, I offer a significant contribution to the growing and important body of scholarship on gender and transnational families by illustrating how gender is negotiated in migration using the case of a single Chinese woman's migration journey to becoming a 'modern woman'.

KEYWORDS: Migration, education, gender, Malaysia, Singapore

INTRODUCTION

"Ya, education is like the most important thing. Even my mother, she… because her parents were from China. Very old-fashioned, and they don't believe in sending the daughters to school. So my mother is about 82 years old now and she never went to school. But she knew the value of education so she always tells us, you know, 'I can give you money but there is no use. The best thing I [can] give you is education.' So this is the same thing that we…this kind of value that we also have and pass to our children." (Eve, 14 June 2009)[1]

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[1]All names have been anonymised.

Eᴠᴇ ɪs ᴛʜᴇ ᴍᴏᴛʜᴇʀ of my interviewee Doreen, a young Chinese Malaysian girl who migrated from Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, to Singapore for further education in 2003. During the interview quoted above, Eve broached the issue of education. Formal education has an important meaning in the local Chinese Malaysian context, especially when it comes to passing it on from older to younger generations. However, though the intergenerational transmission of formal education is important, my data reveals that this transmission is highly gendered.

Change of scene. Another Chinese Malaysian interviewee – Kristy – who migrated from Malaysia to Singapore in 1994, wrote me an email in September 2007:

> "The traditional Malaysian upbringing remains juxtaposed with our [my female Malaysian friends in Singapore] and my westernised thinking (a by product of our overseas tertiary educational environment)."

In her email, Kristy linked her socialisation in Malaysia to the idea of "tradition". She wanted to overcome this traditional upbringing by her educational path to an overseas country which would lead to a western way of thinking. How exactly is the educational migration from Malaysia to Singapore connected to 'being traditional' and 'being-modern'?

Malaysia is a multicultural society with Malay Malaysians, Chinese Malaysians and Indian Malaysians, as well as many different communities of Orang Asli ('original people'). Malaysian society is organised on a system of ethnic categorisation, in which the Malay Malaysians benefit more from governmental policies than Chinese or Indian Malaysians. The emphasis on ethnic inclusion and exclusion in Malaysia has so far hindered expression of women's and gender issues beyond ethnic categorisations. In an arena of social structures and relationships, Chinese Malaysian middle-class women choose Singapore as a destination for further education.

Eve's and Kristy's responses and experiences are far from unique. Their interviews are exemplars of my overall data and raise at least three vital issues: (1) the importance of education; (2) gender roles and relations in the family and beyond; and (3) a 'modern' vs. a 'traditional' Malaysia. For example, some of my female interviewees emphasised that the only brother lived back home in Malaysia in the parent's house and that he did not study at a prestigious university. Graduation from a university in Singapore was considered a stepping stone for the sister's career which was not available for the brother. In other discussions my interviewees focused on their 'modern' way of female behaviour compared to their Malay Malaysian fellows in their home country. These insights lead to the heart of this article: gender and educational migration in the context of broader social processes like ethnic identifications and aspirations for modernity. The central question addressed in this article is: How are gender relations negotiated within the

family? More specifically, what roles do the mother and the father play in influencing and helping their children, and what roles do daughters and sons play when it comes to the accumulation and enjoyment of education? In this respect, how are the family constellations shaped? The overarching aim of this case study is to illuminate and analyse how gender, education, modernity, and migration are negotiated within intergenerational family ties.

To discuss the above questions, it is important to understand the historical and current social processes in Malaysia and Singapore with regard to gender, education, migration, ethnicity, and modernity which I first discuss below. Following that, I will present the research methods and methodology and then give an overview on the current state of research on educational migration and gender. I will then present this particular case study: the Chinese Malaysian educational migrant Yue Yan within her gendered family constellations and how a 'modern' Chinese Malaysian middle-class family positioned itself within broader sociopolitical dynamics of Malaysia and Singapore.

SOCIO-HISTORICAL PROCESSES IN MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE: ETHNICITY, EDUCATION, AND GENDER

In Malaysia and Singapore, the increasing importance of education is connected to social status and power, and is entangled with transformed allocations of meaning concerning gender and ethnic relations. These processes are based on the concept and practice of multiculturalism.

Using the concept of multiculturalism in this article is helpful for analysing the socio-political processes in Malaysia and Singapore because it recognises the negotiation processes of cultural identifications, which are constantly created in both culturally segregated societies. In my argument I follow Gerd Baumann (1999: 26), who understands multiculturalism and culture as a set of sociopolitical performances which must be constantly stimulated. Social relationships are negotiated in a web of multiple identifications which leads to flexible and situationally caused cultural identifications (Baumann 1999: 138). Baumann (1999: 18–26) views "cultural identifications" as being based on ethnic and religious differentiations as well as on nation building processes. These interdependent categories of difference (national, ethnic, and religious belonging) entangle and form, according to Baumann, the basis of multicultural societies. Referring to the concept of multiculturalism in this article, therefore, does not mean to emphasise cultural identifications or cultural differences. By using this concept, I recognise the complexity and diversity of culture in Malaysia and Singapore and at the same time I reflect on the creation of and allocations of meaning to culture.

Multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore is created by segregating the societies into 'Chinese, Malays, Indians and Others' ('CMIO' in Singapore). In Western Malaysia, Malays form the biggest group (Department of Statistics

Malaysia 2008: 9), while in Singapore the Chinese make up the majority (Singapore Department of Statistics 2010: viii). Indians are the smallest group in both countries. The concept of multiculturalism implies the opportunity of cultural recognition, but simultaneously excludes other cultural actors. As a result, multiculturalism forms the basis for ethnic segregation. 'Ethnicity' does not describe certain characteristics of groups of people, but a relational and fluid power relationship (see Holst 2012; Goh. *et al.* 2009). Andre Gingrich (2008: 102) explains that ethnicity is the relationship between two or more groups which are of the opinion that they are culturally different from the other(s) on the basis of important questions. In this article, the term 'culture' is used to constitute ethnic identification through corresponding processes of differentiation.

The classification of CMIO is carried out in an essentialist way. Therewith not only is the inclusion of other cultural identifications prevented, but also intercultural exchange (Goh and Holden 2009:3). Despite cultural diversity in both countries, the respective governments legitimate a Chinese majority society in Singapore and a cultural Malay supremacy in Malaysia (*ketuanan Melayu,* lit. 'Malay dominance'). The latter is also linked to religion, as Sunni Islam has been established as the compulsory religion for the Malay Malaysians (*ketuanan Islam*) (Hefner 2001: 29). These developments of in- and ex-clusion are based on colonial categorisations of 'race' that have not been radically transformed until today (Goh and Holden 2009: 4).

Ethnic segregation in Malaysia and Singapore was introduced during British colonial times mainly through the establishment of a formal education system in combination with an institutionalisation of ethnic-based identity politics. A pivotal factor was the colonial government's assumption that the Malay population was native in contrast to the immigrant Chinese and Indian communities. Thus, they did not conceive of the three ethnic groups living as one social unit. As a consequence, the colonial government established separate schooling systems for each ethnic group (Lee Y.-F. 2009: 208). Ever since, tensions between the Malay and the non-Malay population have affected developments in the formal education sector. The Malaysian and Singaporean governments currently promote a neoliberal understanding of education and regard education as the basis of economic success and social advancement (Lee, M. 2004: 1–18).

In Malaysia, the neoliberal ideal of formal education competes with the philosophy of Muslim single-gender education which focuses on the personal religious development of boys and men: "The themes [of Islamic Education] are religiosity – God-conscious men having good characters – and intellectualism – putting knowledge to use in the service of God" (Rosnani 1996: 87). Muslim education is understood as a socialising process, which holds religion as its key component through learning the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the history of Islam with Arabic as the medium of instruction: "These [islamic] educational institutions had a common goal of producing virtuous Muslims who would obey the religious commandments and be useful to society" (Rosnani 1996: 5). The Muslim

education system in Malaysia is controlled by the religious departments of the federal states (Rosnani 1996: 5) and has therefore no priority for the central state. However, the public secular education organised by the Muslim Malay dominated government is not totally separated from Muslim faith (Mir and Salma 2007: 89).

The current neoliberal ideal of formal education in Chinese dominated Singapore, as well as Chinese independent schools in Malaysia, must be understood in the context of local Confucian education. Especially in Singapore, known for its western-standard elite universities, where the economic driven neoliberal principle is practiced successfully, this orientation runs contrary to the Confucian perspective to use education for personal development. According to the Confucian principle, education should be used for the moral growth of the individual because it is believed that it will enhance internalising social norms (Zürcher 1989: 19). Education is regarded as the lynchpin for personal – male – success (Göransson 2010: 119). The connection between Confucian beliefs and personal success is embodied in the ideal of the *junzi* – the morally perfect, just, and cultivated male Chinese (Chan 2008: 153–155).

The concept of the *junzi* reveals that Confucian elements and values, as well as the Muslim and British colonial values, were and are male-centred. Gender therefore is a pivotal category in Malaysian and Singaporean education policies. For a long time, men were preferentially treated and thus outnumbered women in the schooling systems (Singam 2004: 14–16). From end of World War II, women started to protest against gender-discrimination in the formal education system because access was *de facto* refused to them regardless of their ethnic background. The late 1940s and early 1950s emerged as a turning point for women of all ethnic groups. Anti-colonial movements developed, in which women's issues such as female participation in education became important. Despite anti-colonialism as a shared target, these struggles took place along the ethnic lines that had been developed in the previous decades (Maznah 2002: 84–85). Thus, gender issues have been entangled with ethnic-based education policies since colonial times.

In Malaysia, these 'entanglements' intensified in 1971 with the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP). After the so-called 'racial riots' between Malay and Chinese Malaysians in 1969, the NEP sought the economic development of the former through the improvement of education and job opportunities. Especially Malay Malaysian women profited from these policies of "neoliberal multiculturalism" (Goh and Holden 2009: 10). The newly created access to formal education and the labour market was now as much applicable for women as for men (Norani 1998: 173). The reasons for women to benefit from the NEP were wide-ranging. In the vein of the transformed economic policies, the salaries of wives and daughters were regarded as necessary for a higher standard of living on a concrete level (Ting 2007: 82). Furthermore, the state needed every potential worker for an economic upturn. Being classified as a "cheap labour force", women were more sought-after than men (Ong 2003:272). In addition, the NEP was embedded in

state policies of modernisation which also considered democracy as broadening the scopes of action for women. Social mobility of women has been developed to be a matter supported by state politicians by which they can present Malaysia as a 'modern state', both in domestic and foreign policy.

Through the implementation of the NEP, women were first engaged in factory work. By the end of the 1970s, 80,000 women between 16 and 25 years of age from rural areas were employed in urban factories (Frisk 2004: 59). Due to the high percentage of Malay Malaysians in rural areas (Department of Statistics, Malaysia 2010: 82–98), primarily Malay Malaysian women migrated to the cities in order to make use of the new possibilities. Between 1970 and 1980, the factory jobs for women rose by 209 per cent, for men by 79.5 per cent (Chitose 1998: 103). Women, who participated in the labour market for the first time, furthermore profited from the simultaneously introduced and widened education institutions. The opportunity to find employment and gain education resulted in greater social and financial independence. This changed the social status of these women and so became a criterion applicable for a "modern Islam" (Frisk 2004: 59).

The economic growth during the last four decades in Singapore and the urban centres of Malaysia has led to an enormous increase in female social mobility. As a result of these developments, more women than men now obtain tertiary education (Department of Statistics, Malaysia 2007: 130–134) and many women have obtained high-level positions in their jobs. This also enables them to choose between a personal career and family (Stivens 2007). However, in Muslim Malay-dominated Malaysia and in Chinese-dominated Singapore, access to these opportunities still differ for women and depend on their ethnic, religious, and also class-based background. As a consequence of these different opportunities, especially young Christian English-speaking middle-class Chinese Malaysian women not only migrate for reasons of labour (Lam and Yeoh 2004), but also for reasons of education.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

This ethnographic study of female Malaysian educational migrants in Singapore deals with global topics, which the social actors negotiate on a local level. Keeping this in view, I carried out a "multi-sited ethnography" (Marcus 1995) in order to better understand the complexity of migration processes. This implied doing fieldwork in diverse, but connected places. The main fieldwork phase in Singapore and Malaysia ranged from September 2008 to August 2009. The collected material has been amended on the basis of shorter fieldwork stays of altogether three months between December 2009 and January 2015.

Based on the approach developed by Marcus (1995: 106–110), I followed my respondents from Singapore to Malaysia. During my first six months of fieldwork in

Singapore, I closely accompanied thirteen Chinese Malaysian female educational migrants. In the second half of my fieldwork, I followed the biographical traces of my interviewees and primarily worked with their families who still lived in the migrant's home country, mostly in the capital Kuala Lumpur or in other cities like Johor Bahru and Georgetown. In this way, I gained access to the migrant's living environments. In the end, I interviewed and accompanied five Chinese Malaysian families with more than three children and three nuclear families with one daughter and one son in each case. I interviewed the migrants' parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters. Sometimes, the migrants took part at these interviews, but most of the time they did not. I met with the members of the family presented in this paper seven times, usually with different combinations of individuals present each time. The fifty-five interviews with the Chinese Malaysian actors I carried out between 2008 and 2009 were primarily open and narrative. My everyday life in Singapore and Malaysia was also structured by participant observations on different university campuses, in Christian churches, in bars and restaurants, and at student parties.

Following Marcus (1995: 106–110), I traced the signs of conflict that were in many ways connected with the decision to migrate, educational opportunities, and ethnic identifications. I examined the education opportunities for those women who did not migrate by accompanying eight female Malay Malaysian students at Malaysian universities in order to understand why their educational paths had not led them to Singapore. Interviewing and meeting their parents, grandparents, and siblings was also part of my fieldwork.

Through the conceptualisation of a single case study, it was possible to get in-depth understanding of a small number of 'cases', set in their real-world contexts. On the basis of systematic data analysis, the case study findings can be generalised to other situations through analytic generalisation. Nevertheless, presenting only one case in this article brings the details of the corresponding biography into sharp focus. By means of this approach – to focus on the narration of only one interviewee (Yue Yan) in her broader network – it is possible to interrogate the decision-making processes of the relevant actors (Hermann and Röttger-Rössler 2003: 2). The detailed narration becomes valuable through its uniqueness as it represents one facet of manifold possibilities in the specific local context (Waterson 2007: 30). After systematic data collection and analysis procedures, the gendered and education-based constellations with their complex consequences are not only meaningful for Yue Yan, but show significant patterns among the contemporary young generation from Malaysian cities.

EDUCATIONAL MIGRATION AND GENDER

Within the last four to five decades, the field of 'migration and gender' has gained great attention in research. However, within this field intellectual women remain

understudied, along with,[2] the elite strata of society in general, highly skilled female labour migrants, as well as female educational migrants in particular. The complex conflation of the topics 'migration, gender, and education' is so far lacking.

From an educational science perspective the internationalisation of higher education as well as patterns of educational migration in different regional contexts have been analysed in recent studies as 'student mobility' (e.g. Bhandari/Belyavina/Gutierrez 2011; Brooks/Waters 2011; Kell/Vogl 2010). In European countries (such as Great Britain, France or Germany) which attract high volumes of migrants, educational sciences have studied education paths taken by the second generation immigrants (Hummrich 2006, 2001; King 2006). With a focus on the economy, 'student mobility' is also studied in the context of education systems and economic policies (Delpierre and Verheyden 2011; Haupt *et al.* 2011).

Studies in the social sciences which deal with the micro-perspective, however, are very rare. Especially for the regional context of Southeast Asia, studies on young people migrating for reasons of higher education have only emerged within the last few years. An interdisciplinary group of Swedish researchers consisting of cultural anthropologists, sociologists, and scholars of Islamic studies are currently analysing intra-Asiatic patterns of educational migration (see corresponding articles in this issue). Two other ongoing research projects are an anthropological study on educational migration of young people from Arabic countries and Iran to Malaysia, based at the Institute of Asian and African Studies at Humboldt-University in Berlin[3], and another focusing on migration paths of African students to Malaysia based at the Southeast Asian Studies at Frankfort University, also in Germany[4]. Both projects highlight the relevance and timeliness of the topic of educational migration, especially in Southeast Asia. However, no significant results from these studies have been published to date.

In addition, there are two completed ethnographic studies on educational migration, both focusing regionally on Germany and Africa. Jeannett Martin (2005) analysed return migration of Ghanaian educational migrants who gained

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[2]Following Antonio Gramsci (1996: 1500–1502), I assume that every person in the world can be intellectual, but only very few have the possibilities to perform the function as intellectuals, e.g. through a position at a university.

[3]Since 2011, Dr Olivia Kilias runs the project *The Politicisation of Religion in the Context of Educational Migration to Malaysia* which is funded by The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research/Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF).

[4]The project *Migration of African students to Malaysia* which is conducted by Frauke Kandale is supervised by Prof. Dr. Arndt Graf and is part of the interdisciplinary and transregional collaborative research *AFRASO – Africa's Asian Options: New Interactions between Africa and Asia*. It started in February 2013 and is funded by The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research/Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF).

tertiary education in Germany before the 1960s. In one chapter Martin (2005: 272–292) focused on educational migration from a gender-specific viewpoint by presenting some interview-sections of women. However, in her study Martin deals uncritically with the category of gender; she does not deal with gendered-specific dynamics, motivations, ideas, and practices but regards men as universal and covers the topic of gender through the narrations of some women. The second ethnographic study on educational migration was conducted by Wiebke Aits (2008) and deals with educational migration paths of young men from the Maghreb states to Germany.

In the broader field of migration research that does not specifically deal with educational migration, gender has been developed as a strong analytical tool. According to Helma Lutz (2004: 476), despite interdisciplinary research, migration of women has long been considered a "gender specificity" in the field of migration research. In the field of gender studies, however, migration of women has long been considered an "ethnic specificity". In migration studies, the focus has been on constructions of ethnicity, but in gender studies, constructions of gender have not been linked to female migrants. Only since the mid-1990s were gendered identifications perceived as crucial for migration paths and destinations, so that the approaches of gender studies and migration studies became connected forming a complex analytical approach (George 2005; Lauser 2004; Lutz 2004; Salih 2003). Despite this fact, the analytical conflation of migration and gender studies (also in the sense of women-centred studies) are still being negotiated in Asian, European, and US social science research, because the recognition of gender as a structuring category of (educational) migration processes is still a contested field (Bereswill *et al.* 2012; Bonifacio 2014; Chaudhuri *et al.* 2014; Fink and Lundqvist 2010; Lutz 2009; Pessar and Mahler 2010).

In the following section, I will discuss how local actors give meaning to and use the multifaceted discourses and practices concerning gender, education, migration, and ethnicity for themselves on a local level.

Yue Yan: Becoming a "Modern Woman"

In 2000, Yue Yan migrated from Shah Alam, the capital of the Malaysian state Selangor which is only located 25 km from Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, to Singapore. At this time, she was only 15 years old, and she chose this way in order to finish her A-level in the city state. Funded by the Singaporean government with an ASEAN Pre-University Scholarship, she first attended the elite school Methodist Girls School (MGS) and then the Victoria Junior College (VJC). Classified as a so-called *foreign talent,* Yue Yan's Singaporean scholarships were extended for her studies at university. When I met her in 2009, she was 24, and had graduated with a Bachelor-Degree in Management Engineering

from *the* Southeast Asian elite university, the National University of Singapore (NUS).[5] Yue Yan's parents and her only brother Naren, who is one year younger to her, continue to live in Shah Alam.

Yue Yan grew up in a Christian, English and Cantonese speaking Chinese Malaysian family. The family's ethnic identification as well as religion and language play important roles for Yue Yan's migration path. Many Chinese Malaysians and Chinese Singaporeans regard Christianity[6] and the English language, linked to a high level of formal education, as a 'modern' way of life because it is associated with globalism resulting from colonialism and missionary work (Chew 2008: 407; see van der Veer 1995). This way, 'global Christianity' is locally understood as a differentiation from ethnically-defined Islam of the local Malays or from the religious practices of Buddhism/Taoism and ancestor worship of the local Chinese (Göransson 2010: 64). Christianity is based on scriptures, the foremost being the Bible, and therefore linked to formal education. Chinese religions like Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism, however, are practiced through temple rituals. Many Christians regard burning joss sticks and thereby communicating with spirits as a means for an intuitive way of practicing religion in contrast to rational and coherent ones (Göransson 2010: 67) and, therefore, attribute it to 'traditional' social practices. According to these local associations, Yue Yan not only grew up in a Christian, but also in a 'modern' family that she herself once referred to by saying: "My parents are very modern!" The categorisation of 'being-modern' will be important later on to discuss intergenerational gender relations.

Besides the religious and linguistic identification of the family, her ethnic identity played another pivotal role for Yue Yan's educational migration path. As discussed earlier, the Malaysian education system is organised on a quota system based upon ethnic classification. Due to the relatively small chance for non-Malays to enter the public universities, the alternative is to study at private universities in Malaysia or to study abroad. In Yue Yan's case it was her mother Su Kim who encouraged her to apply for the Singaporean scholarship after reading about the various programmes in the newspaper. She wanted her to try because of the limited possibilities for Chinese Malaysians to get a place to study and the low educational standard in Malaysia, as Su Kim told me.

The quota system is not only used for places of study, but also for scholarships. Until 2008, approximately 80 per cent of all national scholarships were

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[5]In the QS World University Ranking 2014/2015, NUS is ranked number 22 of over 800. See: http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings-articles/world-university-rankings/top-universities-world-201415 (accessed on 1 September 2015).

[6]In 2010, 9.2% of the total population in Malaysia was Christian. Among the Chinese Malaysian population, 11% were Christian (Department of Statistics, Malaysia 2010: 9, 82, 96). In Singapore, 18% of the total population was Christian in 2010 (Singapore Department of Statistics 2010: 13).

meant for the Malay Malaysian population. After strong criticism especially from Chinese Malaysians, the government gave access to 40 per cent of all scholarships for Non-Malays (Syed 2008: xviii). Yue Yan and her mother discussed this policy as follows[7]:

Yue Yan: You know, in Malaysia it is very unfair. The Malays always get the privileges. When I was a kid I went to a local school. I had a [Malay] friend there who only had five As in his leaving certificate. He got a scholarship from the government to study in Japan. He said 'Itu rezeki ku' [Malay for 'This is my luck']. But it's not his luck; it's only the way how the government supports the Malays! They don't need to perform very well. If we Chinese have straight As, that does not necessarily mean that we get a scholarship or a place at university!

Su Kim: Ya, everything functions according to being Malay or non-Malay. In Singapore, they look at your educational performance. That's good. Here [in Malaysia] they also say that the education system is based on merit. But it's only a hidden meritocratic system. In real it only functions according to skin-colour.

These ethnic experiences with the Malaysian education system were one important structural reason for Yue Yan to choose her way to Singapore. In this process she was strongly supported by her mother. The male members of the family played different roles, which I will discuss below.

Intergenerational Gender Dynamics

To understand better the meanings of education, gender, ethnicity, and modernity in Yue Yan's family, it is important to analyse Yue Yan's career decisions and paths in relation to those of her brother on the one side and to the roles of her mother and father on the other.

Yue Yan's brother Naren studied graphic design at ALFA College, a private institution in Malaysia, but he did not finish his studies. His father, Yew-Foong, then employed him in his own design agency where he produced advertisement boards and road signs.[8] "I encouraged him to work at my company", said Yew-Foong in an interview with me in June 2009. Yue Yan commented on the professional path of her brother:

[7]Interview, 20 June 2009.
[8]The father being a non-Malay himself, had difficulties in founding his agency because of the prioritisation of the Malay population. Yuen Yan told me: "My father couldn't open his company by himself legally. He had to ask a Malay whether he could register the company. My father had to pay him. We are working hard; very, very hard, much harder than the Malays do. The owner of the company only exists on paper. We have to do the whole work by ourselves. That's one of the reasons why so many Chinese Malaysians want to leave the country." (4 November 2008)

> "He is the only one who can help out in the family's business because there are only the two of us. It was his responsibility to do this." (Yue Yan, 4 November 2008)

Naren not only worked in his father's firm but also lived in his parent's house. Even after getting married in 2013 and soon having a baby son, he stayed in his parent's house together with his wife and baby. Yue Yan told me in January 2015 the reason for this is because their parents want to spend as much time with their grandson as they can.

When it comes to formal education, the relationship between brother and sister, which is closely connected to family duties, raises the question for social transformations of male and female gender roles within the broader society. Since Yue Yan went the way of excellent formal education, this way was not as much an option for her brother anymore as it was for her, because, in Yue Yan's family the son was encouraged to play an active role in family life.

This aspect can be discussed in the broader context of Chinese ideals. Ideally the eldest son takes on the responsibility for the family, especially for the elders. Usually, this has been understood as a caring role (*filial piety*) towards the parents. This is an expression of a certain Chinese status position. In the past, the (eldest) son enjoyed high prestige in the relations between parents and children. For many Chinese all over the world this is the case even today (Ong 2005: 175–178; see Nonini 1997). The Chinese status positions are based on the Confucian-Chinese family model. In this patrilineal model, the father as the male head of the family represents social stability as well as unity (Nuyen 2004). The mother is expected to be warm and play a supportive role vis-à-vis the rest of the family (Stivens 2000). These ideals, in turn, are based on the five most fundamental relationships in Confucianism *(wulun)*: those between father and son, ruler and subordinate, man and woman, elder and younger brother as well as friend and friend. It is important to note that all the relationships that a female can engage in according to *wulun* are subordinate positions (v. Ess 2003). In many Chinese families, this model is not practised that strictly anymore, but the implicit requirements still influence the relationships between men and women, brothers and sisters, mothers and sons, or fathers and daughters (Mellström 2003: 33).

The status position of the eldest son was and is represented through parental care as well as the task of raising the family's reputation and standing on the basis of good educational and professional performance (Ong 2005: 167). In the 1970s in Malaysia it was the women who ideally took the role of the "guardian of the house" as well as the "preserver of traditions" (Ong 2005: 33, 220). On the basis of Yue Yan's brother, Naren, remaining in the parent's house one can say that he, as the son, is guardian of the house and family, and therewith indirectly preserver of tradition. This was a recurrent pattern that I observed during my fieldwork, particularly for families with one daughter and one son.

While Naren represented the tradition of the son who took over responsibilities towards the family, he did not maintain the tradition of gaining high status through education or a corresponding position. His sister performed this role. Contrary to other assumptions (see Nonini 1997), I argue that in a 'modern' Malaysian family like Yue Yan's it is the daughter who overlays the social status position of the brother by means of formal education. In the field of education, she gains status, whereas he loses status in the same field. Considering the local sociopolitical processes regarding women's education, like the high proportion of women at the Singaporean universities, it becomes evident how, in the current local context, 'education' is becoming connected with 'femininity'.

Mother Su Kim and Father Yew-Foong: Education and Work

Regarding the educational path of their son, Su Kim told me:

> "We always told him to apply for the Singaporean scholarships too. He then applied for the same scholarships Yue Yan applied for.… I encouraged him to do so." (Su Kim, 20 June 2009)

The father Yew-Foong was the one in the family who wanted at least his son to work and to contribute to the family's business. The mother Su Kim, however, wanted both of her children to educate themselves, preferably in an excellent environment in Singapore. How do these different preferences reflect the parent's roles with regard to their professional life?

Su Kim grew up in Melaka, the port city on Malaysia's west coast. Yew-Foong is from Seremban, the capital of the state Negeri Sembilan. Both migrated to Kuala Lumpur for their tertiary education. The two studied Geography at Universiti Malaya (UM). Yew-Foong entered university in 1975, Su Kim in 1977. He was her senior; this is how they met.

The 1970s in Malaysia was the time when the Malay-oriented NEP was first implemented in the education system and the labour market. However, the ethnically based organisation of the education system was still different for the generation of my informant's parents:[9]

Su Kim:	When we went to UM last time, it was still an elite university.
YueYan:	Ya, like NUS today.
Yew-Foong:	It was very difficult to get a university place at UM. But back then we still could get a place when we had very good grades. When we studied at UM, there was the quota system already. But nevertheless they still looked more at the grades. That has changed now.

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[9]Interview, 20 June 2009.

The conflicts along ethnic lines became more powerful later on in the parent's professional lives. This is where the aspect of gender comes into play. Su Kim worked as a teacher for Geography and English language at a local Malaysian secondary school in Shah Alam:

> "You know, at my school, I'm the oldest and the one with the most experiences. But the younger colleagues, who don't have that much experience yet, are the ones who lead and control the school. Because they are Malays. Shah Alam is a very Malay dominated place. I'm the only Chinese among the colleagues. We have four different leading positions. And then there are four additional leading positions. I'm holding one of these, I'm head of languages. I'm the only Chinese among these eight positions!" (Su Kim, 20 June 2009)

After studying Geography, Su Kim continued to work as a teacher for Geography. Her husband, Yew-Foong, worked also as a Geography-teacher for the first year after graduation. After that, he worked in a bank for three years and then opened his design-agency. As he is a pragmatic person, he did not hesitate to work in fields for which he didn't have any formal educational background; Su Kim was the one who directly profited from her tertiary education.

Su Kim studied in the 1970s, which, as discussed earlier, was a time when women gained most from education policies. In the 1970s, there were still more Chinese Malaysians studying at universities than Malay Malaysians.[10] However, by 1985, there were two and a half times more Malay than Chinese Malaysians enrolled in Malaysian universities. Since mid-1980s, Chinese Malaysians have migrated overseas for further education on a higher quantitative level (Chong 2005: 50).[11]

Although these policies were Malay-oriented, the rise of women's status in the 1970s was still noticeable for women of all ethnic groups. Having studied from 1975 to 1977, Su Kim belonged to the first generation of Chinese Malaysian women who could profit from national education and modernisation policies as well as from social movements which fought, among other things, for women's education. It is this sense of valuing formal education with its consequences for the professional life that Su Kim wanted to pass on to her children – her daughter and her son.

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[10] One might be misled into assuming that the high levels of Chinese participation at the public university level might have been the result of pro-Chinese government policies. Rather the high percentage of Chinese enrolment developed due to the critical mass of educated Chinese compared to the Malays and Indians. This is because of the self-view of many Chinese that they are high-performing and education-oriented which is embedded in historical processes (Thimm 2014: 50–59).

[11] In 1975, from a total enrolment of 7677 students, 3084 were Malay Malaysians and 3752 were Chinese Malaysians. In 1985, the total enrolment of Malay Malaysians was 22271, but of Chinese Malaysians only 9142. In the meantime, 6034 Malay Malaysians versus 13406 Chinese Malaysians studies overseas (Chong 2005:50).

The father put most emphasis on the son remaining in the family according to the Confucian ideal. He wanted his son to contribute to the family's income and therefore work in a field he did not have any formal degree for. Pragmatic decision-making is a noticeable element on the male side of the family. Due to ethnic education policies in Malaysia as well as in Singapore and to historical social movements and modernisation processes which resulted in a rise of women's status through formal education in Yue Yan's mother's generation, Yue Yan, as the daughter, had the necessary resources and familial support to migrate to Singapore for further studies.

In the following section, I will conclude this article with a discussion on the spatial directions Yue Yan took with her migration path. Several times she mentioned that she regards Malaysia as her home because it is where her family lives. How influential were the structural and the familial factors on Yue Yan's future plans? How strong are her transnational networks in Singapore and in Malaysia with regard to her future decisions?

Migratory Directions: Going out – Coming back?

After finishing her A-levels, Yue Yan initially thought about going back to Malaysia because she had the strong feeling that it was her home. She wanted to help out in her father's agency and to study at a university at the same time. However, the structural factors keeping her in Singapore were strong. The Singaporean government developed a specific strategy in order to maintain the economic standard of the city-state. 'Foreign talents' are recruited through the offer of governmental scholarships by Singaporean schools. Those who don't migrate to Singapore as a school student have the chance to get a governmental scholarship out of the ASEAN- or A-Star-Program for one of the three autonomous universities: National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), or Singapore Management University (SMU). The scholarships are similarly based on ethnic criteria like the Malaysian ones, but in this case are especially meant for young Chinese.

> "If you want to study in Singapore, you need a scholarship from the Singaporean government. In Malaysia, they especially look for Chinese foreign talents, because they want to support the Chinese in their own Singaporean Chinese society." (Yue Yan, 4 November 2008)

Classified as a 'foreign talent' herself, Yue Yan not only got the scholarship for secondary school, but also for her tertiary education at NUS. That was the first reason for her to stay after her Pre-University Scholarship. However, the young people regarded as 'intelligent' by the Singaporean governmental institutions are expected to stay as long as possible in order to make the highly desired contribution to the local economy. Immediately after graduation, they are offered permanent residency, which is linked to special advantages, e.g. in obtaining

housing (Lam and Yeoh 2004: 153). Besides this, the foreign students who were supported by Singaporean scholarships are obliged to work for a Singaporean company for at least three years.[12] According to this duty, Yue Yan had to stay in Singapore after graduation:[13]

V.T.:   Do you want to stay on in Singapore?
Yue Yan: I don't know. I have to work in Singapore for the next three years anyway. When I can stay in Singapore even afterwards, it's okay. Here [in Singapore] I can earn more money….In Singapore I have all my friends and networks….[And] I have a chance for a better future, to get good work, I feel secure here. There are a lot of mixed feelings when I talk about Malaysia and Singapore. In Malaysia is my family, here in Singapore I have more strong relationships to my friends.

On 6 June 2009, Yue Yan started her first job in the field of sales. She regarded the structural possibilities in Singapore in terms of education and job opportunities in a safe environment as very productive. These possibilities have a stronger impact on her than staying together with her family and helping out in the family's business – as the young woman in the family she had the opportunity to continue her way abroad.

CLOSING REMARKS

The aim of this article was to analyse how gender, education, and migration are negotiated in Malaysia and Singapore within intergenerational family ties. Through Yue Yan's story it is evident which structuring social categories are manifest in the narrations of a local protagonist during a specific phase of life. In this story, gendered levels of negotiation are entangled with the categories of education and ethnicity as well as with the factors of migration and modernity. It also became clear how Yue Yan's educational migration path was negotiated through the gendered relations of a multigenerational family. There were negotiations in this gendered family constellation as to who should go on the road to success by means of tertiary education. In Yue Yan's case, it was the mother who passed on the responsibility to the daughter, the mother being a woman from the generation that experienced female social mobility since the 1970s. In this manifold arena of power, status, in- and exclusion, the Chinese Malaysian males are supposed to preserve the more 'traditional' elements like filial piety. As a consequence, Naren lived longer in the parental home than his sister. The gender relations therefore influence the educational

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[12]The duration depends on the subject: those studying Medicine are bonded for five years.
[13]Interview, 4 November 2008.

migration to Singapore insofar as the young women is afforded the chance to enhance the social status of their families through educational achievement.

In terms of democratisation, female social agency is conceived as part of a local 'modern' ideology. This ideology is adopted and reproduced by Chinese Malaysian women who regard themselves as 'modern'. Singapore with its multi-ethnic meritocratic society is the destination for female Chinese Malaysian educational migrants, who seek more equal opportunities. Its 'modern' neoliberal and elitist education system offers a variety of opportunities for the female migrants, e.g. the scholarship programmes. Finally, though, the young Chinese Malaysian women do not only migrate to the 'modern' Singapore, but also to a Chinese-dominated Singapore. Thus, the migration process is also a means of ethnic distinction. In the context of migration and education, it is evident that gender is directly entangled with ethnic and religious belonging, and embodied in the 'modern' habitus of the female educational migrants.

Acknowledgements

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