

Unsettling the *Yin-Yang* Harmony: An Analysis of Gender Inequalities in Academic Mobility among Chinese Scholars*

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This paper highlights the gendered nature of international academic mobility. Drawing on a qualitative research on Chinese scholars who have professional mobility experiences overseas, specifically in Germany, the paper demonstrates how the practice, meanings and perceptions of academic mobility are highly gendered. Research findings highlight how gender, intersecting with other axes of differences, shapes the power geometries of the transnationalized academic field, and in turn, facilitates and inhibits academic mobility differently among women and men. By bringing forth the gender inequalities in academic mobility, this paper contributes in opening up spaces to challenge and eliminate structural and normalized gender bias in the field.

Introduction

“Here he comes, our brother, our good brother who accompanies his wife! Come, sit here!” One of the Chinese fellowship-holders greeted his country fellow on the tour bus (Excerpt from fieldnotes taken in Germany, August 2006, original in Chinese).

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The “good brother who accompanies his wife” was a rare member on the fieldtrip that I (female, then mid-30s, Hong Kong Chinese) and 16 other research fellows, six of whom were accompanied by their spouse, went on. He was the only male spouse on-board. His wife was also atypical in that she, a chemist, was the only female mainland Chinese research fellow in our group – the other four Chinese fellows were men. Though the membership of this tour was not necessarily statistically representative, the gender balance (or “imbalance” rather) among the Chinese fellows reflects the general picture of the (transnationalized) Chinese academic landscape.¹ In a way not too surprisingly, therefore, this “good husband” attracted attention. His country fellows sometimes giggled a bit when they called him by this title. In exchange, he received such labeling with a somewhat embarrassed smile, so did his wife - the exceptional female fellowship holder. The other five accompanying wives on the journey, two of whom also from China, were not called the “good wife” or “good sister who accompanies her husband” because it was considered ordinary. Unlike the other “trailing spouses” from China who accompanied their husbands more or less throughout the whole fellowship period, the “good husband” had come to join his wife in form of a longer visit. The holiday was timed so that he could also take advantage of the generous invitation from the sponsor organization to join the 14-day tour around Germany. Though not being a devoted, full-time trailing spouse, his short-term but formalized appearance nonetheless invited extra notice and comments that the other trailing wives did not. This vignette illustrates how gender shapes the practice, perceptions and meanings of mobilities in the academic field at individual (as in socialization, construction of self, subjectivities), interactional (as in cultural expectations, cognitive bias) and institutional levels (as in organizational practices and distribution of resources and opportunities) (Risman, 2004).

This paper makes visible the gendered nature of international academic mobility that has received little attention in the scholarship. Academic mobility refers to the academically motivated geographical movements of students, faculty and researchers, generally in higher education, from their home institution to another one, either inside or outside of their home country, to study, teach or take part in research for a period of time. Like other forms of human movements, academic mobility is a gendered terrain. Drawing on secondary data, interviews and participant observation, this

¹ In this paper, “China” refers to the People’s Republic of China (PRC), excluding the Special Administrative Regions, Hong Kong and Macau, and does not include Taiwan. “Chinese” therefore denotes people and characteristics of the PRC, unless noted otherwise. Exceptions are also found in the section: “Embedding Gendered Mobility in Chinese Society and Culture” where “China” in its previous generations (before the PRC was founded) is referred to.

paper illustrates some dominant gendered mobility patterns, perceptions, expectations and experiences among Chinese scholars who have professional mobility experience in Germany. Intersecting with other powerful social positionalities (e.g., age, place of affiliations, social and professional background), gender facilitates and inhibits academic mobility differently among women and men in this elitist population. This leads to differentiated opportunities to accumulate mobility capital (Leung, 2013; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002), and in turn, can have a remarkable impact on the career advancement among female and male academics, as well as their contribution to the broader scientific and societal development in the increasingly globalized knowledge-based society.

Conceptualizing Gender in Migration/Mobility Research

A vibrant scholarship growing out from the important pioneering work conducted by feminist scholars in the 1970s and 1980s has advanced our understanding of migration and diverse forms of mobilities. Numerous conceptual and empirical interrogations have demonstrated that migration/mobility patterns and trajectories, migrants' motivations, expectations and experiences, their sense of obligations and duties, notions and practices of citizenship, as well as the discourse surrounding migration and mobilities are gendered (for reviews and exemplary collections of work, *see e.g.*, Boyle and Halfacree, 1999; Chant, 1992, 2006; Donato et al., 2006; Erel and Lutz, 2012; Hillmann and Wastl-Walter 2011, Kofman et al., 2000; Lutz, 2009; Momsen, 1999; Morokvasic, 1993; Morokvasic et al., 2003; Willis and Yeoh, 2000). In this literature, gender is treated as a social construct – hence not natural, essential or inevitable – that intersects with other axes of differences such as class and race/ethnicity, migration/citizenship status and sexuality (Glenn, 1999; Ingraham, 1994; Mohanty, 2003; for a review, *see* Kofman et al., 2000) in producing asymmetries and inequalities in migration and other forms of mobilities. A genuine gender perspective goes beyond treating gender as a fixed attribute for producing numerical comparisons. As Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994:3) makes explicit, "Gender is not simply a variable to be measured, but a set of social relations that organize immigration patterns." Rather than a static variable, therefore, gender is conceptualized as a process through which individuals and groups create, reproduce and/or contest identities, relations and power hierarchies that signify social differences between women and men through their perceptions, practices and discourses.

A number of feminist sociologists have offered conceptualizations that underline the structural manifestations of gender. Acker (1992), Lorber (1994) and Martin (2004) propose to consider gender as a social institution

with a set of formal and informal rules that shape human interaction, comparable to other “institutions” such as economy, the family and religion in its significance and consequences. Risman (2004) builds on Lorber’s and Martin’s work and defines gender as a social structure, to be treated on par with the economic or political structure of a society. Central to her proposal is a three-level analytical framework, anchored at the individual, interactional (i.e., between and among individuals) and institutional scales in deciphering the power of gender as a stratification system that works in intersections with other social structures such as the economy, the state, religion and the family. Highlighting the structural facet of gender does not mean undermining the role of individuals in shaping gender relationship and power hierarchy. The above-mentioned thinkers incorporate Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory in their conceptualization, emphasizing also the dialectic relationship between social structure and agency.

The emphasis of the above perspectives on the ways gender signifies dynamic power relationships and operates simultaneously and dialectally on various scales resonates the “gendered geographies of power” framework advocated by Mahler and Pessar (Pessar and Mahler, 2003; Mahler and Pessar, 2001) in their work on transnational migration/mobilities. The framework has three building blocks: “geographic scales,” “social locations” and “power geometries.” “Geographic scales” underscore the fact that gender operates simultaneously on multiple spatial and social scales (ranging from the body through the family, community, the state and beyond), and how gendered identities, practices and relations are produced, reconfigured and contested with each of these scales as well as between and across them. “Social locations” refer to “persons’ positions within interconnected power hierarchies created through historical, political, economic, geographic, kinship-based and other socially stratifying factors,” which are viewed as fluid (Pessar and Mahler, 2003:816). Last but not least, the third building block “power geometries,” an idea originally proposed by Massey (1994:146–156), is crucial in deepening our understanding of “time-space compression.” With the concept, Massey highlights how the seemingly even compression produces conditions that affect people unevenly. Individuals’ social locations affect their resources and mobility across (transnational) spaces; their agency to initiate, refine and transform various time-space compressing globalizing forces affecting them also varies.

This paper draws on the above complementary conceptual frameworks in teasing out the gendered contours of the international academic mobility field traveled by Chinese scholars. It illustrates how gender shapes Chinese academia and the mobility of scholars, with manifestations across individual, interactional and institutional levels. While the academic world seems to be increasingly internationalized and traversed by hypermobilities (of stu-

dents, academics, programs, knowledge, etc.), it is evident that this facet of time-space compression in the knowledge economy does not mobilize or root individuals in the same way, producing distinct yet dynamic power geometries. The professional mobility of academics is gendered through the patriarchal relations encoded in different national social-cultural spaces, expressed through institutional and family decision-making on who is allowed or encouraged to go abroad to gain the hailed "international experiences," for how long and how often, and who is not. My inquiry goes beyond the question of who moves and who does not, and elaborates on how academic mobility aspiration, expectations, practices and experiences are gendered. Before I proceed to present my research setup and findings, a review of the extant literature on gender and academic mobility is in order.

Gender and Academic Mobility: A Literature Review

Reflecting the propensity of women's engagement in specific economic sectors, the extant body of literature on gender and migration/mobilities has a heavy focus on gender divisions of mobility and work experiences played out in mostly lesser-/de-skilled sectors such as export-orientated manufacturing (e.g., Pun, 2004; Wright, 1997), domestic and care work (e.g., Lutz, 2011; Momsen, 1999; Parreñas, 2001; Pratt, 1997), sex work (e.g., Anderson and Phizacklea, 1997; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003), escort and entertainment work (Truong, 1996; Tyner, 1996), and to a lesser extent in entrepreneurship (Apitzsch und Kontos, 2003; Hillmann, 2007). Comparatively, the significance of gender in higher-skilled migration/mobilities had a late start (Kofmann and Raghuram, 2005). In the last ten years, however, much valuable research has been undertaken by (feminist) migration scholars to debunk conventional, masculinist assumptions about professional migration and mobilities. Important work by scholars such as Aure (2013), Iredale (2005), Kofman and Raghuram (2005, 2006), Ramos and Bosch (2011), Shinozaki (forthcoming), Silvey (2006) and Yeoh and Willis (2005) have brought forth the gendered power geometries at work in the labor market, the workplace, as well as within the household and other reproductive spheres concerning those who are categorized as (spouse of the) highly-skilled. An earlier intervention by Raghuram (2000) is particularly useful, in which she argues for gendering skilled migration streams for its implications in theorizing migration in general. She maintains that studying the experiences of skilled women allows us to challenge dominant conceptualizations concerning units of migration, migration regulations and the labor market positions.

Lagging further behind in this gendering research work are the studies on academic mobility. Within the small body of work available, the

main focus has been on the generally lower mobility women academics practise as compared to their male counterparts. Earlier studies examining the national patterns in the USA (e.g., Marwell et al., 1979; Rosenfeld and Jones, 1987; Schauman and Xie, 1996) have pointed to this tendency and concluded that geographical constraints experienced disproportionately among women have decisive influence on their professional advancements. These findings have been confirmed by more recent studies (e.g., Kulis and Sicotte, 2002). In his piece on the internationalization of the academic profession, Welch (2005:79) presents a short section on the distinct gender dynamics, underlining well-known facts that "international experience is valued within [academic] institutions" but "the opportunity to travel and study abroad actively discriminates against women academics" also using data from the USA. Similar gender gap has also been repeatedly confirmed in Europe. Ackers (2000, 2004, 2010) has persistently drawn attention to the importance of gender in her work in the past decade. Her research has identified the barriers to training and mobility of female researchers and examined the extent of female participation in research and knowledge production in Europe. Ackers (2000) shows that female mobile researchers predominantly move as "tied" movers, typically following a male partner. Focusing on situations in which both partners in a couple are employed in scientific research, Ackers (2004) concludes that high levels of mobility expected in the scientific profession often leads to tensions in these partnerships and women tend to sacrifice their career in such circumstances, by either leaving the profession or forgoing chances of progress. Ackers and Gill (2008) examine the gender bias of life-course dynamics such as partnering and children on academic mobility and career development focusing on the experiences of researchers from Bulgaria and Poland who have worked in the UK and Germany, respectively. Women were found to be tied to a specific spatial context because of private responsibilities and dual-career partnership.

Also highlighting the challenge in maintaining work-life balance among women plant scientists, a group of highly transnational researchers, Pettersson (2011) analyzes how gender intersects with mobility, career and private life drawing on interviews conducted with scientists affiliated with a highly international science center in Sweden. Leemann's (2010) research on academic careers of PhD graduates in Switzerland reveals how gender, working in complex and interactive ways with partnership, children, dual-career constellations, social class and academic integration, produces inequalities in the transnational academic mobility that in turn affect individual's accumulation of international cultural and social capital. Scheibelhofer (2008) examines the gendered mobility aspirations among Austrian scientists who have worked in the USA, highlighting parallels

between the mobility experiences of women across vastly different socio-economic and legal backgrounds. In particular, she underlines the similarity between highly-skilled female scientists and their counterparts who work as care workers. Focusing on the temporal dimension, Ackers (2010) calls specifically for more value attached to short-stay mobility, which is more practised by female academics, to career advancement among academics.

Research and policy-related discussion on gendered migration/mobilities in the German academic field concerns mainly the structural biases against women academics in general, and in particular those with migration background, who are employed in the higher education and research field (Bakshi-Hamm and Lind, 2008; Bouffier and Wolffram, 2011; Neusel, 2012) and more specifically in gaining academic mobility experiences (Bauschke-Urban, 2011). Recurrently, research concludes that the German academic sector is highly gendered and biased against those who have a migration background. Women with migration backgrounds have to jump double hurdles to enter and excel in the profession. More related to my work – considering the social demographics of the studied group – is Jöns' research that looks at the mobility experiences of international academics who have visited Germany and perhaps circulated to and from Germany for professional purposes. Jöns (2011) illustrates that former female Humboldt research fellows have experienced significantly less transnational mobility in their careers as compared to their male counterparts, particularly in the natural sciences. The gendered nature of academic mobility has important implications beyond shaping the experiences and career prospects of the mobile individuals themselves. Research has shown that academic mobility can also induce considerable professional and personal development among the students and immediate colleagues of the mobile academics, as well as capacity development of the institutions these individuals are affiliated with (Ackers, 2000, 2010; Leung, 2011).

A review of this body of literature reveals generally a rather technical operation of gender, mostly as a fixed attribute that accounts for the unequal opportunities and experiences of men and women in the academic world. While providing valuable observation and analyses of the individual and institutional factors contributing to gender differences, this body of work tends to overlook the importance of gender as a category to understand power relations. This paper aims to address this. Furthermore, there is also a distinct spatial bias in the scholarship: past research centers almost exclusively on the (im)mobility of European and US academics. This paper contributes to the scholarship by highlighting the gendered nature of academic mobility among Chinese scholars who have become prominent movers in the international academia in recent years. This focus enriches the hitherto small scholarship on the international mobility of Chinese

academics that has overlooked the gender aspect. Existing research has mostly considered the opportunities and limitations of considering mobile or transnational Chinese scholars as a diaspora network to be deployed for (national) development (Fahey and Kenway, 2010; Leung, forthcoming; Welch and Zhen, 2008; Xiang, 2005; Yang and Welch, 2010; Zweig and Chen, 1995; Zweig et al., 2004; Zweig et al., 2008). This paper reports the findings from a project that is one of the first endeavors in studying Chinese scholars' motivations for and experiences of mobility, using an agent-centered approach. This paper adds to the few brief reports published in the Chinese language on the structural bias against women in Chinese academia (e.g., Han, 2010; Xu, 2011). It illustrates how gender, as an important axis of power differences, affects the aspiration, acts and experiences of mobility among Chinese women and men in the increasingly transnationalized profession.

Embedding Gendered Mobility in Chinese Society and Culture

Gendered mobility patterns and experiences in the academia should be understood as embedded in the broader Chinese socio-cultural context. Gender inequality has persisted throughout history in China, though progress resulting from various reforms cannot be denied. Structuralized gender inequality in Chinese societies is often justified with the Taoist concept of *yin-yang*, which is used to explain the universe in terms of basic forces in nature, with elements categorized into two sets: *yin* (female, dark, cold, negative) and *yang* (male, light, hot, positive). *Yin-yang* is thought of as complementary, interconnected and interdependent in the natural world. Not respecting the *yin-yang* principle is to risk harmony and hence should be avoided. Such deep-seeded "Chinese culture" and "wisdom" provides a foundation for patriarchal practices, prejudicial legal system and inhuman ethical codes, which reinforce men's political, physical and psychological power over Chinese women (Zhou, 2003:67-68). Conventional idioms built on *yin-yang* dualities such as *nan zhu wai, nü zhu nei* (men take charge of the outside, women take care of things inside the family), *nan zun nü bei* (men are superior and women are inferior), *nü zi wu cai bian shi de* (a woman's virtue lies in having no talent) are still circulated, reproduced and deepened in contemporary Chinese societies often without reflection or criticism. The endurance of these notions signifies how gender shapes human interactions, opportunities and risks, and resource distribution. According to a recent UNDP (2010) report, gender inequality has persisted in all realms of life in China, including the education sector.

However, it should be noted that progress has been made in narrowing the gender gap in education. Prior to the communist era, formal education was considered as the privilege of wealthy families, accounting for the il-

literacy of 90 percent of the Chinese women (for a historical overview, *see* Wong, 1995). By 1958, 16 million women had supposedly gained literacy (Zhou, 2003:70). The latest survey conducted by the All-China Women's Federation and the National Bureau of Statistics in 2010 reports apparent improvements compared to figures from the previous decade: the gender gap in terms of years of education had been narrowed to 0.3 year from 1.5 years, and women aged 18 to 64 had completed 8.8 years of education on average (an increase of 2.7 years from 2000). Among those surveyed, 33.7 percent of women had received high school education and above, while 14.3 percent had received college education and above (an increase of 10.4 percentage points from a decade ago) (Xinhua, 2011). The wider gender gap at the higher level of the academic ladder is further demonstrated in a recent (2011) survey on "outstanding (*jiechu*)" scholars in the humanities and social sciences, which are already less male-dominated in most parts of the world including China. Among the 1,278 individuals selected to be outstanding scholars, only 89 were women – accounting for 6.96 percent (China Alumni Network, 2011). It should be noted that even though this proportion is extremely low, it has steadily increased over time and is relatively high compared to other more male-dominated disciplines. In comparison, among the 743 academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (Chinese Academy of Sciences, 2014a), only six percent are women (Chinese Academy of Sciences, 2014b). Going beyond numerical comparisons, Wong (2000) provides a critical analysis of the factors contributing to the persistent gender gap in education. She concludes that entrenched patriarchal beliefs, institutional discrimination, competitiveness-driven economic reforms, and insufficient governmental intervention limit the educational choices and futures of China's girls and women, and that much progress made in gender equality in the 1960s were eroded in the 1980s. Several studies conducted in the 2000s (e.g., Lee, 2012; Veeck et al., 2003) have concluded that the one-child policy has improved gender equality in education as parents are more committed to send their single child to school regardless of gender. The gender gap still persists at the tertiary education level, however. Focusing on higher education, Jacob (2006) underlines how gender intersects with geographical location and ethnicity in producing inequalities. Liu and Li (2010) conclude that gender inequality is apparent throughout the whole process of university education. These gendered patterns can be seen as comparable to the conditions in many parts of the world (Baker, 2013; Gutiérrez, 2012; Johansson and Śliwa, 2014; Neusel, 2012; Pritcharda, 2010; Sang et al., 2013). This paper contributes to this body of work to illustrate how gender shapes individual's perception of their ability to move, and how gendered subjectivities and code of practices stretch across space to affect women's and men's mobility experiences differently at the top end of the education and research field.

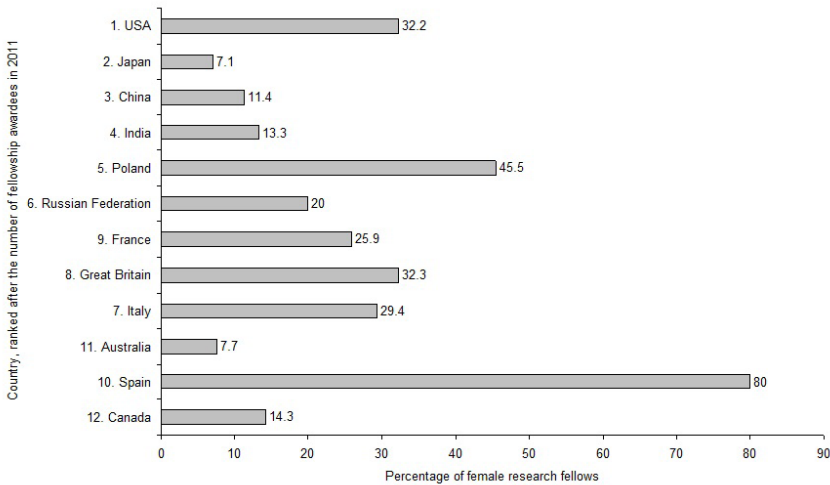
Methodology

This paper draws upon secondary data available from relevant Chinese and German organizations and primary data from a research project conducted between 2009 and 2010. The study began with the implementation of a two-page survey to generate an overview and collect quantifiable data from 123 Chinese scholars of post-doctoral or above level who have conducted research visits of at least three months in Germany. Among the respondents, 94 were male and 29 female (reflecting, though not statistically, the male bias in academic mobility), in their mid-20s to late-70s, with the majority being between mid-30s and 50, having held positions ranging from Post-doctoral Researcher to Professor during their visit(s) in Germany. The survey provides a broad understanding of the motivations for and experiences of academic visits among the respondents, which is used to draft the question guide for subsequent qualitative interviews conducted with 64 persons. The interviews were conducted mostly in China; a few were done during one of their visits in Germany. Interviewees were invited in the survey and through personal contacts. I have tried to make the sample as representative as possible in terms of gender, age, academic rank and academic discipline. Among the interviewees, 18 were female and 46 were male. In addition, expert interviews with six representatives of German organizations involved in academic mobility programs for Chinese scholars and three with Chinese officials were also conducted in Bonn, Cologne and Beijing. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese or German (with expert interviewees in Germany). They lasted between one and 2.5 hours. All interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed for analysis. Pseudonyms are used for individuals, their institutions and (when considered necessary) their specialities in order to maintain the anonymity of research participants.

Narrowing the Data Gap – Unearthing Gender in Academic Mobility

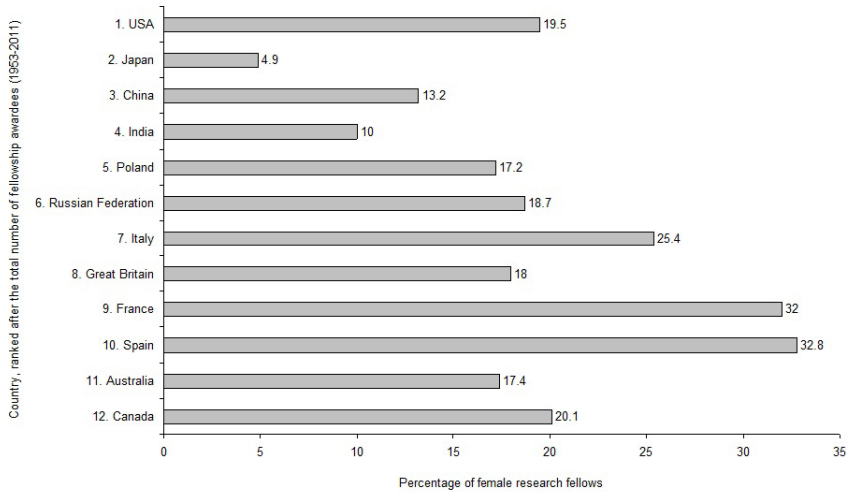
Comprehensive and reliable data on staff academic mobility are not available, partially due to the highly diverse and temporary nature of these trajectories. Even less is known about their lived mobility experiences. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education, academics going to Europe are generally aged between 30 and 40 years, male and from disciplines related to engineering. They are mostly affiliated with institutions located in Beijing or Shanghai. Academic mobility of Chinese scholars to Europe is steadily increasing and these scholars mostly travel to Europe for short-term periods (three months to one year) (GHK Consulting and Renmin University, 2011). The general male bias of academic mobility (i.e., not

FIGURE 1
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF FEMALE HUMBOLDT-FELLOWS FROM THE
TOP 12 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN, 2011



only among the Chinese) can also be observed in Germany, one of the most popular destinations among mobile academics in Europe. While no aggregate data are available on the gender distribution of visiting academics in the country, the statistics from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH) (Bonn, Germany) serve as good indicators. The Humboldt Research Fellowship Programme, run by the AvH has been the largest sponsorship scheme for visiting researchers (up to 40 years of age) at German universities and research institutions (up to 600 fellowships per year). Compared to other more specific and targeted sponsorship schemes, the Humboldt Research Fellowship Programme takes pride in its openness to applications from all countries and disciplines, without any regional and disciplinary quotas for the selection of research fellows. While the gender distribution of the fellowship is not readily available on the website – reflecting how it is an issue sidelined by the organization, the officer-in-charge was prompt in providing me the data. Among the total number of fellowships granted by the Foundation worldwide in 2013, about 30 percent were granted to female researchers (Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung, 2014:87). This figure has registered a steady rise in the past decades. From 1953 to 2011, only 16.5 percent were granted to female researchers (Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, email communication in April 2012). Figure 1 presents the percentage of women among the Humboldt-Fellows from the 12 countries with

FIGURE 2
AVERAGE FEMALE RATIO AMONG HUMBOLDT-FELLOWS FROM THE
TOP COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN, 1953-2011



the largest number of Humboldt-Fellows in 2011 while Figure 2 illustrates the average female ratio during the period 1953-2011. Among the Chinese fellowship recipients in 2011, 11.4 percent were female. The average figure for the period 1953-2011 was 13.2 percent. While this places China at the top among Asian countries, the figure is noticeably lower than those from North America and Europe, especially those from Spain (average: 32.8 percent) and France (average: 32 percent). Having noted the heavy bias against female academics, it is important to note the positive trend. AvH figures for the period between 1981 and 2000 show that for the then two most frequent source countries, the USA and China, the share of female research fellows were 18 percent and eight percent, respectively (Jöns, 2011: 198). Even though the base year for these two sets of data differs, it is safe to assume that the increase in both figures – 4.8 percent for China and 1.5 percent for the USA – are mostly accounted for by increases in the last decade, considering the general increase in female participation in academia (and associated mobility) in the course of time in most countries around the world (Jöns, 2011:198).

Gender imbalance in academic mobility is related to subject-specific gender disparity. Women are under-represented in the natural sciences and even more so in engineering, which in turn are the disciplines mostly promoted in the academia practically worldwide. Longitudinal AvH figures

TABLE 1
DISCIPLINE BACKGROUNDS OF HUMBOLDT FELLOWS, 1953-2010

	Country	Humanities and Social Sciences	Natural Sciences	Engineering	Total
12 Major sources of Research Fellows	USA	885	1320	161	2366
	Japan	528	1352	246	2126
	India	80	1329	281	1690
	China	88	1118	459	1665
	Poland	381	645	183	1209
	Russian Federation	172	641	77	890
	Italy	408	243	14	665
	Great Britain	294	346	15	655
	France	142	496	16	654
	Spain	206	302	6	514
	Australia	77	384	24	485
	Canada	103	252	33	388
Countries with high female proportion	Denmark	38	24	1	63
	Portugal	18	42	5	65
	France	142	496	16	654
	Spain	206	302	6	514

SOURCE: Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. 2012. Jahresbericht. Bonn: Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Available at http://www.humboldt-foundation.de/pls/web/docs/F179/jahresbericht_2010.pdf, accessed on 21 May 2012

for the period 1953 to 2010 on research fellows' subject fields make this gendered pattern in horizontal labor market segmentation and academic mobility apparent (Table 1). In most countries, many of the fellowships have been dedicated to disciplines in the natural sciences, followed by engineering. On the contrary, for source countries with a high percentage of female research fellows, such as Denmark and Portugal (which achieved a 50 percent balance of male and female research fellows in the 1990s), France and Spain (from which 40 percent of research fellows were female in that period) (Jöns, 2011:198), a large share of the fellowship has been granted to those in the humanities and social sciences disciplines.

Data cited above provide a sketch of the gendered terrain of academic mobility. The sketch illustrates how gender and disciplinary biases at the institutional level have directed the distribution of material advantage, as well as priorities in formal organizational and funding schemas (Risman, 2004) in the Chinese and German academia. The sketch lacks depth, however, as gender is translated into binary categories. Actors involved in these trajectories are reduced to either male or female, have gone abroad or not,

belonging to one discipline or another, etc. In the following section, we shall turn to data collected from in-depth interviews with Chinese academics. These narratives provide textured and grounded insights showing how academic mobility is gendered and a gendering process, where academics, as active agents, react to and act upon the power structure that shapes their mobility experiences.

Chinese Academic Mobility as Gendered Trajectories: Evidence from the Ground

Compared to skilled migrants who have longer job posting overseas or migrate for work reasons, the academics studied in this research had left China for shorter period(s) ranging from one semester to one or two years. Most scholars went on these study/work visits alone, without the company of their family. In addition to the short duration, the tremendous difficulty in finding skill-matching jobs for the usually (highly-) skilled spouses and affordable international schools for the children in Germany (Föbker et al., 2014) further discourage scholars and their families from disrupting their life routine and restraining their education/career prospects for being together on short academic visits in a socio-culturally unfamiliar environment. The interviews I draw upon in the following are conducted with scholars who belong to this vast majority. It should be noted that the academic mobility of those who move with their family is also a highly gendered process – just consider the fact that practically all the “trailing spouses” in this mobility stream are women. For those who move without their families, academic mobility brings with it an extra price that is reckoned and handled in a highly gendered manner.

During the interviews, no questions specifically on gender were asked at the onset. Follow-up questions related more specifically to gender were raised, when deemed relevant after the interviewees have brought that into the conversation. Hardly any comments regarding their work environment as gendered space were made among my 64 interviewees. The most frequent juncture when genderedness can be traced arose upon the question on the dark-side of academic mobility. Much more often, women interviewees shared the pain they had to bear for being away from their families, especially their children, as compared to their male counterparts. Li Meimei (female, 40s), Professor in Urban Planning, mapped out a few of the dominant gendered contours in the Chinese academic (mobility) field. Comparing her experiences with her female peers, Li considered herself to be “lucky.” She had witnessed multiple women academics having to go through divorce (“because their husbands could not take it!”) or had

to give up having children as a result of having gone overseas to work for an extended period.² She made the “gendered price for mobility” explicit:

If men go to Germany to study or work, they can bring their wives with them. That is acceptable in the Chinese society. “Men take charge of the outside; women take care of things inside the family.” That is Chinese tradition. It is not really probable that a man accompanies his wife to study or work. Well, at least my husband thought he would lose his face if he did so. He visited me at the different places where I worked, but he was not willing to stay. If he had nothing meaningful [professionally] to do there, wouldn’t that hinder his career in China? To stay with me, he must have a very suitable position; otherwise he would rather remain in China, so that his career and chances for promotion would not be affected.

Li’s justification for her husband not accompanying her is a common narrative among my female interviewees. On the contrary, I have come across many male academics (of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds) who were accompanied “full time” by their wives and families. Many of these trailing wives were highly-educated and/or –skilled, but willing to put their career on hold or accept a less than “suitable” socio-economic position (i.e., being full-time homemakers or taking up part-time, freelance work as “pastime” or “to keep connection with their professions”) – in some cases because of restricted right to work stipulated by immigration law – to travel with their husbands because they did not want to sacrifice their marriage and families. This illustrates how patriarchal ideology shapes socialization and subjectivities among women and men, and affects their sense of responsibilities in the family. Such expectations and practices in turn liberate and restrain the opportunities of professional advancements in a gendered manner.

Reflecting further on her experiences, Li elaborated on the loss she had to endure while being away from home:

In the process, I think the biggest loss was being away from my child. For a few years, I could not be together with her properly. When I first left, she was in primary school. When I came back, she was almost finished with the whole primary education. I care very much about my child, how she grows up. So after I returned,

² A few of the younger female scholars I interviewed also expressed their wish or need to return to China when they decided to have children, some of whom explained this expected move (or stasis) because of the lack of familial and/or infrastructural support they would have access to, if they were working abroad with very young children.

I have done my utmost to compensate. I guess now, I can say that the [negative] impact is not so obvious anymore. But I am aware that somewhere deep down, she might still be affected by the separation. When I was away, they sent me photos and I could see loneliness in her eyes. My heart ached so badly when I saw that.

A sense of guilt can be detected in Li's narrative, as in many other interviews conducted with women academics. For them and their families, professional mobility is often perceived to have discounted their role as a good mother and/or a good wife. Li's reflection on the impact on her marital relationship is particularly telling:

Certainly, there was some impact on our family. My husband never spoke much about his feelings, but I think such separation must have affected [negatively] our relationship. So after I came back, I did extra for our family, like taking up a larger share of housework, [laughs] and behaved better [in front of her husband] deliberately.

This part of her interview reminds us that the gendered division of labor and sense of responsibilities in the reproductive sphere stretches across axes of differences such as class, education and professional backgrounds. Li, being a senior professor, felt that she owed her husband housework labor while being away. Again considering herself to be fortunate, Li commented on the opinions of her parents-in-law:

At least they did not openly object to my plan. I know they blame me somewhat, but they did not object. That is already good. I know that many parents-in-law of women academics object openly and in extreme ways.

Looking back at her career with frequent transnational mobility, Li concluded that:

I missed my family so much during those times. But there were no alternatives [to the separation]. Sometimes we [women, as opposed to men] just cannot have the best of both worlds.

In a very similar way, Hu Lin (female, 40s), Associate Professor in Electronic Information, also considered that the biggest price she paid for her academic mobility experiences in Germany was separation from her son:

The biggest loss was the separation from my child, leaving him at home. Nobody took care of him. And then my son's eyesight got worse. He became short-sighted. And his school performance also deteriorated. Actually there was a possibility for me to extend my research stay from one to two years then.... But I did not dare take

the offer. Because I did not dare leave my child behind longer... My husband was very busy. And if my child went on like that [performing less well at school and becoming short-sighted], my family would be finished.

Hu Lin's son was an early teenager when she was in Germany. Even though her husband was at home with him, she still considered that her child was left uncared for. She clearly assigned more duties to herself, as mother, in caring and disciplining her son. Hu even blamed her absence from home for her son's eyesight weakness, possibly attributing that to excessive television and computer-usage that is common among (Chinese) children. Later on in the interview, she repeated that she dared not leave for too long and too often because "[her] family pulls her back." The above narratives underline the power of gender in enabling mobility and installing stasis in academic work. Gendered (im)mobility in turn affects the subsequent capital accumulation possibilities women, especially mothers with young children, have through participating (more) actively in the increasingly global(ized) academia (Leung, 2013).

Comparatively, male interviewees seem less affected by the separation from their families. Li Zhaodong (male, 60s), Professor in Medical Technology and Engineering, was an exception as he mentioned twice during the interview that "it was hard for [his] wife" who was in China taking care of home and family, allowing him to work at different times in Germany. Acknowledging, on own initiative (i.e., without prompting by the interviewer), the extra burden put on partners to manage the home alone was in fact rare among my male interviewees. Chen Yi (male, 40s), Associate Professor in Material Science and Engineering, provided a response that is more typical of my male interviewees. During our conversation in one of his visits in Germany, he evaluated his overseas academic visits very positively. When asked if these exchanges were only positive (*bai li wu yi hai*, literally translated: hundred gain and not one harm), he agreed immediately. I could not help asking a leading question, knowing that he had a young daughter who stayed in China with his wife while he was in Germany at that time:

Leung: Perhaps being away from your family is one of the disadvantages? Like, not being able to see them for three months?

Chen: I suppose that is true.

Immediately after this brief confirmation, he turned to comment on the relative living standards in places where he had been. While I do not wish to generalize that men are less affected by separation from their families, this emotion, at least the expression of which, was highly gendered. The

differentiation was noted similarly in interviews conducted by me (female, 30s) and my research assistant (male, 20s). Zhu Fucheng (male, late 30s), Associate Professor in Resources and Environmental Science, talked almost exclusively about his work during the interview. When asked about the impact of his academic visit on his life more generally (i.e., other than work), he reflected:

Nothing in particular. Well, my wife and child stayed back in China while I was in Germany for over a year. They came to visit me during the summer. Yes, we made use of the summer. The two of them traveled around, so our child could see something new... On the whole, other than work, [being in Germany] had not had much impact on my private life. Except that I was apart from my wife and child for some time.

Zhu's account reflects the distinct gendered division of labor that is common in Chinese society, like in most others. The husband and father of the family takes up the role to work, while the wife and mother is more responsible for social reproduction, both at home and abroad in our increasingly mobile world. The fact that he had to work as usual while his wife and child visited him and traveled around on their own was presented by Zhu as a matter of course, without any sign of regret.

Finally, I would like to return to Li Meimei to illustrate how academics, especially female scholars, are active agents in the (re)constitution of the gendered/gendering academic mobility field. Enduring the over-proportional burden and heartaches, female scholars, who have not given up on becoming, being and/or staying mobile, challenge the gendered academic (mobility) power structure "with their feet." Often, they also become mentors, promoting mobility among students and younger colleagues. In spite of the relatively higher emotional price women tend to pay in order to gain academic mobility, Li Meimei was convinced of the potential gain of these journeys and encouraged students and colleagues, especially female, to consider going overseas for some time. While providing encouragement, she also offers "important" and very gendered advice to young women scholars:

I also tell these young women to strike a balance, not becoming a strange woman after having been abroad for a few years. I do not want to see them coming back and not being able to find a boyfriend. They should not sacrifice their happiness. For women, [love, family] relationships are very important. So I always warn them, especially the women, that going abroad is not only exhilarating and blissful. It also contains very painful elements. And I tell them to be very persistent, in order to survive these painful edges.

This quote illustrates well the dialectic and “muddy” relation between structure and agency in the continuing (re)definition of gendered power geometries in the academic field. Instead of dividing individuals either as promoters or challengers of the gendered power structure, we should acknowledge that the terrain of negotiation is complex. Active agents who practise mobility and unsettle deep-rooted gender bias are also entangled in gendered and gendering perceptions, practices and discourses. In turn, they conform to the imperatives of the gender power structure and (re) produce it as they work against it simultaneously.

Conclusions

“Read ten thousand books, walk ten thousand miles (*du wan juan shu, xing wan li lu*)” is a classical and still very popular proverb that elucidates the appreciation of geographical mobility in Chinese culture. The possibility to achieve mobility and subsequent advancement, however, varies among individuals. In this paper, I have underlined the power of gender in shaping the inspiration for, practice and experiences of mobility in the Chinese academic field. As urged by Massey (1994) and Pessar and Mahler (2003), we need to recognize and be critical of the (gendered) geometries of power that define the uneven opportunities and experiences. Like in many other countries, regular exchanges and collaborations with colleagues overseas have become a valued and necessary component of many scholars’ work in China. My analysis above has demonstrated that the mobility turn in Chinese and international academia has produced conditions that affect people unevenly. Individuals’ social locations as in gender, age, disciplinary background, professional affiliations, ranking, etc. have an impact on their resources and mobility capital, as well as their agency to initiate, refine and transform the institutions and processes that constitute the academic (mobility) field.

Drawing on Risman’s (2004) three-level analysis of the gender structure, this paper has demonstrated how gender inequality is (re)produced, maintained, and challenged at individual, interactional and institutional levels. As illustrated by the secondary data, female academics in China, like the situation practically all over the world, experience much less mobility than their male counterparts due to biases at the institutional level that sideline certain disciplines in the academia and condone gender-biased (against women, precisely) challenges in balancing family and work. Qualitative interviews with female and male mobile academics and participant observation serve as windows to detect gendered manifestations at the individual and interactional levels. In this paper, we have had the opportunities to listen to the stories of a few academics and decipher how the push for academic

mobility in China (and elsewhere) has opened or constrained their mobility options and practices in a gendered way. Narratives collected demonstrate how gender, as perceived and practised in the work and family spheres, shapes professional-mobility-related aspirations, practices, experiences and emotions of individuals, as well as their interactions with others (as shown in the story that opens this paper). Going beyond the simplistic and binary comparisons of how men vs. women move and how many (have to) stay, this paper shows how female academics are socialized to carry more burdens because of the gendered division of physical and emotional labor at home that in turn, casts shadows onto the otherwise positively-perceived mobility experiences in their career. This illustrates vividly how gender respects no boundaries. It traverses social spheres, in our case, from family to work. Artificially dissecting these connected fields (or “institutions” as conceptualized by Lober and Martin or “structure” as framed by Risman) and in our analysis, as scientists often do, would only produce, at best, incomplete pictures.

I have centered my discussion on the effect of gender, as a set of power relations, embedded in Chinese society in shaping academics’ experiences in China and overseas. This focus was chosen because of the obvious pattern suggested by data. By no means, however, do I want to imply that Germany is a space of gender neutrality for the transnational academics. While hardly any comments were made regarding the genderedness of my interviewees’ work space in Germany, it does not mean that gender does not play a role in the academic space. In fact, gender inequity in the German academia is well-documented (as noted in the literature review). Compared to gender, the effect of ethnicities and nationalities were found to be much more pronounced in shaping the Chinese scholars’ perceptions and experiences of the German academic work space. It is, however, conceivable that if the interviews were conducted with an explicit focus on gender and on the German work environment, some additional or different data would have been collected.

By bringing gender dynamics in the academic mobility field to the fore, this paper has contributed in opening up spaces to challenge and eliminate structural and normalized gender bias. The quotes I have provided above demonstrate how gendered biases are (re)produced by men and women, often in a subconscious manner, because they have been socialized to carry certain sociocultural expectations with situational meanings that are taken for granted (Risman, 2004). Patriarchal hegemony (in Gramsci’s (1971) sense) is strongly in place, whereby gendered practices and assumptions are seen as normal and hence accepted, making domination seem natural and inevitable to both the dominant and the subordinate. Highlighting the non-reflexivity of gender (re)production may offer readers of this article,

most likely students and scholars of mobility, some food for thought. How do we, as (but not only as) academics, practise gender in ways that might perpetuate existing hierarchy? Or put in another way, how can we, as (but not only as) academics, practise gender in ways that can engender more equity? If academic mobility indeed has potential developmental impact that can be realized at different spatial levels (from individual to institutional, disciplinary, city-to national levels), more should be done to enable mobility among female scholars, so that they can also reach the stars, after having labored to hold up half of the sky (*fu nü neng ding ban bian tian*) – a slogan popularized by Mao Zedong in the early communist era. Indeed, if the (too) often-upheld *yin-yang* harmony means the male half of the population (privileged as bright, strong and positive (*yang*)) being balanced by the female half of the population (represented by dark, weak and negative (*yin*)), shaking up this harmony in all aspects of (Chinese) society is an urgent task.

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