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Family Obligations and the Post-International-Study Migration Plans of Thai Students Graduating from China

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Abstract

In reversing the narrative of 'family support' to 'support family' for a more comprehensive understanding of international student migration, this study examines how family obligations may shape post-international-study migration plans. Adopting a life course perspective and through quantitative methods using data collected among Thais studying in China, we find that, first, for caregiving of their elderly parents in the home country, the oldest group of students are more inclined to leave the host country upon graduation; second, for business purposes, those whose parents own businesses show a clear tendency to stay in China, Thailand's largest trading partner; third, reflecting an egalitarian view on intimate relationships, those married or in a romantic relationship tend to migrate to places where the couple could both have a career; lastly, when international students need to fulfill obligations both for family businesses and for facilitating the partner's career development or self-realization, instead of international students being left in dilemma alone, the family members may coordinate with each other and work out win-win solutions, taking advantage of their specific international economic circumstances. In an increasingly interconnected world , this study deepens our understanding on how the linked lives in international students' family fare and migrate in flexible and productive ways.

Keywords

Family obligation, International student, Post-graduation migration, Life course theory

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Introduction

Typically equipped with cross-cultural intelligence and/or advanced scientific and engineering skills, international students are welcomed to work in most countries upon graduation, especially the host and home country (Alberts & Hazen, 2005). Nevertheless, current studies on international students mainly focus on the students' in-campus, academic and social experience (Abdullah, Aziz & Ibrahim, 2014). Their post-study migration, on the other hand, remains understudied (Findlay, Prazeres, McCollum & Packwood, 2017).

King and Raghuramet (2013) rightfully acknowledge that international students assume multiple roles, including being family members. A further look into the limited studies on post-international-study migration reveals that family ties are frequently referred to as a key factor in shaping post-study destinations, on par with economic considerations (Geddie, 2013; Hazen & Alberts, 2006). Unfortunately, how family ties affect post-international-study-migration largely remains obscure and the mechanisms are often described in general terms, such as 'to be with family members'(Lee & Kim, 2010), or because of 'family pressure' (Bozionelos et al., 2015). Notably, in their study on international students' intention to stay in the US or return to their home countries, Alberts and Hazen (2005, p. 147) observed that 'the desire to be close to family members was not only a societal value, but also a moral obligation.' In this study, we attempt to specifically investigate how family obligations could shape post-international-study-migration.

International students' family obligations are multifaceted, depending on their cultural traditions, their positions/roles in the family, as well as the family types (Elmelech, 2005; Trieu, 2016; Hwang, Ko & Kim, 2018). In this article, obligations to care for their ageing parents, to accommodate their partners' career development or self-realization, and to take care of the family business, are examined for their implications on post-international-study-migration. Integrating the latter into our endeavor is legitimate, as the ownership of family businesses creates a complex web of obligations among family members (Stamm, 2016) and has been frequently (but only roughly) mentioned in prior studies on the relationship between family ties and post-international-study-migration (Geddie, 2013; Marcu, 2015; Ong, 1999).

The present study aims not just to list these family obligations and then their individual effects, rather, this article further explores the implications of students and their family members negotiating and coordinating with each other when multiple obligations are shouldered by international students. In doing so, we draw on life course theory to form hypotheses regarding international students' mobilities. Life course theory attempts to understand the continuities as well as the changes in the paths of individual lives. Contrasting with determinist viewpoints on human lives, it proposes that human development is a life-long social process and calls on scholars to examine 'the continuity and change of human lives in relation to interpersonal, structural, and historical forces' (Elder, Johnson &

Crosnoe, 2003, p. 5). Despite emphasizing larger historical contexts, life course theory does not cancel out individuals' planning and choice-making. Life course theory has been widely adopted in studies of international migration (Mulder, 2003). For our study, it is even more relevant, as the years abroad (in China specifically) can be both a response to the historical rise of China, and a life-changing experience, for the Thai students and their families. Particularly, we concur the 'linked lives' theme of life course theory, which argues that 'Lives are lived interdependently and socio-historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships' (Elder, et al., 2003, p. 13).

The data come from a recent survey on Thais studying in Chinese universities, of whom many are from business-owning families. Studying the migration (plans) of Thais graduating from China has critical policy implications. As China's economy keeps growing, new economic opportunities spring up for Thais. For instance, Thai entrepreneurs can learn the successful business modes in China; while organic farms in Thailand can expect increase of exports by targeting on the emerging middle class in China. Thus, the post-international-study migration of Thais can fundamentally affect the competitiveness of the Thai economy.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. We begin with a concise review on studies regarding the relationship between family ties and post-international-study-migration. Then, we discuss the obligations international students have to their parents, both in terms of care-giving and family business stewardship. Next, we turn to the commitments international students have to their partner or spouse. We then further examine the scenarios where international students simultaneously face obligations to a partner and to their business-parents. Next, we introduce our data and the analysis strategy. Lastly, after reporting the findings, we discuss implications and limitations in this study.

Research Background

When making post-study migration decisions, international students may consider not only job/career opportunities attached to places, but also their familial attachments. Encouraged by their parents who have helped form their life plans, some take job offers far from home (Findlay, Prazeres, McCollum & Packwood, 2017); accompanied by their spouse, international students are found better adjusted to the host environment and thus more inclined toward remaining abroad (Kim, 2015); yearning for the warmth of family and following their hearts (Soon, 2011), or under family pressure (Bozionelos, et al., 2015), some plan to return to the home country.

Family obligation, or the 'sense of duty' to assist family members and consider their needs when making a personal decision (Trieu, 2016), can also be weighed in the mind of graduating international students when making post-study migration decisions. Lee and Kim (2010) found that the returning decisions of South Koreans after obtaining doctorates in the US were often shaped more by 'family ties' and the relevant 'cultural reasons' than

the 'political economy'; in other words, international graduates returned to fulfill the cultural obligation of caring for elderly parents, and wives might simply follow, out of the obligation to support their husband. Geddie (2013) offered a more thorough examination of how post-international-study migration could be shaped by binding transnational family ties, which involve parent-child ties and intimate ties (spouses or partners). Unfortunately, family obligations are only implicit in these studies, and scholars did not go further to discuss the possible scenario where international students assume multiple family roles and face multiple family obligations simultaneously.

Family obligations are culturally specific (Elmelech, 2005), moreover, even within the same culture, they may vary. When discussing family obligation fulfillment among Southeast Asian American young adults, Trieu (2016) argued that their family's economic situation, or 'structural circumstances of economic need', should also be considered. Studies suggest that some international students plan to stay in the host country or return to the home country, sometimes reluctantly, for stewardship of their family business (Geddie, 2013; Lin & Kingminghae, 2017; Marcu, 2015).

In the following two parts, based on further review of relevant literature, we form a hypotheses on how the family obligations of (Thai) international students, including caring for their parents, stewardship of family business, and accommodating self-realization of their partner/spouse, jointly shape the post-international-study migration plans.

Parental Obligations

The obvious obligation international students may consider fulfilling upon completing study is caring for ageing parents. If so, where would this likely happen? Although there are cases where a parent migrates with the children who study abroad (Huang & Yeoh, 2011), it is unlikely for both parents to do so, as the normal lives and careers of the parents would be interrupted or even given up. After all, parents of international students are most likely to be from the upper-middle classes rather than being refugees or very poor (Findlay, King, Smith, Geddes & Skeldon, 2012). Furthermore, for the freshly graduated, it is generally not a good idea to bring their parents to a foreign country where they start working (Şenyürekli & Detzner, 2008).

Can we then propose that to better care for their ageing parents, other things being equal, older international graduates are more likely to leave the host country after graduation? Empirical evidence is scant in this regard. While Soon (2011) did not find age as a meaningful predictor regarding post-graduation migration plans, Kim et al. (2011) found that the role of age varied with time: while older students were formerly more likely to return home upon degree completion, this phenomenon disappeared in the 2000s. Yoon et al. (2013) even found that older students were more inclined to stay in the host country five years after graduation.

In light of the 'linked lives' proposition in life course theory, a person's life trajectory is intricately interlocked with their family members. The inconsistent findings above can be due to the fact that the parents of a typical tertiary student are likely to be in their 50s or early 60s, a life stage not in critical need of care. On the other hand, when their parents are more elderly, they begin to face health issues more frequently, and international students may feel obliged to return and care for their elderly parents, at the 'transition' moment of graduation (Elder, et al., 2003, p. 8). Returning to Thailand to care for elderly parents is even more plausible in our case because Thai society is still characterized by strong intergenerational solidarity (Knodel, 2014; Dommaraju & Tan, 2014). 'Parent repayment', especially in the form of providing comfort and support during the parents' later years, is commonly expected by all segments of Thai society (Knodel, Chamratrithirong & Debavalya, 1987, p. 196). Thus, primarily based on the linked lives theme of life course theory, we propose Hypothesis 1 as follows.

Hypothesis 1: Among Thais graduating from Chinese universities, the oldest are less likely to plan on staying.

If parents of international students own businesses, where would they like their children studying abroad to go post-graduation? Life course theory emphasizes the impact of macro-level historical times and places on individuals, especially through families (Elder, 1998), which is echoed in studies of international students with family business backgrounds. For instance, Marcu (2015) reported cases of international students in Spain planning to return to work in the family business, largely because of the sluggish economy of the host country. Ong (1999), on the other hand, observed that business-owning Chinese diaspora preferred to send their children to study in the US, the world's largest economy, and upon graduation, these children were expected to help expand the family business there.

In our Thailand-to-China case, in 2015, China was Thailand's largest trading partner (World Integrated Trade Solution, 2017), and Thailand was listed as a top China-dependent country (Rapoza, 2015). To survive and grow, few Thai business people can afford to neglect the challenges and opportunities brought by China's expanding economy (Fernquest, 2017).

One of the main obstacles faced by firms that want to expand their business abroad is the lack of knowledge, especially experiential knowledge, about the foreign countries, and this 'liability of foreignness' can only be alleviated through hands-on experience (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009). Thus, staying, irrespective of whether they stay as business representatives or general staff in local companies, would be preferred by those from Thai business-owning families, as the experiential knowledge gained will help their families better grasp the China-related business opportunities. Considering that many Thais are trying to grab the opportunities brought about by the historical rise of China as life course theory suggests, we propose Hypothesis 2 as follows.

Hypothesis 2: Among Thais graduating from Chinese universities, those whose parents own businesses are more likely to plan on staying.

Partner Obligations

While most international students do not have elderly parents, many are at the life stage of forming their family of procreation. In most parts of the contemporary world, including Southeast and East Asia, marriage is increasingly believed to be an institution in which individuals enter out of their own choice and should facilitate self-realization of individuals rather than hinder it (Jones, 2005; Williams & Guest, 2005). As work is often associated with individuals' life goals, the graduating international student may be obliged to work in places where not only good offers to himself or herself exist, but also career opportunities for their partner (Geddie, 2013). The behaviour of seeking dual careers reflects the themes of both linked lives and the influences of historical changes to individuals, which underlie the following two hypotheses.

In our study, if the Thai international student has left their partner to study in China alone, upon graduation, their partner may be busy at work or school in Thailand, awaiting the graduate's return. For the graduate, on the other hand, although returning to Thailand presents a skill-transferability cost (Sklair, 2012; Yoon, et al., 2013), it nevertheless accommodates the dual careers of the couple. Moreover, a foreign degree, as a form of cultural capital, can be even better rewarded in the home country (Lee & Kim, 2010; Waters, 2006).

Hypothesis 3: Among Thais graduating from Chinese universities, those in long-distance intimate relationships (partner or spouse) are less likely to plan on staying.

When studying abroad, international students may also form intimate relationships with or even get married to foreigners, especially to citizens of the host-country. For those Sino-Thai couples in our study, dual careers would be more likely in China than in Thailand, because the Chinese may not speak much Thai, whereas the Thai international students, after staying and studying in China for years, are likely to speak Chinese. Similarly, Leinonen (2012) indicated that some America-Finland couples chose to settle in America, partially due to the language-barrier Americans faced in Finland.

Hypothesis 4: Among Thais graduating from Chinese universities, those with Chinese partners are more likely to plan on staying.

When inter-generational obligations co-exist

What if international students need to fulfill multiple family obligations simultaneously? In our case, these situations include, A) having elderly parents who own a business; B) having elderly parents and a waiting Thai partner; C) having elderly parents and

a Chinese partner; D) coming from a business-oriented family and having a waiting Thai partner; E) coming from a business-oriented family and having a Chinese partner.

As the majority of international students are young and probably do not have elderly parents imminently needing healthcare, we continue by focusing on the last two scenarios, where international students hold obligations both to their family business and to their partner. The hypotheses regarding their plans of post-international-study-migration decisions, in light of a life course perspective, are formulated as follows.

When international students have both business-owning parents and a waiting Thai partner, they seem to be caught in a dilemma: staying would benefit the family business, while disappointing the waiting partner. Then, would business-oriented families ignore the welfare of their family members, or even go against their will, to achieve business goals? We would argue that this is unlikely, as the family's involvement distinguishes the family business from other businesses (Chua, Chrisman & Sharma, 1999). Coercing family members for business goals can also be counter-productive, as family member's emotional issues or feelings are important for family businesses' operation and succession (De Vries & Carlock, 2010; Kellermanns, Dibrell & Cruz, 2014).

Adopting the 'linked lives' theme from life course theory, Stamm (2016) suggests that coordination tasks need to be resolved as multigenerational family members in business-oriented families negotiate their interlocking lives. For the business parents in our study, asking their children to stay on in China after graduation for business purposes (which persists the long-distance marriage/relationship) is not only a hard sell, but also can easily engender hard feelings, which may hinder the strategic goals of family businesses, especially succession. On the other hand, the well-educated graduates returning from abroad can strengthen the domestic business operation (Cabrera-Suárez, De Saá-Pérez & García-Almeida, 2001; Iredale & Guo, 2001). In our case, with their knowledge of China, despite mainly learned at universities, the returnees would have plenty of opportunities to help the family do business with the Chinese flooding into Thailand, given that China is Thailand's largest trading partner and a tourist-sending country (Fernquest, 2017). Thus, primarily based on the linked lives theme from life course theory, we propose the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5: Among Thais graduating from Chinese universities, the pull effect from a partner waiting in Thailand is not weakened even if the international student's parents own businesses.

Lastly, what if the Thai student whose parents own a business has a Chinese partner? At first thought, staying in China seems to be an obvious choice: not only can the parents' business agenda be arranged, dual careers can also be accommodated. However, for those whose parents own businesses, the whole point of them staying in China may lie in gaining experiential knowledge there. Therefore, a Chinese child-in-law would have already

provided key knowledge about China to the business-oriented family, which would reduce the need for the Thai student to stay on.

But would a Chinese partner agree to live and work in Thailand? To begin with, are there suitable jobs for them? While it is generally difficult for marriage immigrants to find suitable jobs in the labor markets of western countries (Omori, 2016; Chen & Liu, 2017), in our case, there are various employment niches for the China-to-Thailand marriage immigrants. Liu-Farrer (2009) observed that some Japanese companies intentionally hired Chinese international students to handle growing business with China. Likewise, given the close Sino-Thai economic/trade relationship, the Thai import/export companies may like to hire China-to-Thailand marriage immigrants. The Chinese in-laws could also work in the branches of Chinese companies in Thailand as the investment from China surges (Waters & Hamilton, 2018). Moreover, given that their Thai parent-in-laws own businesses, the Chinese marriage immigrants could work for their parent-in-laws, or start new businesses, with all the legal and practical advice at hand from their Thai partner or in-laws. Negotiation and bargaining within the family may well exist, however, as the spouse realizes they also have opportunities to work and develop themselves in the migration destination, their reluctance about moving wanes (cf. Lundberg & Pollak, 2003). As we mentioned before, although life course theory stresses the influence of historical changes to individuals, it recognizes agency and flexibility that people have when rising up to the new opportunities and challenges. Accordingly, we propose the last hypothesis as follows.

Hypothesis 6: Among Thais graduating from Chinese universities, the staying intention of those whose parents own businesses is weakened if a Chinese partner is present.

The hypotheses are summarized in Figure 1.

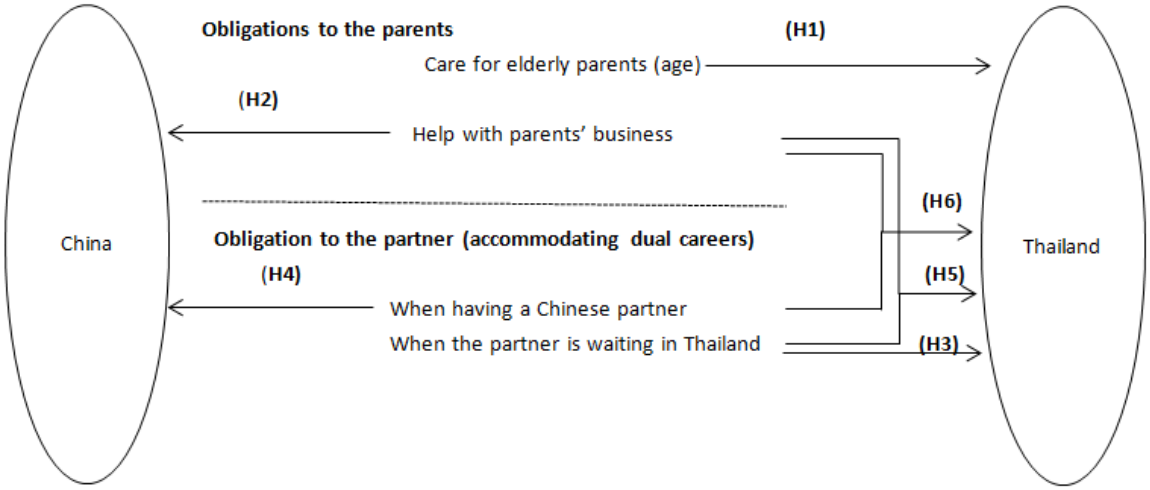

Figure 1 The proposed Effects of Family Obligations

Method

Data

In 2015, 19,976 Thais were studying in China, making Thailand the third largest sending country of international students to China (Ministry of Education PRC, 2016). In the early months of 2015, we conducted a survey aiming to understand the experiences and mobility intentions of the degree-seeking Thai students in China. Based on information acquired from the Royal Thai Embassy using quota sampling, which is a non- probabilistic version of stratified sampling when a sampling frame is not available, was adopted to choose seven universities into the sample. The criteria included university location (Shanghai, Beijing, and other cities), university ranking (a spectrum of college quality), and university type (comprehensive universities and universities focusing on certain fields such as business or foreign language learning). The research assistants, who were Thai students themselves, were asked to explain to the respondents that the survey was only for academic purpose, and no personal information would be disclosed. Questionnaires were distributed at classrooms or dormitories and were collected a few days later. The response rate was estimated to range from around 40% to 90%.

We ended up with a sample of 328 respondents. Although not randomly drawn, some traits of this sample were consistent with the general information provided by the Royal Thai Embassy. For instance, 65.5% of the respondents in our sample are females, which caused some concern. To our relief, an official in Royal Thai Embassy informed us that the percentage of females can be around 70%. Moreover, a study of international students in

Australia also found that, with a percentage of 62.5, females dominate the population of Thai international students (Boey, 2014).

Models

The respondents were clustered in universities. Idiosyncratic factors at the university level, such as the acculturating atmosphere and the quality and frequency of job fairs held on campus, may both affect Thai international students' post-study plans and be associated with the independent variables. To avoid the complicating effects of universities level factors, dummy variables of the universities were included.

At the individual level, the number of Chinese friends that Thai students have also needs to be controlled. While we presume that older students may return to care for their parents, they may actually leave the host country because of something else, i.e. facing more social difficulties (Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Poyrazli, Arbona, Bullington & Pisecco, 2001). Controlling for the number of Chinese friends also helps identify the pull effect of a Chinese partner, as the Chinese partner may bring along some old friends. Notably, we did not include the number of Thai friends, because unlike Chinese friends who will most likely work in China, Thai friends may leave China when the student graduates.

Measures

Our dependent variable is whether the respondent plans to stay in China upon completion of studies. We coded this variable as a 0 if the answer was 'not staying' and 1 if the answer was others.

Age, the status of marriage or romantic relationship, and whether the parents own businesses, constitute our independent variables. Notably, we combined the statuses of being married and having a romantic partner, and conceptualized them as having a 'partner' indiscriminately. The combination was justifiable as the specific roles and norms in a marriage become obscure in modern societies (Cherlin, 2004). It was also for the practical consideration that most students in our study were not married while some were in a romantic relationship. As suggested by Geddie (2013), these romantic relationships are as binding as family ties. Thus, based on whether the student was single or had a partner, the partner's location, and the partner's nationality, we sorted our respondents into five categories: (a) single, (b) partner is Thai and also in China, (c) partner is Thai and not in China (assumed to be in Thailand), (d) partner is Chinese (assumed to be in China), and (e) other situations.

To measure whether the family of origin owns a business, given that familial patriarchy still prevails in Thailand (Xu, Kerley & Sirisunyaluck, 2011), we only asked about the father's occupation instead of both parents'. We coded this variable as a 1 if the answer was 'business owner' and 0 if the answer was others.

Gender and numbers of Chinese friends are control variables that are measured based on self-reporting. For the latter, the question is “How many Chinese friends do you have?”

Results

Table 1 describes the statistics of variables used in the analyses.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Variables (N=328)

Variables		Percentage
Control Variables		
Gender		
	male	34.45
	female	65.55
Number of Chinese friends		Mean=5.14,SD=4.07
Independent Variables		
Age		Mean=24.5,SD=3.37
Intimate relationships (marriage or romantic relationships)		
	Single	57.62
	Thai partner in Thailand	10.98
	Thai partner in China	18.9
	Chinese partner	5.49
	Others	7.01
Father's Occupation		
	Business owner	59.45
	Others	40.55
Dependent Variable		
post-study stay plan		
	Leave	46.34
	Stay	53.67

As can be seen, a little bit more than 50% of the respondents planned to stay. Being single and having a father who owned a business also characterized most of the respondents. The dependent variable is correlated with both statuses of intimate relationships and having a business-owning father (Pearson Chi-Squares are 18.11 and 5.47 respectively, both significant at 0.05 level). As shown in Figure 2, age appears to have a negative effect on an intention of staying, and the effect is clearer at greater values.

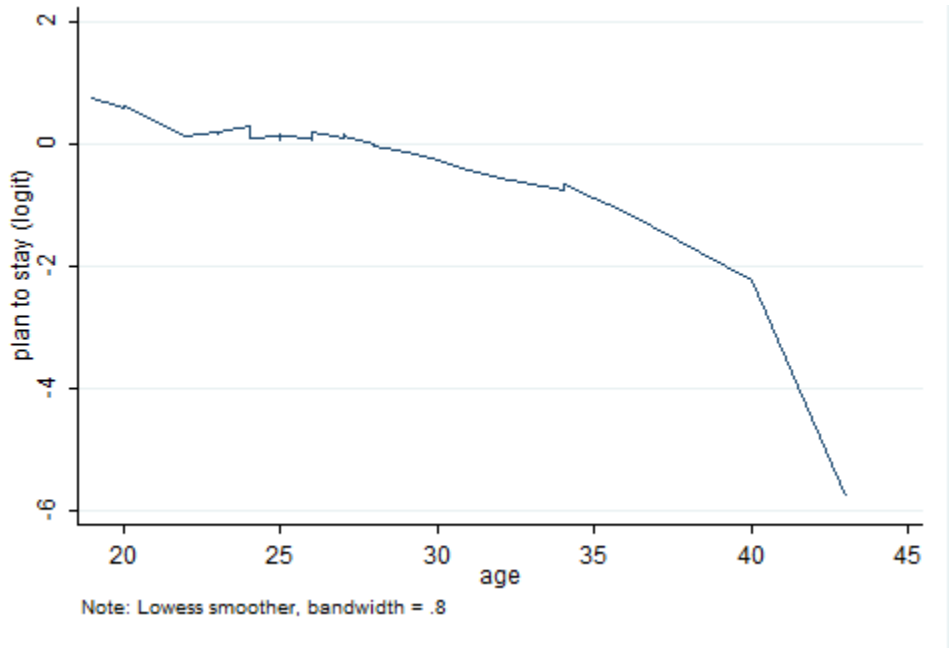

Figure 2 Effect of Age on Plan of Staying

As the dependent variable is binary, logistic models are adopted to estimate the coefficients and test the hypotheses, as shown in Table 2 and Table 3. The coefficients in these tables are slopes; a positive and significant value indicates increased odds of staying.

Table 2 Individual Effects of Family Obligations on Plan of Staying (Within-school effects, N = 328)

VARIABLES	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Gender(Male)	-0.349	-0.345	-0.330	-0.334
	(0.256)	(0.257)	(0.259)	(0.259)
Chinese Friends	0.0727**	0.0732**	0.0744**	0.0737**
	(0.0337)	(0.0338)	(0.0340)	(0.0340)
Age	-0.0536			
	(0.0410)			
Segments of Age				
(allowing different slopes)				
Quantile 1		-0.0317	-0.266*	-0.241
		(0.102)	(0.158)	(0.253)
Quantile 2		-0.0639	0.370*	0.0180
		(0.0604)	(0.194)	(0.218)
Quantile 3			-0.156*	0.189
			(0.0807)	(0.200)
Quantile 4				-0.171*
				(0.0956)
Status of Intimate Relationship				
(Single as the reference group)				
Partner is Thai and in China	-0.157	-0.163	-0.0844	-0.103
	(0.312)	(0.313)	(0.319)	(0.319)
Partner is Thai and in Thailand	-1.493***	-1.497***	-1.498***	-1.562***
	(0.448)	(0.448)	(0.454)	(0.461)
Partner is Chinese	1.146*	1.141*	1.170*	1.146*
	(0.620)	(0.620)	(0.613)	(0.615)
Others	0.431	0.424	0.349	0.374
	(0.485)	(0.485)	(0.485)	(0.484)
Father Owning Business	0.667***	0.660***	0.645**	0.663***
	(0.252)	(0.253)	(0.255)	(0.255)
Log Liklihood	-186.2	-186.2	-183.7	-184.6
BIC	374.41	376.30	373.21	376.98

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Dummy variables of universities not shown.

In Table 2 we focus on the effect of age. Model 1 includes all of the variables in their original form and thus assumes a common effect of age across the span. Given that both Hypothesis 1 and Figure 2 suggest increasing effects of age among older students, in Model 2, we sever the age range into two segments at the median, and estimate the slopes respectively; in Model 3 and Model 4, age is further divided into three and four segments where each segment has its own slope being estimated. The effects of age in the last segments are our main concern.

The effects of age in both Model 1 and Model 2 are not significant, whereas Model 3 and Model 4 indicate a negative effect of age on staying among the oldest group of students. As we reasoned above, health conditions may deteriorate at a much faster rate at older ages than in the middle range, which can trigger the obligation considerations of their children studying abroad. In fact, the coefficient of age in the last segment from Model 3 to Model 4 gets larger (from -0.156 to -0.171), indicating a clearer effect of age among the oldest group of respondents. Thus, the results in Table 2 lend support to Hypothesis 1. In the following models and discussions, based on the models' BIC that favors Model 3 (Long & Freese, 2006), we keep the three segment setting, rather than a linear or a more nuanced segmentation, to test the remaining hypotheses.

Model 3 in Table 2 also evinces the other hypotheses regarding family obligations. Specifically, father-owning-business is positively associated with planning to stay (0.645, significant at 0.05 level). The average age of those whose father owned a business was 24.2, indicating that the fathers were around 50 years old and probably did not urgently need care or help. Intimate relationships also turn out to be pulling graduating international students to their partners' current location, supporting Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4. For those whose partner was in Thailand (H3), the pull force seems clearer and stronger (-1.498, significant at 0.01 level).

For the control variables, Model 3 suggests that having more Chinese friends is associated with a stronger intention to stay, as expected. Gender was not found to be a relevant factor influencing intention of stay/leave.

Table 3 Interacting Effects of Inter-Generational Obligations on Plan of Staying (Within-school effects, N = 328)

VARIABLES	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Gender(Male)	-0.315	-0.356	-0.339
	(0.261)	(0.260)	(0.262)
Chinese Friends	0.0839**	0.0751**	0.0845**
	(0.0349)	(0.0342)	(0.0350)
Segments of Age			
(allowing different slopes)			
Quantile 1	-0.241	-0.254	-0.231
	(0.160)	(0.158)	(0.160)
Quantile 2	0.306	0.353*	0.292
	(0.196)	(0.195)	(0.197)
Quantile 3	-0.149*	-0.156*	-0.149*
	(0.0816)	(0.0814)	(0.0822)
Status of Intimate Relationship			
(Single as the reference group)			
Partner is Thai and in China	-0.0918	-0.0896	-0.0964
	(0.320)	(0.318)	(0.319)
Partner is Thai and in Thailand	-1.515***	-2.480**	-2.431**
	(0.456)	(1.080)	(1.082)
Partner is Chinese	2.764**	1.166*	2.731**
	(1.164)	(0.614)	(1.165)
Others	0.392	0.333	0.377
	(0.487)	(0.485)	(0.487)
Father Owning Business	0.779***	0.565**	0.703**
	(0.264)	(0.264)	(0.273)
Father owning business× Partner is Chinese	-2.677*		-2.617*
	(1.367)		(1.369)
Father owning business × Partner is Thai and in Thailand		1.314	1.215
		(1.192)	(1.194)
Log Liklihood	-181.4	-183.0	-180.8
BIC	370.60	373.70	371.32

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Dummy variables of universities not shown.

In Table 3, we test Hypothesis 5 and Hypothesis 6 regarding if having a business-owning father moderates the effects of statuses of intimate relationships. As shown in Model 5, when there were partners waiting in Thailand, the respondents overwhelmingly showed intentions to leave China upon graduation, regardless of whether their father was a business owner or not. Having a Chinese partner, on the other hand, had different implications. For the non-business-owning-families, having a Chinese partner is strongly associated with an intention of staying (2.764, significant at 0.05 level, much higher than a coefficient of 1.17 in Model 3), which is in line with Hypothesis 4, as China is a place where dual careers are more likely to be accommodated. By contrast, when the student's father owned a business, the effect of having a Chinese partner on staying was significantly decreased (-2.677, in Model 5, significant at 0.1 level). Thus, Hypothesis 5 and Hypothesis 6 are supported.

Conclusions and Discussion

Family members are supposed to attune to each other's needs (Becker & Becker, 2009). Although international students have left their home countries, they probably have not left their families. In this study, we take the perspective of family obligations as well as the insights of the life course approach to explain the post-study migration plans of international students, based on survey data collected among Thailand-to-China students. This quantitative study finds that, first, the oldest group of students are more inclined to leave the host country upon graduation, probably for caregiving of their elderly parents in the home country; second, for business purposes, those whose parents own businesses show a clear tendency to stay; third, reflecting an egalitarian view on intimate relationships, those married or in a romantic relationship tend to migrate to places where the couple could both have a career; lastly, when international students need to fulfill obligations both for family businesses and for facilitating their partner's career development or self-realization, instead of international students being left in a dilemma alone, the family members may coordinate with each other and work out win-win solutions, taking advantage of their specific international economic circumstances. More specifically, we find that the pull effect of a waiting partner is not weakened in a business-oriented family, as maintaining a long-distance relationship would also hurt the family business in the long run; whereas having a Chinese partner reduces the stay intention of those from business-oriented families, as enough career/business opportunities exist in Thailand for every family member.

Research acknowledges that studying abroad can enhance students' abilities, and many of them may gradually build the aspiration for international careers (Bozionelos, et al., 2015; Gomes, 2015; Huang & Yeoh, 2011). Moreover, their family members, parents or partner alike, often respect or prioritize their migration preferences (Findlay, et al., 2017; Geddie, 2013). Dominguez-Whitehead (2017) suggests that when undergraduate students in South Africa consider their future plans, they may give up graduate studies to satisfy

the wishes and needs of their family. In this study, we indicate that on the part of the international students, perhaps 'with great power comes great responsibility', the sense of family obligation is alive and well (Hwang, Ko & Kim, 2018), and actually affects their post-international-education migration plans. Thus, with this conceptual reversal from 'family support' to 'support family', our work contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how family ties affect international student/graduate mobility.

Another contribution of this study lies in our dedicated endeavor to understand international student mobility through a life course perspective. Rather than being domestically located, the major historical forces affecting Thai students and their families originate abroad. The process of modernization, spreading from the West (Giddens, 2013), has been undertaken by Thailand, a country long adopting opening-up policies (Riggs, 1966). Another major impact comes from the East, i.e., China growing into an economic giant and with lowering trade barriers, an increase in products, tourists, and investment flooding into Southeast Asian countries. Instead of being dominated by these global trends, Thais have risen to the occasion. While the western influence on lifestyles in contemporary Thai society is evident, family obligations remain nevertheless important (Knodel, 2014; Rindfuss, Piotrowski, Entwisle, Edmeades & Faust, 2012), as this study also indicates. Moreover, echoing studies that found family obligations being renegotiated with changing Asian families (Croll, 2006; Göransson, 2013), students from business-oriented families in this study may have negotiated and coordinated with their family members to work out win-win migration solutions, in occasionally unexpected ways. Geddie (2013) noticed that some Chinese international students in Western countries considered moving to Singapore after graduation, as both they and their parents could live comfortably. Due to the limitations of the data, we only discuss stay/return plans (cf. Findlay, et al., 2017), however, it is possible that Sino-Thai couples end up working in the internationalizing Chinese firms in Indonesia.

Thus, family ties do not just 'bind' (cf. Geddie, 2013), even fulfillment of family obligations does not necessarily hinder international student/graduate's mobility, as long as family members are willing to negotiate and coordinate with each other; moreover, when favorable international business/career opportunities emerge, family members may even improvise or be creative with their migration decisions, as Hypothesis 6 suggests. The representation of family obligation fulfillment in this study thus echoes Michel Foucault's conceptualization of power, i.e., being 'productive' and 'relational' rather than inhibitive (Cooper, 1994; Foucault, 1990).

This study is not without limitations. Firstly, while we provide examples of win-win scenarios, we may have represented family members as being too altruistic and reasonable while downplaying the possible conflicts among them. These conflicts within family may well exist in bi-national couples (Brahic, 2013) or business-oriented families (Cooper, Kidwell &

Eddleston, 2013; Pieper, Astrachan & Manners, 2013). Secondly, a plan might not be carried out in actuality. A longitudinal study or survival analysis would be appropriate if the actual post-graduation migration were to be examined. However, the cost of doing research involving students' parents or graduates is much higher than one on current students (Collins, Ho, Ishikawa & Ma, 2017). Lastly, in terms of data and models, owning to the design of the questionnaire, the possibility of going to a third country is ignored in this study. More variables could also be included into the models, such as the number of siblings and the size/sector of parents' business. We suggest future studies pay close attention to these fine details within the family, as well as the internationally structured opportunities and constraints facing international students and their families, for a better understanding of international student/graduate mobility and global talent flow in general.

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