

The Parent Tax: The governance of gratitude between transnationally educated
Singaporean sons and their parents.

by

Raviv Litman
BA, University of Victoria, 2014

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Anthropology

© Raviv Litman, 2016
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy
or other means, without the permission of the author.

Supervisory Committee

The Parent Tax: The governance of gratitude between transnationally educated
Singaporean sons and their parents.

by

Raviv Litman
BA, University of Victoria, 2012

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Leslie Butt (Department of Anthropology)
Supervisor

Dr. Daromir Rudnyckyj (Department of Anthropology)
Departmental Member

Abstract

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Leslie Butt (Department of Anthropology)

Supervisor

Dr. Daromir Rudnyckyj (Department of Anthropology)

Departmental Member

Abstract:

In Asia many young men and women feel obligated to give allowances to their parents. Scholars have shown that Singapore has reinforced traditional family relationships as a source of economic national security among citizens by drawing these feelings of obligation. I argue that students' experience with parent-child relationships of obligation within Singapore comes from a combination of state policy and parental expectations. These relationships are not created solely by the state, but co-created by the combination of parents and the state and result in reciprocal relationships expressed as gratitude. This thesis argues that there are state programs in Singapore that reinforce sons' bonds to parents while they are studying overseas in order to inculcate the idea of self-motivated gratitude to give money to parents. This study draws on data gathered from ethnographic interviews and participant observation conducted in Singapore with male students returning from studying overseas in 2015. The conscription of men into the military, scholarships for overseas educations, and funding for overseas Singaporean communities were all arenas where the state invested in strengthening the ties between sons and their parents in order to keep overseas students close to family. Among the respondents in this study the pressure to give back to family was solidified as a result of these programs which demonstrate that the state of Singapore seeks to sustain a global governance of gratitude among Singaporean transnational families.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures and Tables	vi
Acknowledgments	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 The sparkler bomb	1
1.2 Research questions	5
1.3 National family policy: Deserving families	6
1.4 Students, sons and soldiers	9
1.5 Familialist policy and expectations of children	14
1.6 Overseas education and ongoing contracts	17
1.7 Outline of the thesis	20
Chapter 2: Methodology	23
2.1 Ethnography: Research methods and subjects	23
2.2 Constructing “Mateship” and addressing masculinity	27
2.3 Insider/outsider	29
2.4 Including digital data	32
2.5 Language of the state: Poster, advertisements and fairs	35
2.6 Analysis and compilation of the data	36
2.7 Conclusion	37
Chapter 3: Intergenerational contracts and transnational sons	38
3.1 The Parent Tax table	38
3.2 Reciprocal gratitude	41
3.3 “Our money”: Currencies of gratitude	43
3.4 “Symbol of appreciation,” “Gesture of love”	46
3.5 Intergenerational frictions	50
3.6 Cheng’s change of heart	51
3.7 Zixing’s bargain	55
3.8 #filialpiety	59
3.9 Conclusion	62
Chapter 4: Guns, money and the Singaporean way: How National Service, scholarships and Singaporean Societies define sons’ responsibility.	64
4.1 “I used to be <i>blur</i> ”: Lessons from the National Service	66
4.2 Homogenizing masculine values in the military	73
4.3 Bonds and scholarship: How granting opportunities tie students to home	79
4.4 SingSocs: Linking the state with student bodies around the world	83
4.5 Conclusion	89
Chapter 5: Transnational sons’ experience: Agency under contract	91
5.1 Learning self-motivated gratitude	92
5.2 Learning the quickest pathway to paradise	94
5.3 The state discourse on gratitude	97
5.4 The flow of living overseas	102
5.5 Singapore dreaming	104
5.6 Conclusion	109

Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	112
Bibliography	115
Appendix.....	122
Appendix A: Guiding questions in in-depth interviews	122
Appendix B: Example informed consent form	125

List of Figures and Tables

Table 1: List of methods used.....	25
Table 2: Student respondent characteristics.....	39
Figure 1: Navy career poster.....	68
Figure 2: Government scholarship brochure.....	68
Figure 3: Navy scholarship career advertisement.....	68
Figure 4: Singapore Armed Forces community fair.....	76
Figure 5: Children playing soldiers.....	76
Figure 6: The Pioneer Family Member's Health Card promotional ad campaign	99

Acknowledgments

I'd like to first of all thank all the Singaporean students and parents who generously shared their time and their stories with me. Without your willingness to explain *gahmen-tality* to me, I would have no thesis to share. I want to also acknowledge the assistance of my friends who were not interviewed but helped me with my research. Thank you to Fung Ping, Charmain, Abidur, Doreen and Tan for helping me survive the constant summer in Singapore. I would like to express gratitude towards my own mother and father, Shoshana and Todd Litman for their support. I am most grateful to my supervisor, Leslie Butt, for motivating me to write this thesis and for teaching me how to become a student of anthropology.

I am also grateful for funding from my own government's scholarship programs. Funding from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada's grant number 435-2013-0079, *Southeast Asian Women, Family and Migration in the Global Era*, (Leslie Butt, Principal Investigator), funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada's Joseph Armand Bombardier Canadian Graduate Scholarship, and funding from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Victoria. I am also grateful to the Centre for Asia Pacific Initiatives' Crossing Borders Scholarship program for funding my expenses in Singapore and to the Asian Research Institute at the National University of Singapore for providing me with office space and support in Singapore.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The sparkler bomb

An already hot summer mooncake festival in September 2015 went up a notch when 19-year-old Spocky¹ and I learned how to make a sparkler bomb during my fieldwork. This wasn't his first time making one, but it was mine. Since I was the most senior person there among Spocky and his cousins, who were between the ages of 9 and 19, I thought I would play the responsible adult and learn how to do it safely. Spocky handed me the grenade of duct tape and sparklers that he learned how to make by watching Youtube videos. I lit the homemade firecracker on the staircase of his aunt's Housing Development Board (government housing) apartment complex and we bolted away. The explosion was bigger than any of us expected, and in quiet and safe Singapore, it was enough to wake the dead. Luckily no one was hurt. By the time the flashing lights of the police and fire department came around the corner, we were already safely back in Spocky's aunt's apartment.

Spocky looked like he has seen a ghost. As the rest of us laughed about the pure stupidity of our adventure while eating mooncake, Spocky suddenly became very serious. This could get him caned, or worse, he said, it could get him court-martialed in his army unit and sent to military prison. He would lose his chance to get accepted into an American or Canadian medical school like he and his mother dreamt about. He didn't want to lose out on that opportunity to live with family in Arizona because of a permanent mark on his service record. This international opportunity was a dream he and his mom shared, but he was afraid his immaturity could have wasted it.

¹ Respondents names have been changed to pseudonyms

During an interview in August 2015, Spocky showed me a photo he had taken during a recent trip to the Grand Canyon and said: “I soon realized that I was completely alone for the first time in my life – I had no social contact aside from my parents.” His mom had encouraged him to experiment with his passions which could lead to success. She also had enrolled him in afterschool cram schools so that he could succeed in them. He assured me that his parents would give him the funding he would need to study overseas when he needed it, and he would repay them over his lifetime.

In my contact with Spocky and other young Singaporean overseas male students, what stood out was an emphasis on gratitude and maturity in sons’ relationships with their parents. Going abroad to study is for many students their first extended period away from Singapore. Spocky’s parents provide important support for him as he struggles with moving between the US and Singapore. The threat of discipline in National Service makes Spocky afraid that if he doesn’t become more responsible to the state, he could put his parents’ investment in him at risk. Spocky’s gratitude towards his parents’ makes him feel concerned about what would happen to his future if he deviates too far from expectations about his maturity articulated by the state and by his parents.

Spocky’s story is an example of how male transnational students struggling with their place in Singaporean society may become self-motivated to emulate national expectations about responsible behavior in order to also show gratitude to their parents. Their experiences in state programs prepare them to maintain family bonds when they are independent as overseas students by maintaining contract-like obligations to reciprocate on the support they received from their parents. The bonds children in Singapore have to parents includes the common practice of children giving a portion of their income to

parents after they start working, or, as respondents called it, “The Parent Tax.” Through The Parent Tax children supply their parents’ with a regular allowance which supports the financial security of the state of Singapore by keeping more families insured of private income.

The role of the state in managing family obligations as a source of financial support for the state has been well documented in contemporary Singapore. The small island city state of Singapore on the tip of the Malaysian peninsula has become one of the world’s leading financial centres, because of top-down market-oriented policies implemented following independence from the British Empire and Malaysia in 1965 (Shatkin 2014). In the words of Lee Kuan Yew, the founding patriarch of the state of Singapore and biological father of its current prime minister, “I felt strongly that the people’s morale and confidence would be decisive in the coming battle for Singapore’s soul” (Lee 2000, 71). The battle Lee Kuan Yew was referring to was the survival of Singapore as an independent state through its transition from a colonial economy to an international market economy. Since the 1990’s the government of Singapore has reacted to the nation’s rapid economic rise by propagating a discourse of shared national values to combat materialism and the breakdown of family they identified with consumerism and westernization (Ortmann 2010, 31). The state called for the strengthening of ties between family members by putting the family above the self. This national discourse on the Singaporean family has been used to justify low taxation by shifting welfare responsibilities from the state to the family (Göransson 2009, Teo 2011).

According to several scholars, a national discourse on obligation to family based on shared traditional values sustains a neoliberal model of governance in Singapore, by

keeping family members more reliant on each other than on the state (Göransson 2015, Graham et al. 2002, Hudson 2013, Ong 2006, Teo 2015, Wong and Yeoh 2003).

Neoliberal governance in theory has been used to refer to policies which reduce state support for collective welfare initiatives and lower taxes on international capital transfers to encourage transnational private sector investment (Harvey 2005). This economic deregulation is in practice never absolute, since citizenship and public safety in particular are ways that the state stays relevant to people living in a neoliberal economy (Ong 2006). This study will address how a neoliberal national discourse on reciprocal gratitude, the expectations that children should financially support parents when they start working in order to show gratitude towards them, impacts young Singaporean sons who travel outside of Singapore for a post-secondary education. This study will add to existing literature on governance and family in Singapore by looking at the state's influence on young male Singaporean overseas students beyond national borders by drawing from ethnographic research methods. This thesis shows how the state's influence on family continues to be relevant in overseas Singaporean communities among families with a son studying overseas and demonstrates the state's desire to keep students from leaving Singapore permanently.

In order to describe the influence of the state on transnational families, I look at reciprocal financial expectations between parents and overseas educated sons and the motivations parents and sons articulated for this mutual support. I propose that the state plays a role in reinforcing these relationships along with parents. I argue in this thesis that the state of Singapore promotes the maintenance of financial obligations between parents and transnational sons. The state reinforces values of self-motivated, reciprocal gratitude

within families in order to prevent educated Singaporeans from leaving to work and live in other countries after their studies. This expectation of support reinforces national values of self-reliant families by co-creating with parents the perceptions of sons' maturity, independence and personal choice in their decisions to show gratitude. To explore how the state helps shape relations between parents and sons studying overseas I set out key research questions in the following section.

1.2 Research questions

- a) **What defines reciprocal relationships between parents and sons in Singapore today? Where do sons learn how to practice reciprocal relationships?** With this question I explore how contracts between parents and sons are learned and taken for granted.
- b) **How do sons practice reciprocal relationships with parents when studying overseas? How do sons demonstrate agency in negotiating their parents' expectations of them after studying overseas?** With these questions I assess how overseas independence can change or shape perceptions of reciprocal relationships for sons.
- c) **What role does the state play in producing expectations of gratitude by sons for parents before and during their studies overseas? What state programs reinforce feelings of gratitude by overseas sons towards parents?** These questions can explain how state neoliberal policy is applied to overseas students.

A large body of academic literature has been written on the role the state plays in shaping transnational families in the Asia Pacific region which I will review in the following section. I look in particular at those scholars who have worked closely with the

subject of family ties and family policy in Singapore over the last two decades because they show the methods used by the state to reinforce reciprocal gratitude. I assess scholarship on the expectations parents have of children in Singapore and research on the education of elite sons and daughters in global post-secondary institutions. I argue that students' experience with parent-child relationships of obligation within Singapore is a combination of exposure to state policy and parental expectations which means these relationships are not created solely by the state, but co-created by the combination of parents and the state and result in reciprocal relationships expressed as gratitude. I summarize how the literature of transnational education and of Singapore's national governance raises questions around the conditions upon which students are able to make choices about their future.

1.3 National family policy: Deserving families

I conducted three months of fieldwork in Singapore in 2015 where I explored the co-creation of family obligation with returning overseas educated sons, parents, and at public forums in Singapore. My ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Singapore in the summer of 2015 coincided with three historical moments in Singapore: The immediate political fallout of the death of Lee Kuan Yew; the national commemoration of Singapore's 50th anniversary of independence (SG50); and the 2015 elections which re-affirmed a continued People's Action Party leadership. In the summer of 2015, discussion of Singapore's future and its national identity was visible everywhere. I observed social marketing campaigns promoting election issues and social programs all over the mass transit, malls, and at political rallies across the dense urban island of Singapore.

Singapore had not always been so densely developed nor was it always ruled by such a central government. Singapore had been an overseas port and colony of the British Empire during the 19th century and only gained independence as a nation in 1965 under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew. Its precarious position as an independent city state between the larger nations of Malaysia and Indonesia in Southeast Asia has been the justification Lee Kuan Yew and his successors used to establish an overarching system of population planning meant to secure the nation from external threats through rapid economic growth and militarization (Lee 2000, Ortmann 2010). These policies have involved seeking to manage citizens' marital relationships, reproduction, and modes of taking care of family (Hudson 2013, Teo 2011). Singapore's family oriented policies include reproductive policies designed to increase childbirth which reinforce gender roles in the family (Hudson 2013, Teo 2011). Reproductive policies were not successful in increasing Singapore's birth rate, which is among the lowest in the world, but it has succeeded in making the state more forceful in defining what family is in Singapore (Teo 2011). Prominent examples include pronatalist policies and preferential treatment in housing allocation for married couples and multigenerational co-habitation. The state of Singapore has well-established strategies designed to maintain self-reliant family units through preferential treatment of closely tied families in Singapore (Teo 2010). Outside of Singapore, the state has tried to take advantage of the Singaporean diaspora for the purpose of economic development by encouraging family reunification between overseas students and their parents through Singaporean communities located in overseas campuses, continuing to define what family means for international students (Ho, Chiang, and Lin 2008, Ho 2008, Teo 2012).

Singapore's government mandate lies in the goal of protecting capital investment in the country in the post-colonial era by establishing a self-regulating, competitive and self-disciplined workforce (Harvey 2005, Ong 2006, Lee 2000). Lee Kuan Yew's top concerns when the nation of Singapore was achieving independence from the British Empire in the 1960's was how to ensure continued national security for multi-national corporate investments (Lee 2000, Ortmann 2010). One of the ways Lee Kuan Yew's party, the Peoples Action Party, sought to ensure that Singaporeans were able to meet the demands of the international labor market was to encourage self-regulating families who rely on each other for support rather than the state (Teo 2010).

These family policies are part of a process called governmentality, defined as the way the state attempts to motivate citizens to self-regulate their activities to benefit the state. Governmentality is "the attempt to shape human conduct by calculated means" (Li 2007b, 275) by the method of managing citizens' self-interests. The application of governmentality involves the state motivating citizens to monitor themselves, and to take on state values and objectives as part of their personal values (Li 2007a).

The concept of governmentality also applies to what families felt they ought to do, or what people ought to do for family. Aihwa Ong looks further at the specific geographic and temporal realities of governmentality in Southeast Asia as a triangular negotiation between state, economic and family actors (Ong 1999, 2006). Ong shows how governmentality developed upon the adoption of a neoliberal model in Singapore. Government support for families is allocated according to deservedness as defined by the state and its economic policies. For example, university graduates' in Singapore were given tax breaks for having children to try to encourage a more educated workforce (Lee

2000). State projects of regulating families have encouraged family members to achieve their personal goals within the framework of national development (Gammeltoft 2014, Kenway, Fahey, and Koh 2013). I argue in this thesis that economic demands are the main reason why the state of Singapore has co-created, along with parents, children's feelings of obligation to parents.

In Singapore, the state has explicitly tried to foster ties between Singaporeans' families and opportunities in Singapore to keep college graduates contributing to the Singaporean economy (Ho 2008). The state reinforces a sense of personal responsibility for promoting family wellbeing among young Singaporeans. In the next section I show how these policies of linking family goals with state objectives have become relevant to overseas male students through Singapore's identification of sons with Singaporean society through military obligations. Military service promotes an idea of responsibility to family and society which solidifies sons' reciprocal gratitude towards parents.

1.4 Students, sons and soldiers

In this section I look at the state policy programs of maintaining the national idea of family based on traditional values of family obligation among overseas male students. I examine how the army associates young men with the state and creates a gender-based age difference between when sons and daughters enter their studies overseas and how this time investment in the military associates young men with the state. Overseas educated sons' dual position as military servicemen as well as students in Singapore link them with state objectives for family. Family policy has often been oriented towards multi-generational family units of mutual support in Asia, and in Singapore the military makes it even more relevant to sons by promoting responsibility.

Studies on governance in Asia have looked at the many ways state discourses on family have appealed to values of self-reliance and personal responsibility among citizens so they will assume care for multigenerational families (Anagnost 2013, Cheng 2012, Graham et al. 2002, Hairong 2003, Li 2007a, Ramdas 2015, Rozario and Hong 2011, Sun 2012, Yeoh, Chee, and Baey 2013, Croll 2006, Ho and Boyle 2015). These studies suggest that neoliberal policies based on established moral traditions of family values are common in Asia. Croll (2006) suggests that the social contract of mutual support between children and parents is found in many Asian societies and is often reinforced by states as a form of social security within families. State policies shape interpretations of reciprocal social contracts between parents and children in China, India, Korea, Japan and Vietnam among others, and the dominant model/belief is for children to assume a reciprocal obligation to give a contribution of regular funding to parents based on children's income and parents' needs.

In the case of Singapore, Youyenn Teo (2011) calls the current direction of social policy familialist because it is based on state financial support for multi-generational families and married, reproductive couples. Teo shows that state support for children who choose to live with their parents is intended to keep children responsible for their parents' welfare. Familialist policy refers to how the official state discourse of family as applied in Singapore. Singapore's familialist policy, which claims to be "pro-family", is in fact a process by which the meaning of family is created by both society and the state (Teo 2015, 75). In this thesis, I will use the term familialism to refer to Singapore's neoliberal model of family policy in which the family is formed in the process of the state interacting with society. It is a way of talking about family that is common across state

programs and social marketing campaigns in Singapore. Familialist policies involve funding families deemed deserving of social support based on how well they meet the ideal of a self-sustaining multi-generational family unit (Teo 2015, 84). Teo has described how marriage, employment and multi-generational residence are used by the state as indicators of deserving-ness of state support and families who adhere to co-habitation in early heterosexual, dual income marriages and multi-generational residence receive state support for mortgages, healthcare, and childcare payments.

With overseas students in Singapore, government policy has shifted from a policy of accusing students studying overseas of disloyalty in the 70s and 80s for emigrating abroad, to a more recent strategy of catching diasporic talent and maintaining ties with overseas Singaporeans by drawing on these traditions of reciprocal contracts between family members (Ho and Boyle 2015). The Singaporean government has focused on how to make sure the diaspora keeps coming back to Singapore by making attractive offers for overseas Singaporeans (Ho, Chiang, and Lin 2008, Teo 2012, Hooi 2012, Yeoh and Chang 2001, Ho and Boyle 2015). In the case of international education, the state of Singapore now encourages overseas education among potential white collar workers (Koh 2014).

Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong expressed the state's paternalistic perspective about emigrating students in 1989 to *The Straits Times*: "No country is perfect just as no family is perfect, but we do not leave our family because we find it imperfect or our parents difficult" (Devan and Heng 1995, 215). Particularly since 2006, the state has developed a greater number of targeted scholarship and community financing programs which are intended to promote student's connections with Singapore and family while

they are studying overseas (Ho, Chiang, and Lin 2008). The same metaphor of family was used to show the supposedly unbreakable family-like bonds of the state and overseas students again more recently in 2012 by Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean to describe overseas students' importance to nationalist goals: "They are part of our family while overseas and the valuable skills and exposure they gain will enrich our economy and society when they return" (Hean, Pin, and Kiak 2012, 1). Teo Chee Hean describes in that quote the state's desire to create bonds with students based on the marketable skills they bring to the Singaporean economy.

The way Singaporean students become bonded to the state is also dependant on the students' gender because of different societal expectations of men and women's labor and bio-political value to the state (Hudson 2013). Studies of women in Singapore have looked at the state's impact on multiple generations by looking at the experiences of daughters and their parents in the face of neoliberal policies and gender reproduction in Singapore (Ramdas 2015, Tan 2008, Teo et al. 2003, Wong and Yeoh 2003, Yeoh and Willis 2005, Croll 2000a). For example, Hudson (2013) shows how pronatalist policies attempted to turn women into a national resource which belonged to the state, while Ramdas (2015) found Singaporean women living overseas continue to feel primarily responsible for caring for family despite their distance and are consistently expected to take on intimate care roles because of expectations about women's care responsibilities for aging parents.

There have been fewer studies of family policy and sons in Singapore, although there have been studies of family policy and adult men, such as those done by Cheng (2012) examining the experiences of international marriage among working class men in

Singapore, and by Yeoh and Willis (2004) who address understandings of masculinity among transnational Singaporean businessmen in China. In this paper, I intend to address that gap in the literature of family and young men. I look in particular at the expectations of young men's responsibility and self-discipline in the Singapore Armed Forces as a relevant factor in familialist policy.

The experience of young adult sons in elite transnational education in Singapore has important differences with daughters related to age and gendered military service. All able-bodied men are called to National Service for two years after high school in Singapore and then regularly called for short-term re-service during the decade after their conscription (Walsh 2007). The two-year age difference in college entrances between genders that comes as a result of conscription in Singapore is what young men I interviewed talked about most as a separation between their experiences and their female colleagues. The state of Singapore has framed National Service as a coming-of-age period in which boys became men and therefore a developmental period in Singaporean men's lives (OSU 2016). This thesis shows how the kind of values learned in the military were constructive of national ideas about maturity and responsibility towards family. The government of Singapore's familialist values of responsibility towards family as promoted by the state and expressed in programs like national conscription influence the decisions of young men when they go overseas with an emphasis on responsibility.

In the next sections I look at the family ties of reciprocal support between parents and children which is contractual and which bonds children to their families. This is important because policies related to children's obligation to give back to family, as opposed to marriage or reproductive policies, was the most prominent way that familialist

policy was described as relevant by respondents in this study. Few overseas students considered marriage or having children during the age when they studied overseas, but all of them had thought about how to show gratitude to their parents by regularly contributing money to them in the future as part of The Parent Tax.

1.5 Familialist policy and expectations of children

In this section I examine the expectations that children will care for their parents in order to look further at the significance of The Parent Tax, the contractual obligation for children offer to contribute allowance to their parents, for overseas educated Singaporean sons. This thesis argues that expectations of obligation children feel are a result of the state of Singapore's co-creation of a familialist discourse with parents and the global reach of the state to govern overseas Singaporeans. These contracts of obligation between parent and son are the reciprocal and negotiable obligations that develop between generations in a family in order for parents to ensure they can rely on their children for support after their children are mature (Goransson 2013).

Vivienne Wee argues that there exists a triangular relationship between parents, children and the state. In this multisided relationship, parents and the state together reinforce the obligation of children to give back to their family. Wee claims that filial piety, the Confucian obligation for children to respect and care for senior family members (Ikels 2004), justifies the "cultural acceptance of the power of life and death wielded by adults – specifically the father – over vulnerable children (Wee 1995, 187)." Wee looks at this in terms of Confucian traditions in the education system of Singapore. She argues competition in education justifies parental investment in children's individual career attainment because an investment in children becomes an investment in the parent's own

security in old age. Wee accepts the idea of traditional Confucian filial piety to describe the obligation of elder care among the Chinese majority in Singapore.

Studies on Malay and Indian families in Singapore indicate that it is not only a Confucian discourse that has been mobilized to encourage children to be responsible for parents in Singapore, but a more general appeal to multiple traditional Asian societies which includes Singapore's significant Malaysian and Indian minorities (Croll 2006, Li 1989, Ramdas 2015). I accept Wee's fundamental assertion that there exists a triangular relationship of obligation between the state, parents, and children in which the state and parents co-create children's expectations to support their parents. I build on Wee's work to argue that this relationship is not limited to Confucian values in Singapore; on the contrary, the commonality of values of children's reciprocity among Chinese, Malay and Indian families in Singapore reflects the inclusion of *all* Singaporean children.

The obligation to care for elders materially was codified into law in Singapore: The Maintenance of Care Act allows parents to bring children who neglect to support parents to court to demand compensation (Rozario and Hong 2011). This law was passed in 1995 after the Committee on the Problems of the Aged found that Singapore was becoming too Westernized and lacked the traditional values required to sustain familialist policies (Rozario and Hong 2011). This legislation shows that Singapore has formalized the responsibility of children to care for parents.

Wee's acceptance of the legalistic model of the obligation of children to parents does not take into account the investments parents are expected to make in order to earn children's gratitude so that they will be self-motivated to pay The Parent Tax. This mutual support is referred to as an intergenerational contract, which describes children's

obligations to their parents as well and parents' obligations to their children (Croll 2006). Scholars have developed the term intergenerational contract in studies in a number of Asian and Western nations to describe the connected relation between children and parents (see for example Bengtson and Achenbaum 1993, Croll 2000b, Hashimoto 1996, Izuhara 2002, Schindlmayr 2006, Ikels 1993). The term intergenerational contract, or just contract for short, refers to the often unspoken reciprocal expectations that family members must take care of each other across generations as needs and incomes change over time.

Göransson, an anthropologist who writes on the subject of intergenerational contracts in Singapore, ties the Maintenance of Care Act to concerns about the conflation of Western values, increased mobility, Christianity, and a lack of support from children (Göransson 2009, 131). The adult children Göransson interviewed described feelings of internalizing intergenerational contract as “like a chip inside you” and giving of money as “tokens of appreciation” to parents (15). Göransson found that contracts were often taught to Singaporean children by parents leading through example. Parents would lead through example by ensuring their children saw them giving gifts to family on holidays, or describing the importance they put on caring for their own parents. By leading by example to create the motivation children had to give back to parents out of gratitude parents were co-producing children's obligation to pay The Parent Tax along with the state. In the next section I show how intergenerational contracts are ongoing relationships that set the conditions within which students can get funding for overseas education. Contracts with family and with the state are a key part of international education because they create ties between the students living overseas and home. In contemporary

Singapore, overseas students make up a significant proportion of the student body and the intergenerational contracts they maintain with their parents continue to bond them to their parents and to the state of Singapore.

1.6 Overseas education and ongoing contracts

Overseas education in Singapore can give students an edge in the job market and open up otherwise unavailable opportunities. In 2015, approximately 22,500 Singaporeans post-secondary students studied abroad out of 249,000 total post-secondary students (UNESCO 2016, MOE 2015)². Since the founding of Singapore in 1965, international students have made up a significant and influential subset of Singaporean students, largely coming from top local high schools, receiving government scholarships, and returning to high level government positions in Singapore after graduating (Koh 2014, Lee 2000). Aihwa Ong (1999) describes the elite transnational mobility in Asia as a kind of flexible citizenship where upwardly mobile families arrange to study, work or retire in overseas communities when it is advantageous in accumulating wealth or social capital. Waters draws from Bourdieu's (1984) idea of education as the ultimate form of capital accumulation to show why transnational education has become a prominent feature of social mobility in Asia. Parents feel motivated to foster a drive for international education in their children because it can make their children more mobile, cosmopolitan and economically competitive (Brooks and Waters 2011, Waters 2015).

Elaine Ho Lynn-Ee (2008) challenges this notion of flexible citizenship in the case of overseas Singaporeans in London, recognizing the influence of the state in creating the

² In contrast, in Canada, 45,813 out of 2,048,019 post-secondary students studied overseas in 2015 (StatCan 2015, UNESCO 2016). In other words, a Singaporean post-secondary student would be over four times more likely to study overseas than a Canadian would.

family ties which keep their students bonded to Singapore in order to reduce the mobility of Singaporean overseas students and keep them coming back to Singapore. Ho (2008) argues that the state of Singapore continues to regulate family bonds outside of its borders. Ho's argument complicates the notion of flexible citizenship since the motivation and logic of families to obtain overseas education for their children exist within the objectives of the state to keep transnational citizens tied to the nation. In this thesis I show the specific ways that familialist policies have been applied beyond Singapore's borders to promote ties with transnational sons in order to keep them returning home and how sons engage with these policy programs. Parents and the state both finance and support children to attain overseas education credentials. In this way, the state and parents are co-creating students' ability to study overseas and their obligation to their parents upon returning home (Gammeltoft 2014, Wee 1995, Ho 2008).

For sons, the values learned growing up in Singapore and serving in the military makes it difficult not to maintain values of intergenerational contracts. Nonetheless, personal desires and choices affect the trajectory of sons and they have agency in the decision to study, stay, and return from studying overseas and to negotiate their intergenerational contracts. This thesis takes agency to mean "the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn 2013, 240). The definition of agency in anthropology goes beyond the idea of free-will of individual people to include the relative autonomy to make choices within the relationships between people, infrastructure and non-human actors such as communications technology or legal institutions (Ahearn 2001, Allen and Hamby 2011, Elyachar 2014). Agency is discernable in the ways sons respond to the co-creation of obligation by parents and the state.

Teo argues that family policies in Singapore create limits which constrain citizens' capacity to imagine differences in the structure of family relationships (Teo 2011, 101). In particular, she argues that despite her respondents' critiques of the state and how it undermines their personal autonomy, her respondents also took for granted how their families were affected by structural constraints and did not question institutions of family. These taken-for-granted family relationships create limitations on Singaporeans' capacity for agency in her analysis. Building on Teo's analysis, I suggest that agency in transnational family relationships are constrained for sons by the values of reciprocal gratitude that children are expected to feel for parents.

To summarize, contracts between overseas educated sons and parents in Singapore are co-created by familialist state policy and by parents (Ho 2008). Parents support their children's cosmopolitan educations to allow young adults to study overseas because of the perceived advantages of an overseas degree (Waters 2006). The benefits to Singapore's economy of multi-generational family self-sufficiency to buffer welfare support motivates the state to reinforce the practice of reciprocal gratitude between children and parents (Teo 2015). The state's history of intervening in family relationships is well established in Singapore and it extends beyond the borders of the state to overseas students because of the importance to the state of reinforcing family ties to keep overseas students returning and keeping them part of Singapore's labor force (Ho 2008). Methods used by the state to reinforce sons' sense of responsibility for taking care of family extend to shaping how young male students perceive reciprocal obligation and are often taken for granted (Ong 2006, Sasson-Levy 2003). Young Singaporean son's contracts with their parents remain within a familialist discourse while they are overseas.

1.7 Outline of the thesis

In this section I describe the contents of the thesis in the following chapters.

Chapter Two describes methods used in this study. Chapter Three describes the relationships overseas educated sons had with their parents. Chapter Four reviews of the state programs which help to reinforce the ties sons had with their parents. Chapter Five talks about the choices sons made as a result of internalizing the values that the state and their parents had co-created and Chapter Six draws conclusions.

In Chapter Two I describe the research I conducted over three months in Singapore from July to September 2015, using ethnographic methods, in particular semi-structured interviews with college-aged male students returning from studying overseas and with parents of male students who studied overseas. I discuss how four different methods were used to triangulate between the perspectives of students, parents and government ministries. In addition to interviews, I used methods of participant observation, online ethnographies, and media analysis. I look at the challenges of doing ethnography with families and the benefits of anonymous interactions online. I show that online research and state media proved crucial to discussing feelings that might have gone unspoken.

In Chapter Three I look in-depth at the idea of contracts between parents and children and what they mean to overseas educated sons. I summarize the planning that all sons I interviewed develop for giving money out of gratitude to parents. I look at case studies and online examples of what happens when parents make demands their children find to be outrageous. I conclude that gratitude, more than obligation, sustains self-reliant multi-generational families in Singapore.

In Chapter Four I talk about how contracts between parents and children are reinforced overseas in the work of three Singaporean government programs. These three programs are National Service, government scholarships and Singaporean Societies. First, I argue that National Service creates feeling of responsibility to society among recruits and associates sons with the nation. I draw from two case studies in which sons I interviewed felt more responsible for society after conscription and from observations of government booklets and fairs which reinforced these ideas. Second, I look at how government funding for overseas college education set up opportunities for many Singaporeans but creates financial bonds requiring them to work in Singapore. Third, I argue that Singaporean Societies (overseas student societies of Singaporeans promoted and funded by the state) play an important role in reinforcing national community and connections to home. They reinforce a cohesive sense of overseas community while also participating in a state project of maintaining ties to the nation and to family.

In Chapter Five I analyze how sons internalize the intergenerational contract and how their gratitude becomes self-motivated through education, both in school and in religious organizations. I draw from participant observation and from government advertisements which show the similarities between the discourse of respondents and the government around children's gratitude. I look at how the state and parent co-production of obligations has impacted transnational sons' agency when they are self-motivated to follow through with The Parent Tax. I compare these values to the ways sons talk about their futures after returning from studying overseas and how obligations to parents made it difficult for sons to imagine a future without ties to Singapore. I conclude that the limits to sons' agency in international education is a reflection of the state's successful

strategies to sustain self-reliant families beyond Singapore's borders and was a weaker connection among sons who did not feel gratitude towards their parents.

The conclusion summarizes the main points of the thesis. It reflects on the potential biases within the study, and suggests further research on the sons who chose to stay overseas after their studies.

Chapter 2: Methodology

In this chapter I discuss the advantages and problems of the methods I used in my fieldwork in Singapore from July-September 2015. I provide an overview of the ethnographic methods I used and why I believe they were the best way to study family experiences in Singapore. I recorded and transcribed 17 interviews with overseas educated sons and nine interviews with parents (for an example of interview questions see Appendix A, for an example of interview recruitment forms see Appendix B). I conducted participant observation sessions with seven of the overseas educated sons and with communities which sons identified as important for studying overseas. I also conducted online observations of anonymous forums and organization websites related to overseas Singaporeans and an offline media review of the wall advertisements and recruitment materials targeted at young men in Singapore. In the following section I discuss why I used these methods and what they entailed.

2.1 Ethnography: Research methods and subjects

In this research I used the ethnographic method, a qualitative methodology involving a combination of semi-formal interviews and unstructured observations, in order to explore intergenerational relationships (Göransson 2011, Quah 2003, Descartes 2007, Harold et al. 2015). Intergenerational contracts and the governance of families are both practices that were often not overtly discussed in direct conversations because they involve subtle practices (not done publically) and taken for granted practices (too normal to talk about). Gathering data about these topics required a careful use of a combination of methods which addressed not only what people talked about in personal conversation, but also what people practiced and talked about in anonymous settings online. It was through repeated semi-structured discussions, systematic observation and consistent

assessment of anonymous blogs that patterns around practice, and details about feelings and experiences would emerge.

Participant observation was a particular useful method for addressing these topics. Access to family space in particular is greatly dependant on trust between the researcher and participant, and therefore making personal connections precedes any in-depth ethnography research on family (Göransson 2011, Hoon 2006). This method of taking part in everyday interactions as an active participant is called participant observation. Participant observation is a means of establishing a socially understood position for the researcher in the place they are living as well as building trust between ethnographic researchers and the communities they study (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). An ethnographic method was more effective than a quantitative method would have been for determining how overseas sons experienced intergenerational contracts because it involved observations of taken-for-granted practice and experience that questionnaires or scripted interviews could have missed.

In Table 1, I describe the number of persons interviewed, their characteristics, and the three types of methods I relied on in this thesis to triangulate information about overseas Singaporean sons, family and the state. Those methods are interviews, participant observation, and observations of online sources and social marketing. Two interviews were not used in the final analysis, one because the participant had not yet left to study overseas, and the other because the tape recording was lost due to faulty equipment.

Table 1: List of methods used

Methods Chart	Interview (sons)	Interview (parents)	Participant observation (sons)	Participant observation (community)	Online and media observation (webpages/posters)
Number	17	9	7	5	100+
Approximate length	1.5 hours	1 hour	2-4 sessions, 1-6 hours	2-4 sessions, 1-3 hours	Indeterminable
Criteria	Men aged 18-28 who studied overseas for over 1 year within the last 4 years	Fathers and mothers of sons who fit the first category	Respondents in the first category with whom I met repeatedly	Community organizations whose events I participated in	Anonymous forums and media related to topics of overseas Singaporeans

Interviews with both parent and son (each from different families to ensure anonymity) in combination allowed for comparisons between parents and sons' perspectives on family practices. Parental interviews contributed a second layer of analysis to complement data on sons. This means that parental interviews would often explore concepts sons had raised in interviews. For example, most sons mentioned how they would consider giving an allowance to their parents, while in parental interviews parents talked about how they taught their children about this responsibility and tried to save that money so their children would have less responsibility. Interviews with parents were important for learning about how parents felt about sons going to study overseas and how they instilled values of gratitude in their children.

For participant observation I met with seven of the students repeatedly over the 3-month period I was in Singapore or to join them at events they either thought might be relevant to my research or were recreational activities. Combining formal interviews and casual participant observation allowed for comparison between what people said at the time of interviews and what people said and did regularly. In addition to participant

observation with students, I also arranged with organizations such as churches, charity organizations and building strata organizations to have participant observations at events that were relevant to my research question. One example of this was a group of older male neighbors I would join for coffee regularly. They would tell me stories about their time growing up in Singapore, their children, and their travels overseas when they were younger. Another example are the scholarship recruitment fairs, where I learned about the recruitment process for overseas scholarship recipients.

In most cases participant observation and informal follow-up interviews added depth to initial interviews. This is the process that Bernard Russell (2011) refers to as triangulation, when multiple methods of inquiry can complement each other and increase validity by allowing the researcher to cross-check between methods. Using multiple methods can increase accuracy in qualitative studies by allowing us to check our validity by looking at whether data coming from multiple lines of inquiry are pointing to the same conclusions or not (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Interviews and participant observation as well as media and online observation helped to triangulate my research in this study.

In addition to interviews and participant observation, I drew on government rhetoric found in a combination of social marketing campaigns, election speeches preceding the 2015 election, and policy directives published by government ministries to understand more about the intention of family policy in Singapore. For example, recruiting material for scholarships and funding criteria for the Overseas Singaporean Unit can illustrate how maintaining close contact between students, family and the job market in Singapore are part of a familialist discourse (Koh 2014, Teo 2012).

A combination of networking with international student organizations and online communities allowed me to make contacts directly with students. In addition to Singaporean Societies I advertised my study at local religious groups and on online networks such as reddit.com/r/Singapore and meetup.com clubs to reach some students who were not involved in Singaporean Societies but were interested in discussing their experiences overseas and how government policy and family practice affected them. Once I started doing initial interviews they snowballed into larger networks of contacts and in-depth case studies with enthusiastic respondents.

In this section I explained the reasons I used an ethnographic method and how I recruited respondents to this study. In the next section I explain how doing activities together enriched participant observation because of the shared age, gender and transnational backgrounds of the researcher and respondents. I suggest this kind of friendly activity is an effective method for participant observation because it allows for both parties to find common ground and to talk about issues relevant to male students

2.2 Constructing “Mateship” and addressing masculinity

The vast majority of interviews in this study were with male Singaporeans and therefore many of the interview activities loosely follow what Smith and Braunack-Mayer (2014) refer to as “constructed mateship”. Constructed mateship refers to the sharing of male bonding activities to establish greater rapport between the interviewer and interviewee before engaging in more in-depth questions, such as family, relationships, and health. In male-to-male interviews in particular this can be essential to overcoming stigma around discussions of emotional topics (Smith and Braunack-Mayer 2014). It was difficult to talk about topics that could make respondents feel vulnerable in

initial conversations. Meeting over multiple sessions and activities was essential to engaging with topics on family.

Smith and Braunack-Mayer use the term mateship to describe activities such as drinking and high-risk physical activities which they consider to define masculine activities. Constructing mateship in the case of my research was not confined to traditionally masculine activities, nor was there a directed effort made on my part to “construct” mateship. More accurately the similarities in age, gender and interests meant longer participant observation did often lead to more in-depth conversations about family and more personal discussions than in preliminary interviews as we developed better understandings of each other, and conversations became more relaxed and reflected shared interests and concerns. Sharing food and drink was important to establishing mateship since it often facilitated discussions about lived experience in Singapore. In fact, in most cases serious conflicts between family members were discussed in detail only after sharing such experiences as concerts, video games, public lectures and lunches.

As a 23-year-old within the mid-range of participating sons’ ages it was easier for me to engage in activities that an older researcher might have not had access to or might not feel comfortable doing (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 76-78). For example, the admittedly dangerous experience I had making a sparkler and tape firecracker with Spocky also proved to be a significant experience for him and others, but would not have been shared if there had been a larger age gap between us.

In this thesis I focus specifically on sons because in research on transnational education because of sons’ unique experiences in relation to the state resulting from military conscription. Most of the social science research done on transnational migration

and family in Singapore to date has been done on daughters or both genders and therefore can overlook the unique experiences of sons (Cheng 2012). A 2016 article published by the Overseas Singaporean Unit, *National Service: The Rite of Passage for our Singaporean Sons* addresses how both transnational and local sons feel in National Service communicated through personal stories about transitioning into adulthood through military service (OSU 2016). The stories respondents told about their experiences in the military in preliminary research inspired me to focus on this experience of National Service in this thesis. By studying sons, I am able to address how National Service, which is a significant period of young Singaporean men's lives, relates to studying overseas.

In this section I have looked at the activities and shared identities that created feelings of mateship were productive for discussing family and military in interviews and participant observation. I explore in the next sections why I conducted this research. Personal motivation in my own experience of family and government regulation of transnational education inspired me to study students, family and governmentality.

2.3 Insider/outsider

Part of the ethnographic method is to look reflexively at who the researcher is and what motivates them to study what they do, because ethnography encourages the researcher to be active in the study and recognizes the identities and assumptions we bring with us (Hoon 2006). In this section I give an overview of my background in this study.

I was a moody teenager at Oak Bay High, Victoria, Canada, in Grade Nine social studies class when I started to desire to study overseas. We had been studying the Upper

Canada Rebellion and I was frustrated. “This is bullshit! Why can’t we ever study anywhere outside of the West!?” I recall complaining to my teacher. “You can,” she said, “on your own time.” So I did. I started studying Chinese at the University of Victoria partly because of my association with the Jewish-American tradition of going to Chinese-American restaurants on Christmas. On that holiday I felt we shared the outsider position to mainstream Christian culture in North America and that eating (and later speaking) Chinese was a means to obtain a more cosmopolitan identity, a feeling that I later learned I shared with many young Jewish-Americans going back two generations (Tuchman and Levine 1993). In my second year of university I received a Chinese government scholarship to study in the University of Yunnan in China for three semesters. I was involved in a network of students from all over the world who had come together in one place to learn another language and experience being international students.

I noticed some differences and similarities in motivations between students from different places. The similarity was that most of the students there including myself were on government scholarship which stipulated that we had to avoid what the state of the People’s Republic of China considered to be deviant activities such as drug use or political protests, in order to maintain our funding at the school. The differences between us were the range of reasons for attending, from the financial and familial motivations of some of my Asian friends and the more personal and individualist motivations of some of my Western friends. I resolved to study the ways government funding had affected students’ studying overseas given our different motivations for studying abroad.

Beyond the transnational camaraderie in mateship, being a Canadian of European decent in Singapore did create both limitations and opportunities in interviews for me.

Respondents were willing to explain taken-for-granted concepts to me without assuming I understood them, such as how they communicated with family members or why they gave money to their parents. Youyenn Teo, who grew up in Singapore and studied in the United States before starting her research, found that her Singaporean respondents would often ask questions to try to position her status in their community, asking about the car she drove and the housing she lived in, which would indicate her background in Singaporean society (2011, 129-130). She found she was not personally experienced with some of the housing issues that respondents who had not studied overseas dealt with, but her privileged insider status sometimes made it harder to get respondents to explain them to her.

Since I had no family or assets in Singapore I found families would often treat me as a guest. I did not have an obvious place in Singaporean society like Teo did as a returning international student. It was clear to respondents why I did not understand concepts like intergenerational contracts and government scholarships and therefore they were comfortable explaining them to me in full. Conversely, being new to Singapore also meant I came into the field with a number of assumptions about family and romanticised notions of resistance that prevented me from asking relevant questions at first (Abu-Lughod 1990, Ahearn 2013). It was through the informal interview process that my assumptions were challenged and in later interviews these challenges led to more reflexive questions framed in subtler family relationships rather than overt conflicts.

Being marked as an outsider is common in ethnographic research (Bernard 2011, Hammersley and Atkinson 2007), but my position as a Westerner was framed by the overseas student respondents' experiences in Western nations as well as my own

experience in Asian nations. In many cases participant's experiences in Western countries included experiencing discrimination based on perceptions of race as well as opportunities for independence. I shared my opposite experiences of my racial privilege and discipline in schools in Asia. CY Hoon (2006) argues ethnography is as much about respondents trying to understand researchers as it is about researchers trying to understand respondents, which describes these interview conversations. In many cases, respondents would frame our interviews in terms of their experiences with westerners or in western countries. For example, Cheng told me if his experience with New Zealanders had been more like our friendship, he might not have been so anxious to leave. This kind of sentiment positioned me as a welcomed outsider and it framed which topics respondents felt comfortable talking about with me, but it also restricted conversations to topics which compared outsider/insider perspectives.

Total anonymity was beneficial for finding respondents who felt more comfortable talking about emotional subjects and going beyond some of the national or ethnic comparisons that would influence the topics of face-to-face interviews. In the next section I look at how digital ethnography helped triangulate interviews to get at what might be missing from interviews and is an important method when researching any group of people with an active online presence.

2.4 Including digital data

The discussion that came out of interviews and participant observation was enriched by the addition of studies on social and marketing media. Adding data from the online anonymous social media Reddit has helped to account for the language and personal experiences directed at a general audience of Singaporeans compared to one-on-

one interviews. In this section I show why data from online observations became essential to this project because of the unique expressions used in online contexts. I argue that digital ethnographic methods should be considered for any project involving transnationally connected respondents because online observations can overcome limitations of face-to-face ethnographic methods.

Websites which cater to young Singaporeans were important for triangulating between what was said anonymously and what was said in interviews by showing modes of expression and self-representation unique to online interactions (Boellstorff et al. 2012, Markham and Baym 2008). McKay (2010) talks about how one's identity in social media can be defined by new rules, such as circulating digital images to express emotional states. As McKay suggested, language use and subject matter was different online and between different websites. My use of online media in this research includes reddit and the Overseas Singaporean Unit website. Reddit is an anonymous user generated platform to share content based on special interest groups. The Overseas Singaporean Unit is moderated by a professional group of student organizers and government ministers.³ Anonymous threads on reddit tended to use more critical language around family and the state, expressing satire and cynicism in debates about foreigners in Singapore, air pollution, The Parent Tax and desires to leave Singapore.

On reddit I was able to find a number of comment threads in which users shared and critiqued their experiences growing up in Singapore and studying overseas.

Anonymity also meant it was impossible to verify the identities of posters, but specific

³ I chose not to use personal social media like facebook in my data because it would be impossible to insure anonymity if discussants' data could be traced back to profiles which use real names and personal information.

topics attracted people with personal stories. For example, a thread on National Service within reddit allowed male Singaporean respondents to address their shared experience in National Service, while another thread on overseas studies was a venue for Singaporean international students to share tips. There were many similarities in subject matter between what was said online and the type of discussions we had in observation sessions, such as the significance in young men's lives of National Service, the consistent obligation to give money to parents, or the choices students had when studying overseas. In general, online comments brought out more self-critical group discussions on the subjects of this study and this was useful for triangulating with other methods.

When I drew from articles from the OSU website and other government sponsored sites, I found that students are encouraged to share their overseas experiences and their recommendations for new students within an online structure which was expressive of strategies of governmentality, since the contributors had been selected to encourage other students to be more productive of state goals. These sites were essential for triangulating the data from students involved in Singaporean Societies in interviews with the officially published information from the organization.

Triangulating between online and offline comments is particularly important in the case of transnational students because their lives involved moving between multiple places around the world. I would emphasize the importance in online ethnographic studies of triangulating between interviews and online forums to reflect specific demographics of users. Asking questions in interviews about what sites respondents use most frequently to inform online observations would be a good way to address interview respondents' online presence. Student respondents discussed the constant switching they

practiced between local and foreign linguistic and cultural standards. Online communities can help shed light on the range of experiences students had in multiple locations because the websites remain the same when accessed from anywhere in the world.

This section has shown how important online observations have been in this study for showing anonymous and critical discussions on one hand, and governmentality in application on the other hand. In the next section I look at the other methods I used to study governmentality and state policies in the language of social marketing campaigns and recruitment fairs for overseas scholarships and Singaporean communities.

2.5 Language of the state: Poster, advertisements and fairs

In this section I explain why I used print media to explore governmentality in Singapore. On the second day after I arrived in Singapore I attended an outgoing seminar on overseas universities through the Overseas Singaporean Unit, a government organization intended to create networks between overseas Singaporeans. I initially planned to interview people working in government ministries to understand the state mandate for managing overseas Singaporean students. The coordinator of the seminar explained that questions about overseas student experiences would be viewed as political by government employees in OSU and as such there would be very strict limitations on what employees would be allowed to say.

Since direct interviews with government ministries did not seem to be possible I focused instead on the information that organizations themselves published with overseas students or sons as a target audience. I also looked at the ways government scholarships and the military would recruit sons in the poster and pamphlets they disseminated at events, online, and in public advertisements, and the kind of language they used, in

particular use of terminology around gratitude and obligation. I attended more fairs like the one put on by the Overseas Singaporean Unit, including the Singapore Armed Forces 50th anniversary at Istana fair, a public display of military history in Singapore at the house of the president of Singapore, which was packed with families and National Service personnel eager to participate in the festivities.

Fairs and advertisements allowed me to analyze the concept of governmentality in Singapore without asking government workers to put themselves in a vulnerable position. In the next section I discuss how data in this research was analyzed.

2.6 Analysis and compilation of the data

In this section I summarize how data was used after conducting fieldwork in Singapore. Data was compiled and coded for thematic trends in NVivo data analysis software. The codes I focused on in the analysis reflected topics that I had found to be consistent between interviews, participant observation, online observations, and media reviews. In coding, I conducted word frequency searches of all data sets in order to determine trends in the data. The most frequently used primary categories in my coding set include “Gratitude (expressions of)”, “Maturation”, “Government”, “Parental Involvement”, “Responsibilities” and “Process of living Overseas”, each of which include 4-10 sub-codes. In addition to the analytical codes, I also coded for important demographic data, such as family, education, and class background which included details about the identities of research respondents. Looking at multiple datasets under one set of codes based on frequency of use allowed for in-depth comparative analysis.

2.7 Conclusion

Interviews with sons following a process of constructing mateship are at the core of this study, but that method alone was not enough to study governmentality among overseas educated male student. The triangular relationship by which parents and government co-create family expectations had to be complemented with parental interviews, online observations, recruitment materials and advertising to cover the unspoken and taken for granted aspects of The Parent Tax which includes parents and the state as well as children. In the next chapter I provide a summary of my main findings, and describe how sons may feel about their responsibilities towards parents and how their sense of obligation to parents can depend on feelings of gratitude. The chapter begins with a table describing key demographic information from young male respondents. This demographic chart demonstrates the striking consistency with which sons said they wanted to give money to their parents when they started working.

Chapter 3: Intergenerational contracts and transnational sons

“There is no such thing as my money or your money. It’s just our money.” – Weixue

In this chapter, I start by going over some of the demographic information about student respondents, and describe respondents’ willingness to give monthly allowances to their parents. I talk about The Parent Tax, the expectation that children in Singapore have for themselves to give a portion of their monthly income to their parents once they start working. Drawing from four case studies of sons who talked about the reasons they give money to their parents I look at how The Parent Tax is practiced in Singapore and how frustration with parents’ actions and studying overseas can affect the practice of giving money to parents. These case studies show how gratitude is the key part of sons’ motivation to give money to parents when they start working. I conclude by looking at an online discussion about the topic of parents’ expectations. I show how activities that make students feel gratitude towards their parents, including when parents fund their studies overseas, keep those students bonded with their parents when they go overseas and willing to support their parents financially when they start working.

3.1 The Parent Tax table

In Table 2, I detail the name, age, linguistic background, area of studies and housing of the students I interviewed. In the last column it specifies what arrangement they have in terms of giving money to parents. Ages of the respondents ranged from 18-28 while 23-25 were the most common ages because many students were returning to Singapore after graduating from three to four years of college following two years of military service, but had not yet started working full time.

Table 2: Student respondent characteristics

Sons (pseudo-nyms):	Age	Home Languages	Location of Studies; main funding source	Living arrangement in Singapore	Do you give a percentage of your income monthly to your parents?
Cheng	28	Mandarin	New Zealand; Uncle and Father	Parents; HDB	Gives.
Will	26	English	US; gov. scholarship	Parents; HDB	Gives.
Rick	25	English	US and China; gov. scholarship	Parents, sister; Condo	Gave in NS. Planning to give again when working.
Colin	26	Singlish, Mandarin	Australia; FMS (Father-Mother Scholarship)	Mother and sister; 4 room HDB	Not yet. Planning to give.
John	24	Malay, English	UK; gov. scholarship	Parents, granddad and three siblings; 5 room HDB	Not yet. Planning to give.
Tan	24	Singlish, Mandarin, Hokkien, English	US; gov. scholarship	Parents; 5 room HDB	Not yet. Planning to give.
Kyle	21	English	US, Korea, HK, Dubai; FMS	Mother and brother; Condo	Not yet. Planning to give.
Michael	23	English, Hokkien	UK; FMS	Parents and grandparents; HDB	Not yet. Planning to give.
Spocky	19	Mandarin, Hokkien, English	US; state funding	Aunt, uncle, cousin; HDB	Not Yet. Planning to give.
Wudao	25	English	Australia; FMS	Parents; Condo	Not yet. Planning to give.
Weixue	23	Mandarin	US; gov. scholarship	Parents, brother; Condo	Not yet. Will if they ask.
Edward	19	English	UK; Father alone	Mom or dad; separate flats	Not yet. Planning to give to mom only.
Shiqiang	23	English	US; gov. scholarship	Parents, brother; HDB	Not yet. Planning to give physical care first.

Zixing	25	Mandarin, English	Australia; work study programs	Parents; HDB	Not yet. Planning to give. Currently withholding support.
Marcus	22	Singlish, Mandarin	US; student Loans	Parents and siblings; Did not answer	Expects siblings to give instead.
Hobbes	24	English	UK; gov. scholarship	Parents; terraced house	Did not answer.
Rajeev	20	English	US; gov. scholarship	Parents; Did not answer	Did not answer.

Language often reflected differences in class in Singapore, since English and Mandarin have been privileged by the state and therefore may reflect a privileged education compared to other common languages in Singapore such as Malay, Hokkienese or Tamil (PuruShotam 1998). Singapore's national languages were prominent among families with children studying overseas: out of 17 respondents, eight spoke only English, two spoke only Mandarin, and seven spoke a combination of English, Mandarin and other languages at home.

All respondents studied in English speaking countries. The most popular country among student respondents was the United States (nine respondents) followed by the United Kingdom (four) and Australia (three). I intentionally interviewed a relatively even numbers of respondents who had a government scholarship to study overseas (eight) and those who relied on financial support from parents (six) in order to learn about both common methods of financing studying overseas. The remaining three funded their studies from their own work or with support from their overseas universities.

In Singapore the majority of families live in Housing Development Board flats, while private condos are more expensive and terraced housing or landed property (row houses) are the most expensive. All the young men I interviewed lived with family in

Singapore and their housing reflected their parents' income. Nine respondents lived in HDB flats, four in condos, one in a terraced house and three did not answer. Studying overseas is expensive but among the respondents of this study it was not limited to the wealthiest households in Singapore, in part because government scholarships make studying overseas affordable for middle class families.

In the final column of the chart is student respondents' answer to the question of whether they give money to their parents on a monthly basis. This results are striking as all respondents who answered the question either give to their parents, plan to give to their parents when they start working, or would give to their parents if their parents asked for support. Twelve of the student respondents have not started giving money to their parents yet and three give or gave money to their parents at the time of the interview. Two did not say. Among the twelve who have not given money yet, two said they wanted to first care for their parents in other ways before giving them money, such as by visiting them and making them feel appreciated. One wanted to withhold his support until his parent showed more respect for him. One does not think he will give as long as his sibling can take care of his parents. The remaining nine all felt they would give to their parents after they began working. In the next section I discuss why so many young men felt it was inevitable to give money to their parents on a regular basis when they started working.

3.2 Reciprocal gratitude

One of the ways I triangulated my observations of young men's obligations was through developing a relationship with some regulars at the local hawker center. At Happy Hawkers outside the bustling Jurong East metro interchange in Singapore five

elderly gentleman and I regularly sat strategically under the only fan. We sipped sweet coffees as two of them sang a duet of The Miracles 1960 hit single *Shop Around*. Ben Kwok (pseudonym), a retired accountant who grew up in Malaysia, told me about his education in Cambridge in the 1960's and how it later gave him an opportunity to springboard into a 3-year position at a California software company, "Singapore is too small, study outside lah!" he exclaimed as an explanation of why so many students choose to study overseas. If it wasn't for his family here in Singapore, he might have emigrated permanently, he said. Like many other international students from Singapore, Mr. Kwok enjoyed his time overseas because of the independence he gained while traveling but he felt it wasn't right at the time to leave his family behind. This feeling of being deeply anchored to family was normal for Kwok and his friends even though it was an obstacle to Kwok's American dream.

Later that day, the same group lunched at one of the newer malls in the area. Carl Ng, a retired teacher, bragged about his government pension to Graham Lee. Mr. Ng's pension allowed him to cover most of his medical costs without family help. Unlike most of the others Mr. Ng did not need to rely on his children for top ups or "pocket money" to get by. He told me his daughters would like to send him some money, but he doesn't let them. He only lets his son send him five percent of his monthly income. At hearing this Mr. Lee joked "you should adopt me as your son," since five percent is a bargain for sons compared to a more regular 10 to 20 percent of their monthly income. When parents have financial security the financial burden on children is lower, but there is an expectation in many Singaporean families regardless of income that children, especially sons, will offer to give money to their parents.

These types of arrangements where working children provide financial support for their parents was present in all families I talked to throughout my research. Wealthy families were just as likely to have children offer to give money as lower income families, although they were more likely to refuse their children's support. Children are expected by parents to provide regular financial assistance for their parents, up to about 20% percent of their income, dependant on parental need.

Mr. Kwok, Mr. Lee and Mr. Ng's conversations show how established the practice of working children giving money to their parents to support them is in Singapore. This obligation to family can create limitations on how long young men can stay overseas. Göransson (2009) showed that the reciprocal gratitude of children to parents is part of Singapore's program of national development. Education is the means by which parents invest in their children's future and in the gratitude their children feel towards them later on, as Mr. Kwok showed in his obligation to return home (Göransson 2015).

These relationships have a formalized structure; respondents and observations suggested a monthly percentage of income based on parental need and the children's financial security was the norm. As a result of these expectations overseas students may be closely tied to their homes in Singapore. In the next section I look at the case study of Weixue, who talked about how his financial relationship with his parents is one of mutual support. Weixue's case is typical of several other respondents who are closely bonded to their parents financially and hope to show gratitude for their support in the future.

3.3 "Our money": Currencies of gratitude

In this section I look at how sons talked about giving to parents, in particular, how

money is imagined as a token of gratitude and as a means of showing parents they are appreciated. In Weixue's case he described how his own motivation makes him want to give while implying that his motivation comes from the need to reciprocate for the support his parents gave him as he was growing up. Two other respondents also demonstrate continuity between parent's investment in children and children's reciprocal gratitude towards parents.

Weixue: In a new air-conditioned mall seamlessly connected to the metro line at Jurong East I met with Weixue, a tall and reserved 23-year-old student currently studying at a small American liberal arts college. Weixue cracked jokes about Trailer Park Boys, a niche Canadian comedy, which impressed upon me just how much of North American pop culture he had picked up while abroad. Weixue spoke Mandarin at home and came from a family that he described as both conservative and permissive.

When it came to the financial relationship between him and his parents, Weixue told me that for his family "There is no such thing as my money or your money, it's just **our** money" (emphasized in speech). Weixue receives money from his parents when he asks for it. Being on a "full ride" government scholarship, a scholarship that covers his whole tuition, travels, and housing, means that Weixue does not necessarily need his parent's money, but he uses it for other living expenses like owning and operating a car and going on trips. He felt his parents were okay with him doing almost anything he wanted in the United States but when it came to finances Weixue and his parents had an understanding that they were all responsible for each other's well-being.

Weixue's parents were financially secure: They live in a private condominium which is a housing arrangement that indicates they were among the wealthiest 20% of

Singaporeans who did not live in government-managed Housing Development Board housing (Teo 2011). Because of their financial security Weixue was unsure whether it was necessary for him to contribute to his parents' savings, but he was sure he would be willing to as long as he trusted them not to spend it on something "frivolous:"

Weixue: If they ever need my money I'd be more than happy to contribute, but right now I don't foresee myself sending the money every month... We are kind of just drawing from this collective fund, there is this idea, so then like if something goes wrong they would just say hey do you need money? And I would say ya and they would wire like \$20,000 (SGD) to your account right now... Ya and I'm pretty sure it is reciprocative, if my mom needed money I have no problem wiring \$50,000 (SGD) to her, I know she wouldn't spend it on something frivolous, I trust her enough to do that.

Explicit in the above statement is the idea that their requests should be justifiable to each other and implicit is the hope that he will have enough money in the future to give even more to his parents if they ask for it. He would like to be able to give something like \$50,000 while he talks of having to ask for a smaller amount like \$20,000. His gratitude and support is reciprocal, but it is not simply an equal transaction. Weixue is self-motivated to give as much as his parents would need when he has the means to do so, and he expects them to do the same.

This feeling of self-motivation based on paying back parents out of gratitude was brought up by a number of student respondents. For example, one student said "Simply by giving them money... in a sense it's sort of like you are already paying them back". It wasn't as simple as paying back a loan because it was an ongoing relationship. Another

participant summarized that in Singapore “it’s pretty common to give like \$50 (SGD) every month when you start out working, and then as you progress then you get paid more and more for them...I think it’s fair; you owe a significant amount of income to them as they've raised you.” This transaction is a response to a perceived investment by parents in their children. It is reciprocal because children’s obligation to give to parents is done out of gratitude for this investment. Therefore, money can be constantly exchanged between parents and children depending on whether children are studying or working.

In this section I showed that children’s gratitude towards parents motivates their obligation to give money to their parents when they start working. In the next section I show how this gratitude is an expression of closeness between parents and children. I show how monetary expressions of gratitude may reflect an emphasis on non-verbal ways through which children show they appreciate their parents.

3.4 “Symbol of appreciation,” “Gesture of love”

In this section I look at two case studies, and draw on interview quotes and a word frequency search of the most common words interview respondents used in order to suggest that the money children give to parents shows gratitude and intimacy. Financial contributions were defined as physical tokens which represent the feelings family members had for each other, as Rick’s case shows.

Rick: Rick was introduced to me through a friend who was in a debate club with him. Rick is a 25-year-old seasoned world traveller who had studied in China and the United State and had an analytical perspective of his life. In our interview he described his travels as valuable lessons in world politics and alternative world views which broadened his perspective. When we talked about why he had given money to his parents

he described it in terms of its symbolism. Rick was aware that giving these contributions was more significant to his family in terms of symbolism than the amount of the money itself. Rick's mother started asking him directly to contribute from the time he was in National Service. Rick's mom surprised him by asking him directly to give money because he had been expecting to start giving money later after he was working when he would have a significant amount of money to give.

Rick: I think its a... I think it is more symbolic then anything else. My parents don't really want it, 'cause they are still working...But I think for them it feels like, um, ya it feels like a symbol of the children starting to contribute to them. At least for my mom. It is something that is a concrete way of showing that the children are doing something, and are paying back to what they've done for us.

Raviv: So your mom has talked about this with you?

Rick: Ya I think so. I'm...they even spoke about this when I was first receiving my National Service allowance which is a grand total of \$400 a month. So my mom was very excited; oh now you can finally start giving. And I told her like it doesn't make sense because it's such a small sum.

Rick's use of the words 'doesn't make sense' indicates debate and conflict between them about what is a justifiable token of appreciation. Another student, Edward, feels an unspoken pressure to reciprocate for his father's investment in his education:

Edward: I think my dad has tried to reassure me that I don't owe him anything, and that's been really nice of him to do. But it does leave a kind of feeling of like, the strain.

Hobbes, another student, felt that the hardest thing about his parents giving money

to him when he studied overseas was that he could not give back as much:

Hobbes: I feel like I don't want them to take care me haha, because I feel like they have taken care of me already and it's sort of my turn.

All of these students' reflection on how they would give back shows a shared sense of responsibility to show parents gratitude by giving money back. It was an important thing to do which also made students feel strain and pressure to reciprocate.

I used a word frequency search when I compiled my interview transcriptions to look at the most used words in interviews. In total, the word "love" appeared only 43 times among interviews, while the word "expectations" appeared 147 times in interviews. For sons, "love" was mostly used to refer to the love of recreational activity, and only in a few cases did respondents use it to refer to feelings towards parents. In contrast, "expectations" was used most frequently to describe relationships with parents. The words "parents", "friends", "family", "housing" and "home" were all within the top ten nouns students used in interviews and each of these words came up more than 250 times in the transcripts. Based on the context of the interviews, these words often refer to places and people that were significant in overseas educations. I look at Michael's explanation for why expectations might be a more prominent concept than love. Michael showed what it means to express love in the form of tokens through a discourse of investment and expected repayment.

Michael: Michael, a young medical student who was studying in the UK reflected on the symbolism of giving financial tokens of gratitude: The near absence of the word (familial) love may be explained by the emphasis on love as an action demonstrated when children fulfill the expectations parents might have for them.

Michael: They would say it's a way of repaying but I see it more as a gesture of love, that okay you have supported me for so many years, and it's a bit different from, from Western Society. Because our parents here support us way past 21. A lot of our parents continue to pay our fees, we don't get student loans. We live with them, they still cook for us. We still kind of live off them. So to speak. The expectation is that when they retire, we in turn repay this, um, repay what they have done for us and we do the same for them.

Michael shows how love is expressed materially and how it is reciprocal to rely on parents. This is also expressed in the words Michael uses which relate to transaction, words like repaying, investing and expectation used frequently to communicate an exchange of value. It shows intergenerational contracts in Michael's case are a symbolic exchange of value as well as material repayment.

Gratitude ensures both generations can take care of each other financially by providing top ups or pocket money when needed. This relationship of gratitude and giving as an emotional and financial purpose has been noted by anthropologists in intergenerational relationships (Coe 2011, Göransson 2009, McKay 2007). Coe (2011) found that left-behind children in Ghana would often associate good parenting with material support sent by overseas workers and rank it above intimate care as a reason for loving a parent and reciprocating with caring for them when they were older. I conclude that for transnational Singaporeans gratitude seemed to be primarily about the meaning of giving, rather than a material need to cover the costs of raising children.

Family relationships are characterized by ambivalence, and changing relationships can lead to disagreement and conflicts (Bengtson et al. 2002, Butt 2008,

Lüscher and Pillemer 1998, Maehara 2010). Frictions which come out of changing family relationships can also affect expressions of gratitude in intergenerational contracts, and I explore how friction affects gratitude in the next sections.

3.5 Intergenerational frictions

The previous case studies came from interviews where respondents described positive family bonds. Discussions with transnational sons about their relationships with their parents was different in cases where trust breaks down, where giving is not reciprocal, or where gratitude is not felt. In the following case study of Marcus, I show how studying overseas was made difficult when there was friction between parents, particularly fathers, and sons, which could make sons feel more distance from home.

Marcus: When I first met Marcus he was wearing a college basketball jersey and a baseball cap to support his Ohio State team. He had been studying overseas for a year and it had made a deep impression on him. He told me that he would not be like the other respondents because he did not tend to fit in to societal expectations. Marcus attended a polytechnic secondary school which meant he was unlikely to enter a university in Singapore and Marcus did not have his parent's financial support to study overseas because his father did not think he was responsible enough. Marcus had struggled and felt out of place in National Service and his father did not trust him with money. Instead he elected to withdraw a six-figure bank loan. Marcus traced his desire to study overseas at Ohio State University back to conflicts with his father and his father's values which created an emotional distance between him and his home:

Marcus: ... my father would basically, you know as a man and as an Asian, usually he dominates the household. It's...to be honest you know because of

that...maybe because of that maybe because of something else, I don't, I didn't grow up very happy in Singapore. Sometimes I look back and am like did I really have a childhood? ... And I'm the rebellious kid, so you know how tensions are in my house haha...

He laughed about being unhappy with his father, but the subject came up repeatedly. He described a time when his father had used finances to control him. He had wanted to visit Kuala Lumpur, but his dad felt it was unsafe for him to go alone. Frustrated, Marcus set off anyway. At the train station, his father called him and his first question was not about his safety but; "where did you get the money?" Marcus told me this anecdote as an example of why he could not stand his father's attitude when he felt his father was putting money over intimacy. He didn't feel like he owed his father a debt because his father had not been supportive of his dreams or values.

Marcus believed the American education system was a solution to Singapore's pressure cooker system and his troubled relationship with his father. He thought of studying overseas as a way of getting away from his father's expectations of him. In cases where parents and children are in conflict, studying overseas can sometimes be a way to get away. The next case study offers an example of when frictions between fathers and sons changed the meaning of reciprocal gratitude and the financial contract between parents and children. Cheng also shows how studying overseas can improve the relationship between parents and children, and make children more willing to repay parents.

3.6 Cheng's change of heart

Cheng was a professional in his late 20's who had studied in New Zealand and

had come back to Singapore to work at an accounting firm. Cheng felt a lot of frustration with his father's expectations for him before he went overseas. It got to the point he wanted to cut off relations with his father and he felt he could only do so by paying his father back everything he had spent on him in order to break their contract with each other and no longer be obligated to stay tied to his family. He found that it got easier to please his father's expectations after he had gone abroad and then returned to a lucrative career, but it did not reconcile the frictions in his family. He expressed ambivalence about his father's values which he saw as too materialistic and too short-sighted to be reconciled with his own. Cheng thought of himself as an atypical Singaporean but his conflict with his father was shared by other student respondents in this research when sons identified their fathers with traditional parenting (See also Yun 2013).

Cheng: ...the way I see it duty and obligation are a good thing. It means you are seen as a capable person, therefore you have a portfolio and obligation is because of promises. I don't know, I think promises are a pretty big thing... It changes my view towards [my father] because for the longest time I disliked my father for many reasons, and it seems to me he had a change of heart. It seems to me he had a change of heart while I changed the way I look at things as well. Because my perspective was like okay, when I hit 21 I get my own job I'm going to earn say \$100,000 [SGD], give it to my dad and say I no longer know you and you're not my father. I've paid you everything I owed to you. That was the perspective I had like 5-10 years ago. Then obviously this thing (studying overseas) happened and you know things changed. Ya.

The differences in perspective that made Cheng want to buy out his father's

contract with him and break contact had evolved as he matured overseas. Cheng then talked about actions he took to improve his relationship with his father by succeeding in his career. At the same time Cheng was waiting for his father to change and earn his son's gratitude. Cheng uses words like owe and repay to describe parent-child relationships.

Cheng: ...At the very least while I may not like who he was I do not like what he has told me, I disagree with a lot of those things, but I cannot change the fact that he has provided me money growing up. And it's something that I do indeed owe. So I will repay that, once I repay that there would be no relationship between us. I would say that I have taken active steps to change and improve our relationship but at the end of the day it comes down to whether they want to be forward-thinking or not. Unfortunately, we live in a very materialistic environment, like it has changed a lot more because I entered my firm, its improved a lot more, ya, I mean I suppose it's something that is very good, that he's very proud of, he can say my son is in a professional club.

Despite the partial reconciliation with his father that Cheng refers to, he was still ambivalent about living with his parents in Singapore and excited about opportunities to move away. Cheng expressed a strong desire to go to what he referred to as a more sophisticated city like London or New York in contrast to his parent's unsophisticated lifestyle. This type of father-son conflicts around materialism and accomplishment came up with respondents who described their fathers as more authoritarian and motivated by material success.

Cheng was not the only respondent who considered cutting off contact with his

father to escape the friction between their values. This option of paying back parents and then ceasing contact with them was brought up in three interviews. In addition to Cheng, Marcus and Zixing both described their fathers in terms of authoritarian paternalistic attitudes and sought ways to distance themselves by living overseas and having enough money to emancipate themselves from their parents. When telling me why he wanted to emigrate to the United States Marcus told me that between his father's pressure and the materialism of Singapore, "...you know the analogy of the square packed in the round hole or something like that, you feel like the system is always trying to push you through the wrong hole." The feeling of not fitting into the system and into parents' expectations was stifling for sons who felt at odds with their father's values. Nonetheless, all of the interview respondents who described family friction said they would fulfill their obligation to take care of their parents' finances in the future.

Breaking off contact permanently with parents was not an act that anyone in these interviews had put into practice. Even in online discussion about the subject of The Parent Tax, examples of parental abuse and pressure on children were met with a resignation that supporting parents was something that one simply has to do even when parents do not deserve it. Cheng told me later that although he would have liked to pay off all he owed to his father and break their contract, he also felt that family relationships could not be broken like a financial contract, and he was resigned to finding other solutions while continuing to give money to his parents.

Contrasting views on expectations of material gratitude between Western and Asian values was a theme that many respondents brought up, but was not reflected in practice among families I interviewed in Singapore. Those respondents who identified

more with the English language and with Western values had the same feelings about the need to show gratitude through monthly financial contributions in practice as did families that identified with Asian values. It appears to be a Singaporean value to offer tokens of gratitude to parents regularly while working, a trait which crossed boundaries of ethnicity, class, and religion, even though it was often classified by Chinese-Singaporeans as Confucian or Chinese values. For example, in one online interaction one presumably Chinese-Singaporean commentator claimed intergenerational contracts were a Chinese value in Singapore and then was told by a Malay-Singaporean that it was in fact just as relevant to Malays. Despite the perceived traditional Chinese background of intergenerational contracts, it is relevant to other groups within Singapore and it is not always a Confucian value.

In Cheng's case the obligation to give money back to his parents was part of his values as a Singaporean regardless of how he felt about his father. Cheng considered moving away from Singapore because he did not feel his family was sophisticated enough but still felt obligated to give back their investment in him in part because his father had funded his overseas education. In the next section Zixing describes how he could change his parents' self-centred outlook on family using their expectations of him as a bargaining chip. This case highlights how parents could lose their children's gratitude and how losing gratitude could weaken the ties between parents and children which kept their children returning to work in Singapore.

3.7 Zixing's bargain

Zixing, a young man in his late 20's who had studied at a private Australian college in Singapore and then lived and worked in Australia had similar feelings to

Cheng about taking care of a father who had been restrictive in his parenting. Zixing used his time overseas to re-evaluate his relationship with his parents from a distance. Zixing's conflict with his father was related to his father's authoritarian parenting style which his father had learned growing up in a working class household. Zixing was upset by the conflict he saw in his family's older generation, and was looking for ways he could either change the conduct of his older relatives, or break off contact with them.

Zixing: So Chinese culture, or for my parents, they prefer it because, you know how they were migrants from China, and brought up very strict, the parents of my parents were...um, they decided everything about their lives. Controlled. They didn't have much money, so it limited a lot of options for them to take... So that was my parents' point of view, that I should be doing the same thing, getting a comfortable job, get a pension, yah. But to me with education, with how globalized we are, talking with people when you travel, I guess even seeing the world, like cycling or Kayaking, not many people do that in Singapore, not enough, because of how sheltered we are.

Zixing's overseas experiences gave him what he considers a more globalized perspective. He cycles, kayaks, and does activities that his parents would never had done. His feeling that his parents' generation had their lives controlled makes it difficult for him to follow their rules without criticism. Zixing does not give money to his parents and he says he will not until his parents show him they deserve his gratitude.

Zixing: [The expectation of children's support is] always there. So that's why you have to play like hard to get sometimes haha. Like my father is definitely for [my support], and I will definitely care for him, but can't give [my support] so easily,

because they will take it for granted, and they will think they do not need it at all... in fact in the next 10 years I expect to be taking care of them. So for now I try not to be involved in the decision-making processes or...influencing them, or giving them expectations that I will take care of them because after all they will have their own preferences and expectations. Um, I think they would know what they are doing, until the point in time when they may need some emotional or psychological love.

Zixing's father had crossed a line and made Zixing feel he was uncaring for his children. He told me this happened when his father had pressured Zixing's sister to care for their grandmother for years and Zixing had felt she was unprepared for the task. Zixing felt his father should not rely on his daughter so much to care for his own mother. Zixing was in favor of supporting his parents overall but he was thinking of using his parents' dependence on him to set conditions upon them in order to earn their respect for his point of view and make sure they were more caring towards his sister. Conflict over his father's strained relationship with his uncle was something else that Zixing wanted to teach his father to overcome. By distancing himself from his father he felt he could convince him to change and show more support to his sister and reconcile with his uncle.

Although the existence of intergenerational contracts is viewed as non-negotiable, the content is negotiable. When Zixing felt too frustrated with his father he cut off contact. Zixing is distancing himself from his parents to avoid conflict because his parents take him for granted. It is especially relevant that he uses the term love to describe something they have not yet expressed the need for, but that he will provide in the future.

Zixing: My dad has a twin brother, and they don't talk to one another... My dad was saying one day you know, you will realize you have nothing to say to me, because we are grown up. And I was talking to my uncle, and he was like, oh we just don't see eye-to-eye on everything. So then I told my dad lah, that why don't we just stop talking now, and try it out now. Since you have nothing to say to me, and nothing to say to your twin brother, why don't we just stop talking now. And he just became silent. And I just stopped talking to him for about a year... and he also had nothing to say to me.

Zixing and his father had gone over a year without speaking directly. Zixing did not think he could choose not to give The Parent Tax and provide for them when the time came when they needed it, but by withholding intimacy and making his father think he might not be there for them he hoped to have more control over his life and change his father for the better.

The respondents who I spent considerable time with and some online commentators described more fully what type of parents deserve their gratitude and when parents had pushed them too far. The act of giving itself was taken for granted as a Singaporean value, but the appropriateness of the act was questioned when parents demanded too much from their children. Goransson found similar results from interviews with older adults in Singapore where the overemphasis on obligation could be abusive (Göransson 2009). Some of her research respondents also said they no longer were in contact with their families because of the constant stress of their expectations. The contractual relationship parents have with children is dependant on children feeling gratitude for their parents' support, otherwise they may not support their parents when

they are older. Sons who don't feel gratitude towards their parents may not want to stay close to parents when they study overseas.

In the next section I triangulate between interview and online data by looking at how Singaporeans talked about giving to parents in an online comment thread. Online data reinforces the trends expressed by interview respondents on the importance of gratitude in children's obligation to parents. The online data goes further in explaining what parents may do that is unacceptable to children, or that makes children feel gratitude towards their parents. The comments on this discussion forum demonstrated the limits of the demands children will accept from parents before parents' demands seem unfair.

3.8 #filialpiety

The previous sections discuss how sons felt gratitude towards parents when parents have been supportive, but when parents' actions seem unfair to sons, they do not feel as comfortable giving back to parents. The question of how to discourage or subvert unfair or childish parents who may be too dependent on their children and take them for granted was a heavily debated topic online. As one reddit commentator complained, the amount that parents ask of children can be unfair when the obligation of children to give out of traditional filial piety is taken for granted:

The next part is just gonna sound bitter as fuck. For the record, I've not went on any holidays since I started work or bought any big ticket items besides a \$100 microwave. My mom has went on 4 holidays, got herself the latest iphone and has plans to get herself a new laptop. Yet she constantly tells me that my contribution is not enough. #filialpiety.

The term #filialpiety is a Twitter tag used here to make fun of the impersonal

demands by contrasting the commentator's frustration with their mother's excessive demands for money and the Confucian value of filial piety which obligates them to show gratitude to their parents. Another commentator would roll their eyes when their mom brought up the obligation of children to care for parents, something they describe as "guilt tripping" by appealing to children's sense of guilt.

My mum used to tell me "到你養我了 [You'll care for me]" which made me roll my eyes a lot. I see it as her warped way of trying to justify the act of giving her allowance. Thrown in with some guilt-tripping of course. Classic stance.

This mocking tone towards parents' ideas about filial piety shows the feeling children have when parents seem to ask for too much. The use of the term "guilt tripping" linked to The Parent Tax is important here because it is used to show the obligation of filial piety rather than gratitude. The term filial piety was not associated in this online forum with intimacy but with obligation.

Goransson (2015) found that children in Singapore have recently had increasing power to renegotiate their positions in family contracts because of a greater emphasis on technical skills learned in college rather than age based seniority in the economy. Smaller families have also made the younger generation more important to their parents than before. If parents are not willing to make sacrifices for their children, or make unreasonable demands of them, then their children may withhold intimacy or be less present in their parents lives to show parents that their children's values are important as well (Göransson 2009). Another commenter mentioned that her mother was asking for the same level of sacrifice that her mother had given to her grandmother, but the way the mother asked for money made her feel it was unfair and materialistic.

No, she's not asking a lot from me, but it's the way she phrases it - 'it's considered little already okay! When I was younger I gave everything to my mum and went penniless myself!' that annoys me - I'll never be the 'perfect' daughter because I'll never live up to the standard she set herself. Like okay, I can give you more if you want, but it sounds like filial piety is measured by monetary value, commodified in a competition to prove to ourselves that we are indeed filial children, and that's wrong.

This commentator is clear she thinks filial piety measured by monetary value is wrong, but she also mentions in another comment that she would have “given [to mom] of my own accord.” This commentator is saying the problem is that her mom has demanded that she give because she is self-motivated to give and would rather it was self-motivated and not about the materialistic value. She emphasizes that it is not the amount but the request that is problematic. The difference between filial piety versus giving of one's own accord is the distinction of giving out of obligation versus giving out of gratitude. Another commentator linked their intergenerational contract directly to their international education: “I give because they paid for my overseas studies...” In this case parents' willingness to fund this commentator's overseas education was enough to motivate them to give out of gratitude and proof that the support was mutual.

It was common in interviews that sons said parents, particularly fathers, did not contact their sons to talk about emotional and personal subjects except to talk about careers, education, or family events. In this context what older Singaporeans might have more readily termed filial piety and duty in a number of studies conducted with Singaporeans who were over 30 years old (see for example Göransson 2015, Teo 2015,

Yun 2013) may not necessarily reflect the intimacy they or their children felt about giving out of gratitude, but only the frustration of children who were giving out of guilt. For these respondents, filial piety was associated with senior relatives, materialistic values, deference to elders and Confucian tradition, but not necessarily with the intimate care in the relationships that they wanted to practice with their parents out of gratitude.

In a strained relationship between parents and children, such as described by Cheng, Zixing, and these online commentators, financial support of parents was something they felt they had to do out of obligation, but had difficulty doing so when they did not feel gratitude towards their parents.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that children in Singapore prefer to give money to parents out of gratitude than out of obligation. When upholding the expectation that children will give money to their parents when they start working, interview data from the cases of Weixue and Michael showed that money could be a symbol of intimacy when given out of gratitude which flows between parents and children depending on their needs. The cases of Cheng, Marcus and Zixing showed that when children felt less gratitude towards parents it was harder for them to keep close ties with parents and they considered breaking ties with their parents altogether. Data from Reddit further showed that parents who demanded support were considered unfair and materialistic. The obligation of filial piety did not seem as good a reason for giving to parents as self-motivated gratitude did from the perspective of online commentators as well as in interview data. Despite the preference for gratitude, in the cases where sons were expected to give out of filial piety they still said they would give, but it made them less

connected to their families and more willing to break ties and move away in the future.

In the next chapter I move beyond family relationships in order to focus on the state management of financial relationships between parents, children and national funding agencies. I argue that the feelings of obligation from this chapter can be tied to state discourses which help co-create the feelings of gratitude and responsibility. I show some of the strategies used by the state to steer overseas educated citizens into Singapore's workforce by mobilizing a sense of gratitude in order to maintain overseas students' ties to their families in Singapore (Hooi 2012, Sun 2012, Teo 2012, Teo 2010). I describe strategies used by the state to maintain contracts between overseas students and their parents, what the state does to prepare students for their time overseas, and how students have used these programs for their own goals.

Chapter 4: Guns, money and the Singaporean way: How National Service, scholarships and Singaporean Societies define sons' responsibility.

“My parents would have much rather me been, um, more Singaporean” – Edward

The feelings Singaporean sons interviewed in this study have about reciprocal investments around giving back to parents are phrased mostly in terms of gratitude and obligation. The homogenous nature of much of the discourse students articulate suggests the terms are related to family relationships, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, but are also reinforced through wider state mechanisms. In this chapter I look at the ways the state invests in transnational sons' education overseas in the process of co-creating reciprocal gratitude along with parents. These investments by the state are incentives and financial bonds which encourage students to stay connected to family and continue to uphold their contracts (Cheng 2014, Koh 2015, Ye and Nylander 2015). During fieldwork, I attended half a dozen international college recruitment fairs which demonstrated how the state allocates funding for overseas students and their parents. These recruitment events were packed with parents and potential students, comparing and inquiring about how to achieve the educational opportunities and careers that they felt were best suited to their children. The stalls at these events advertised the benefits of military service, scholarships, and Singaporean Societies established at overseas university campuses. I explain in this chapter how each of these three institutions reinforces reciprocal gratitude among international students and their parents. These programs reinforce the gratitude children feel towards parents, and help students to remain connected to Singapore through feelings of responsibility to parental expectations

while overseas. I argue that Singapore's government programs which support sons to go overseas also reinforce a responsibility among recipients to give back to parents and stay connected to Singapore while they are abroad.

First, this chapter describes how National Service (NS) teaches transnational sons values of responsibility and reciprocity to the nation in their two-year conscription prior to attending post-secondary education. I show how this service can help assure parents their sons are ready to be living independently overseas. I argue that the homogenizing values of masculinity taught in NS makes sons feel responsible for their society. Second, I describe how government funding sources for education are contractual and require demonstrations of responsibility by children to parents to prove that scholarship recipients are qualified and will not break their contractual bonds. Last, I show how the government of Singapore supports students living overseas by funding Singaporean Societies, which help maintain a Singaporean identity in diaspora. Together these three institutions continue the state's familialist policy goals outside of Singapore's borders among overseas Singaporean student communities. The state's link to students' overseas lives through these programs reinforces reciprocal gratitude in students' lives overseas.

In the following two sections I show how what participants learned in NS facilitated the kind of responsibility and masculinity parents looked for in children they sent overseas. I will demonstrate in this first section how NS promotes feelings of maturity which are fundamental to sons' sense of responsibility in maintaining intergenerational contracts.

4.1 “I used to be *blur*”: Lessons from the National Service

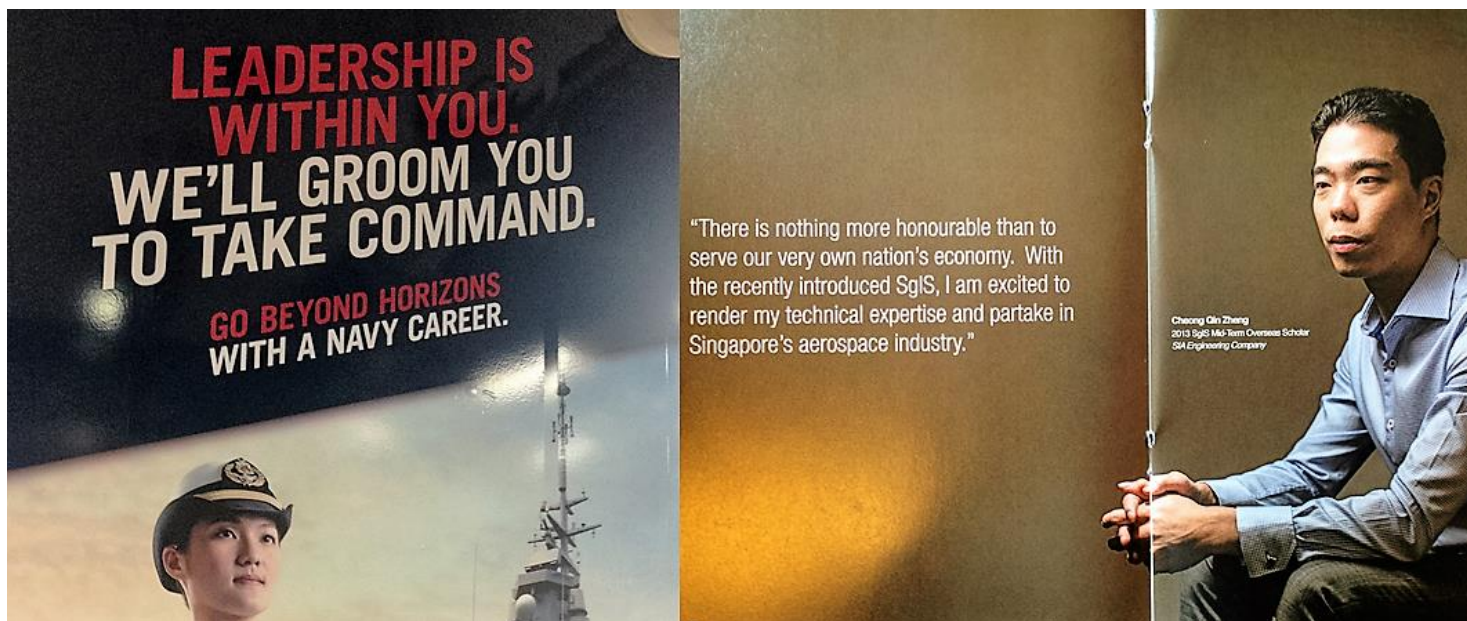
National Service, commonly called NS, is the term most commonly used for the two-year military conscription that all men aged 18 or older are obliged to serve in Singapore. Male citizens who do not plan to be in Singapore at age 18 must have their parents put up a government bond to make sure they will return to complete their duty. Draft dodging can mean forfeiting citizenship and the posted bond (Walsh 2007).

The Singapore Armed Forces aims to instill values desired the state. Michel Foucault and Nikolas Rose showed how modernizing regimes of discipline and psychological tactics in the military can physically and psychologically remodel members to fulfill the desired tasks of the organization through their own self-regulation (Foucault 1977, Rose 1999). The post-colonial military in Singapore was an experimental disciplinary regime that was purposed by the government to remodel not just recruits, but also to enhance the cultural logic of Singapore’s families to connect family ties with the state (Walsh 2007). These values are explicitly stated by the Singapore’s first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew. In his auto-biography, Lee Kuan Yew explained, “We had to re-orientate people’s minds to accept the need for a people’s army and overcome their traditional dislike for soldiering... we set up national cadet corps...in all secondary schools so that parents would identify the army and police with their sons and daughters.⁴ We wanted people to regard our soldiers as their protectors” (Lee 2000, 33). Walsh (2007, 267) argues that contemporary Singapore’s shrinking birth rate has again led the military to re-emphasize the importance of orientating families to see their sons as part of the military as a contemporary means to synthesize the goals of family and the state.

⁴ Mr. Lee said this before the decision to restrict conscription to males was finalized, hence son and daughters. Today only sons are obligated to serve in the military, although women are permitted to volunteer. (Lee 2000).

In Figures 1 and 2, a recruitment poster and a scholarship pamphlet handed out at one international college recruitment fair, the language of responsibility and ties to home are combined to show students that these services will prepare them for future careers in Singapore. In Figure 1, at the top left a young woman stands below the navy's claim to foster leadership in students and expand their horizons. In the pamphlet in Figure 2, on the top right a Singapore Industrial Scholarship recipient describes bringing his expertise back to the nation of Singapore. The promise to help navy officers "Go beyond horizons" in the first picture is shown to also refer to overseas travels and studies in Figure 3 which follows the career of an overseas scholarship recipient. In this map the writer talks of national and personal accomplishments through his travels and military service, from promoting friendly relations with Indonesia to glimpsing the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The language in all of the posters is of the nation expanding students' horizons by providing career opportunities, travel opportunities, and students serving the nation by working for Singapore.

Figure 1 top left: Navy career poster. Figure 2 top right: Government scholarship brochure. Figure 3 bottom: Navy scholarship career advertisement. (Photos supplied by the author)



In these advertisements the nation is portrayed as a benefactor who provides students with the opportunity to study overseas and improve themselves with the expectation that students will return to Singapore and apply those self-improvements.

In interviews, respondents described a wide range of possible work available in NS such as armored divisions, navy, air-force, or administrative positions. Many student respondents I interviewed had achieved officer ranks while serving in NS which gave them positions of responsibility over other recruits. The participants I interviewed described NS in terms of personal development, just like the students in the recruitment posters. Some participants described NS as an opportunity to work on self-improvement and to give back to society, while for others the disciplinary methods used in training was viewed as wasteful or even abusive. However, all respondents felt they demonstrated maturity and personal growth over their time in NS.

For many, the two years that they gave in service to the nation was part of a transition from a position of dependence to independence. Completing NS showed parents that sons were mature enough to live overseas, because NS tried to instill values of responsibility. Parent respondents often said they could feel comfortable investing in the overseas education of sons who demonstrated responsibility after the military, because parents could be more confident their sons would take responsibility and repay them in the long term. This insurance of sons' personal responsibility reinforced through NS helped sustain familialist policy overseas. As the following interview with Rajeev shows, this personal responsibility was internalized as a value among student respondents while in NS.

Rajeev: In my interview with Rajeev, a 19-year-old participant who was preparing to study at an Ivy League institution, he described how NS can be an experience of personal growth. Rajeev described himself before and after he went to NS. In the process of military service, he said had shed his status as a *blur sotong*, a Singlish⁵ word which means a befuddled, absent-minded octopus, through self-discipline. He told me how this transformation occurred after a routine gun inspection. Recruits refer to their gun as their spouse to emphasise the intimate relationship soldiers have with the object. It is the recruit's duty to clean, oil and maintain their gun. Firearms are illegal outside of the military in Singapore, so it is a unique responsibility over life and death that is given to servicemen. Rajeev had misplaced the smallest piece of his gun while disassembling it to clean it. When his sergeant discovered his mistake he didn't just punish Rajeev, he made their entire group pay for it by running laps.

Rajeev told me this was a turning point for him, when he realized he was not just responsible for himself, but for the people he cared about around him. After this incident he said he made an effort to take responsibility for his actions, and as a result he was promoted to a leadership position. As another respondent points out, "its kind of a civic duty as a male... it would be morally dubious to avoid it and I really don't like the people who try their best to dodge it." It's a civic duty as well as a moral obligation that is required from young men in Singapore.

Rajeev's experience was transformative in terms of how it made him feel and act responsibly towards others. The disciplinary tactics of the army produced the kind of

⁵ Singlish is an English-based creole which is unique to Singapore and incorporates vocabulary and grammar structure from many different languages spoken there (Bae 2015).

responsible son that would be considered deserving of funding from the government or from family and reliable enough to repay it. Many of the young men in this study who received government funding to study overseas had been in military leadership positions which showed themselves and their families they were responsible. Sasson-Levy (2002) found that the self-discipline Israeli conscripts experienced while in the military produced feelings of active citizenship in the nation through self-motivation rather than through coercion. This also appeared to manifest in the feelings of maturity that Rajeev and other participants felt they gained in NS.

Ayu, a mother who had three sons studying overseas, agreed that the responsibility of NS made sons more prepared to study overseas: “For Singaporean children, when the boys go overseas, they have served their NS, I think that makes them different... it helps them a lot, they are very much more realistic, and they are more mature. This is what the university tells us too. They give you less problems.”

Julian, a father of two sons, related his sons’ time in NS to his own experience. “When my two children entered national service, we sort of encouraged them... I know my elder son he hated NS, but [now that] he is out, he sort of agreed, yah, it helped him to be stronger, yah.” Ayu and Julian’s descriptions of NS shows parents are more confident in their sons’ abilities to take care of themselves overseas when sons demonstrate they are not *blur* by overcoming the challenges of NS. Rajeev’s discipline in the military demonstrates that NS is active in inculcating sons’ sense of self-motivation to be responsible for others. In the discourse of contracts between parents and children, sons appear to be a safer investment because they were not *blur* and could take care of themselves. As Tan’s case demonstrates, sons going overseas following NS encounter

few problems convincing parents they are mature compared with daughters who do not go through NS.

Tan: Tan is a 24-year-old government scholarship recipient and ex-army officer. Tan is a published author, a member of an orchestra and a student activist. He spoke to me specifically about this benefit of NS in his parents' perception of his ability to take care of himself overseas. I met Tan at a Singaporean Society event he had been helping to organize. Tan uses the term investment, a word related to reciprocal transactions, to describe what parents have to give to make sure daughters are safe overseas. This term shows how the family discourse of reciprocity in overseas scholarship is also present in his description of his parents' investment in his studies.

Tan: My uncle, who is kind of a progressive person, just told me last week...he has two daughters, and he said that he would not let them go overseas, and I said why? And he became very embarrassed, because he knew that was not a very responsible thing for a parent to do.

Raviv: So you think men might have more opportunity to study abroad then?

Tan: Yes, parents are not as concerned about safety as much. I knew a girl who studied overseas, the first time she went overseas her mom went with her. So you might say to prepare a girl to study overseas there is... the parents have to make a bigger investment. It's not just the child, but also the parents have to stay with the child to ensure her safety. Maybe there's that. I mean think about it, if you are a man you start your studies at 21, 22 but if you are a female, you start at what 19? I think psychologically it's a big difference...

On further probing Tan told me that he also felt a general discomfort with young women going overseas alone at all because of unspecified risks to their safety, while he felt sons were better prepared to take care of themselves. For Tan it meant sons may have more freedom when they go abroad and parents don't have to invest as much in surveillance, such as living with them overseas.

NS makes sons feel and appear more mature. Parent's increased trust in sons is grounded in the coming-of-age process that NS seems to represent (OSU 2016). NS represents sons' maturity because the experience of national service can instill discipline. In the next section I look at masculinity in NS and how young men's service is a process by which homogenizing national values about what it means to be a man and take responsibility are reinforced.

4.2 Homogenizing masculine values in the military

NS is associated not only with maturity but also with hegemonic masculinity because the program defines what it means to be a man within a set of universal rules for the nation (Allison 2009, Sasson-Levy 2002). The idea that the military is a coming of age process which turns boys into men was repeated both in state discourse and in interviews with parents and sons, and was productive for sons' contracts with parents when they went overseas.

Masculinity identified with patriarchal hegemony is highly visible in the state discourse surrounding military service in Singapore (Devan and Heng 1995, Wee 1995). It would be impossible to have a unified theory of masculinity which defines what it means to be male because it is men's actions that define masculinity within intersecting experiences of age, class, race, and sexuality (Margold 1995, Sasson-Levy 2002, Allison

2009, Sinatti 2014). In this paper I define masculinity in the context of the military as the actions which boys expect to do in order to become mature men (Sasson-Levy 2002), and they are experiences that become part of the process of studying overseas for sons. The practice of identifying mature sons with the military has allowed many of the participants in this thesis to get permission from parents to study overseas. Discipline in the military teaches sons how they are expected to show responsibility as men.

In a comment thread on reddit by a female-to-male transgendered man writing about his experience growing up in Singapore, a question was posed to him as to whether he would want to serve in NS. He replied:

Yes, I would. I've actually dreamed of being a soldier since I was young, cos I think there's this voice at the back of my head that says to be a *real* man, you've got to go through NS. It also gets awkward when people ask me why I'm 23 and haven't gone through NS yet. I was called up for NS when I was 19, but decided to go for PES F [refusal of service on medical grounds] cos I'm sure people would notice I don't have a dick I don't really want to be picked on.

Long before NS, children learn that going through the military is what makes someone a man, like the voice in the back of this commentator's head telling him NS would make him a real man. This is a widely held set of values. An example in popular culture is the *Ah Boys to Men* films, a popular Singaporean action/comedy series about a boy becoming a man by serving in NS which playfully propagates the national narrative about NS and masculinity (Neo 2012). *Ah Boys* shows how girlfriends, mothers, and other young men can distract from the nation building activities of the Singapore Armed Forces due to their lack of a sense of duty to the nation, duty which men learn through

their service. In the end of the first film of the trilogy, the young male protagonist learns that the Singapore Armed Forces is essential to his way of life, and that his father and uncles had made sacrifices to keep everyone safe which he must continue by putting the nation before himself. Julian, a parent of two young adult sons, recommended this movie to me as an accurate portrayal of NS. “There is a movie [*Ah*] *Boys to Men*, and you must see...I think it’s real.” This movie reflected his own experience in NS, as well as what he expects his sons to have experienced.

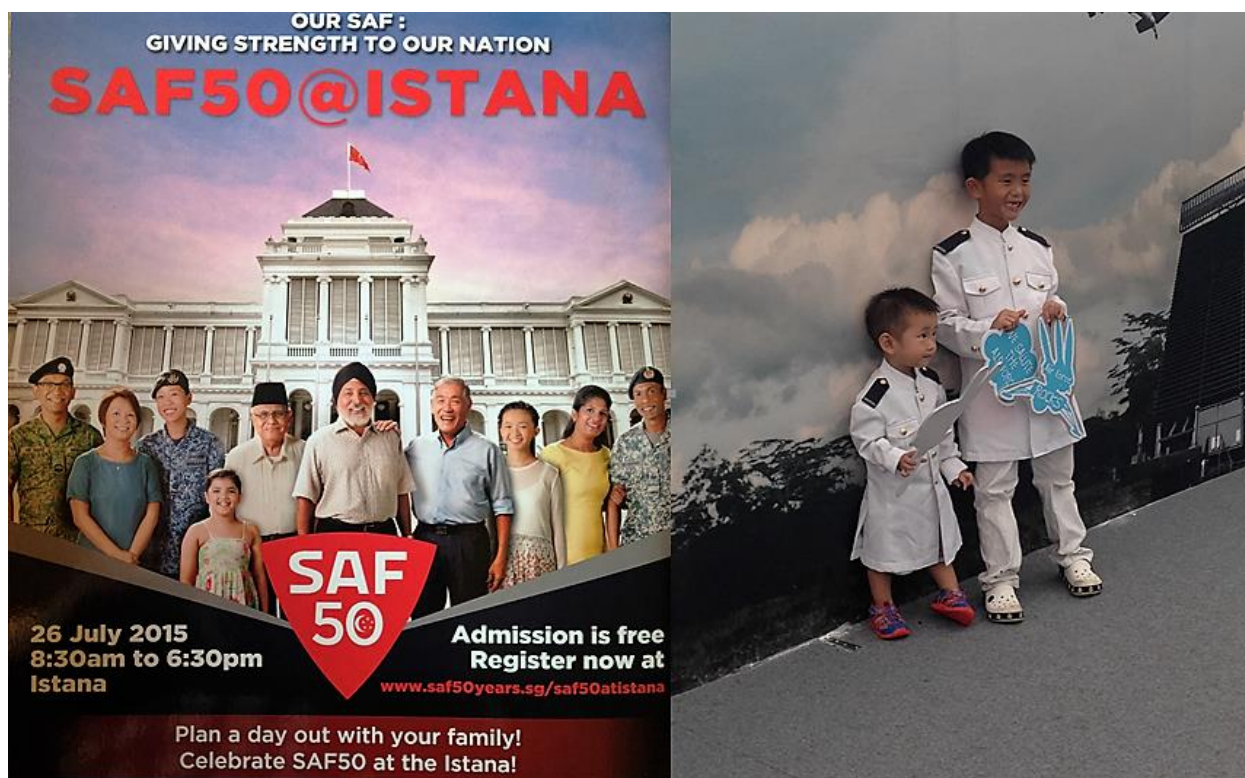
The spoiled son who takes what his family invested in him for granted comes up as a theme in Singaporean cinema as well, such as in the movie *Singapore Dreaming* which satirizes the coddled, materialistic son who squanders his family’s hard-earned money when he refuses to admit his failure after dropping out of college in America (Yen Yen and Goh 2006). This is a film which then president of Singapore S. R. Nathan praised as “life in its reality” (Ramani 2006) and has been highly acclaimed as a cutting satire of Singapore’s materialistic values. Like *Ah Boys to Men* it reinforces an image of sons choosing between selfishness and responsibility, blur and non-blur, by either putting themselves or their family and nation first.

The military’s expectations of men can be hurtful to recruits who do not fit into the hegemonic masculinity of the military by being tough and following in the footsteps of their fathers. A participant in this study who talked openly about being gay was also the participant who tried the hardest to avoid conscription because of the bullying and lack of support he knew he would face for being different. His feelings and the above reddit quote on the importance of becoming a man in the military reflect the

uncompromising demands of NS for sons to become like their fathers and uncles like in *Ah Boys to Men* and follow the military's idea of what it means to become a man.

This responsibility that sons showed their parents, that they could give back to the nation, was also found in the government's military recruitment posters and literature (see Figure 4). In the poster celebrating the Singapore Armed Forces 50th anniversary uniformed soldiers, ranging from young to middle aged men, stand on the sides with women who appear to be mothers, wives and daughters. The senior men appear more prominently than their uniformed juniors. The poster tells attendees that the event welcomes the whole family.

Figure 4 left: Singapore Armed Forces community fair. Figure 5 right: Children playing soldiers (Photos supplied by the author)



I attended the SAF50 fair at Istana, an imposing British style mansion and park which serve as the official residence of the president of Singapore and I saw that most of

the events were geared at young children to prepare them to be future soldiers, such as in Figure 5 where children could dress up in uniform and have their pictures taken behind backdrops of fighter-jets, navy ships and tanks. Parents are told their sons are “giving strength to our nation” as the phrase on the poster notes, emphasizing “our SAF” to include all Singaporeans in young men’s service. Respondent Spocky articulated his reaction to these demands of all sons to serve the nation.

Spocky: In the beginning of this thesis I introduced Spocky and his fears about entering NS as a young recruit. Spocky said he felt he embodied the care-free outlook that he associated with Western young adulthood. He is an advocate of marijuana use even though Singapore upholds the death penalty for drug trafficking. He would go on late night roams across the island’s parks with me and other friends, staying out till the morning trains came. Spocky’s identity changed visibly over the times I met with him, before and after he began his service. Besides buzz-cutting his long hair and regulating his schedule, his induction into the military meant he no longer had the opportunities to roam and to make mistakes like setting off a home-made firecracker.

In his first week of NS Spocky told me he would pick up a bottle of malt liquor before attending camp to relax his fears and maintain self-control when his instructors made him nervous. After a few weeks he began adjusting more to life in the camp. His uncle told me he thought it was a good experience for young men like Spocky, that it would straighten him out. The last time I saw Spocky before I left, after he had been in NS for over a month, he told me he had been thinking more about his responsibility to his family. His younger cousins, whom I met on Mooncake festival, looked up to Spocky. Spocky felt he needed to be a better role model for them and support them. He told me it

was really important to him to be with family and he wanted to make sure they are okay. Spocky's changing attitude shows how NS affected his sense of responsibility and, at least initially, increased his insecurities about being unlike some of the other NS recruits. As time went on Spocky became more comfortable in NS, and he started expressing the NS values about responsibility towards his own family as he began to see himself as more responsible for their safety. In the next quote, Will, describes the reciprocal support of soldiers and suppliers in a military which explains why NS makes recruits like Spocky feel more responsible for their community after being conscripted.

Will: Will, another ex-sergeant, succinctly summarized how NS helped young men realize the desire to improve on the system as well as the sense of responsibility, producing a sense of duty and obligation to give back while living overseas.

Will: I think if you never really thought about that you would think that the country we have in Singapore just has happened you know? ... But going to NS I think like the military experience shows you that you have to make things happen, that things don't happen naturally. Like you go out to fight a war like...where does your tank come from? Where does your sleeping bag come from as well? Why can you sleep at night? Because you have a sentry standing guard of your camp. You don't take things for granted, you don't assume the buses run because they run you know? Like someone has to be driving the buses. It changes your perspective that you are no longer just a citizen that is in the country, but you have to contribute to making things happen in the country.

The ease of switching between soldier and citizen in this quote shows how the sense of not taking things for granted goes beyond just life in the military, and has

become part of his everyday perspective. Linking the military and civilian responsibilities that young men learn in NS shows how the sense of responsibility of recruits described above was demonstrated to parents. This value of responsibility associated with men was also an important indicator for parents that sons were ready to study overseas alone and contribute to society in the future.

In summary, in Singapore NS makes sons feel like they have to give back and therefore demonstrates that they are becoming mature men. This sense of responsibility reinforces the idea that sons must reciprocate for the benefits they received from earlier generations of Singaporeans. This fits with Lee Kuan Yew's stated goals for NS when it was first initiated; convincing parents that their sons would thrive in the military and then give back to the nation by insuring that parents associate their sons with the military and with Singapore's national security (Lee 2000, 33). This association of mature sons with reciprocal gratitude is continued in the second section of this chapter where I discuss government funding for overseas education and how it makes sons who receive government scholarships feel they have to give back for what they receive. Government funding for studying overseas in Singapore requires children to take responsibility for paying back the state with their labor and time in Singapore or risk losing their parents trust and putting their parents' investment at risk.

4.3 Bonds and scholarship: How granting opportunities tie students to home

In this section I discuss how funding for overseas education reinforces state obligations. This section will describe how funding can include formal contracts to stay connected to Singapore. The government sponsors students' local and international studies so that they can contribute to the state and has been doing so since the

independence of Singapore in the 1960's (Lee 2000). I look at excerpts from students and parents about how overseas education came with financial bonds which promoted feelings of responsibility and gratitude. These examples demonstrate how scholarship funding programs are used to promote overseas students' intergenerational contracts with home.

The most common source of funding for studying overseas among participants in this study beyond funds contributed by parents was Government Scholarships (referred to here as scholarships). Scholarships normally include tuition, as set by the receiving school, well as mandatory work placements at the workplace of the respective ministry or industry in Singapore responsible for funding the student's scholarship (Ye and Nylander 2015, Sze Meng 2005). Scholarships require a substantial bond (a sum of money put aside to assure the funder that the contract terms will be completed) which depends on the size of the scholarship and can be vouched for by parents or relatives. The bond is only returned after completion of the studies followed by a working position in Singapore equal to or up to two times longer than one's university studies depending on the needs of the funding organization.⁶ Leaving Singapore without completing one's bond to scholarship funders could have harmful consequences on parent finances. Scholarships are exclusively awarded based on merit to students which in practice is overrepresented by elite local schools who prepare students for award tracts by fostering the specific kinds

⁶ For example, a student who studied education overseas for three years with a scholarship from the ministry of education might work for between three and six years for the ministry upon completion of his studies as a teacher. The amount of money given is dependent on the tuition cost of the receiving university, so a scholarship to Harvard might be larger than to the University of Tasmania. The cost for forfeiting a scholarship is the whole scholarship plus 10% interest on total cost of the scholarship (Sze Meng 2005).

of academic knowledge and extracurricular accomplishments that scholarship organizers care about (Koh 2014, 2015, Ye and Nylander 2015).

Scholarship recipients I interviewed assured me they had discussed their plans to study, return and work with their family members thoroughly before accepting. Likewise, on an online thread about studying overseas, students advised caution and responsibility before seeking to acquire such large funds. For example, one comment said:

Think long and hard and make sure you are 100% cock sure that you will use the opportunity wisely. seen people have their parents blow their ENTIRE SAVINGS to fund the kids education.

Students looking to study overseas had to assure their parents they were willing to follow through with the work and repayment because parents' savings were on the line.

Mai, the mother of a son on government scholarship, explained:

Mai: I think we really don't have much...control. Because as parents we have to let them have their choice. But since my youngest was bonded, is bonded, so I think he should fulfill that. Otherwise I will pay the penalty. But after that its up to him.

Mai says the choice is up to her son and she does not have control, but within this choice her son is responsible for her bond money and it would hurt Mai if her son does not make the choice to uphold his bond. In other words, sons have the choice of whether or not to complete the terms of the scholarship, but the only responsible choice for parents' sake is that of fulfilling the contract. For sons who were funded by scholarships the ties between financial support and family were clear. Tan, for example, said:

Tan: I'm funding by the Singaporean government for studying, so I have to come back... I think like, I want to come back actually, because my family is here, you know, wherever my family is that's where I want to be. Job opportunities I'm sure I can get better ones in The States, but I don't get better family in the States haha.

Tan links his desire to come back and be with family to funding from the government. Rick also felt that his future was clear because his scholarship gave him a stable career, which made his parents happy:

Rick: Once I sign the scholarship agreement... the next 12 years were kind of planned. It's a 5-year bond and I have to come back and do my military service. So everything is kind of laid out for me...so there wasn't very much worry. I think my parents were not very worried, they were quite confident I would be okay, because I have a job.

For Rick, military service and his scholarship in conjunction both made his life unchangeable and located in Singapore, in this case for 12 years. For another respondent, whose parents could not have afforded to send him overseas without a scholarship, the government scholarship was the only means to go overseas with his family's support:

"[My studies] eventually worked out fine because I got the scholarship, so I went and [my parents] were very supportive."

While the scholarships' official mandate is to integrate students into Singapore's economy, they also had the effect of tying overseas students to their families. They made it easier for sons to show gratitude for their parents' support and harder for them to break the contract and leave their parents in debt. This is important because it means the state's use of financial bonds does not only keep students in line with familialist policy goals

while they studied overseas, but possibly for most of their lives if they stay in that career track in Singapore.

In the last example of the state's role in co-creating contracts between parents and sons I talk about student's involvement in Singaporean Societies (overseas Singaporean communities with ties to the state, commonly known as SingSocs). I show how students involved in SingSocs practice giving back and reproducing the national values of Singapore while they are abroad. SingSocs receive funding according to a branch's ability to sustain links between overseas Singaporeans and a national discourse of Singaporean values, and in doing so they reinforce familialist policy overseas.

4.4 SingSocs: Linking the state with student bodies around the world

SingSocs are regionally based communities of young overseas Singaporeans, most of which are organized around university campuses. They are supportive of new Singaporean students seeking advice for their studies, housing and other needs from other Singaporeans. They are found in campuses across the globe. They promote networks between Singaporeans living overseas and are primarily funded by the Overseas Singaporean Unit (OSU), a Singaporean government committee. The OSU claims there are over 280 SingSocs in over 120 cities (Hean, Pin, and Kiak 2012). They are mostly concentrated in English-speaking countries where most overseas Singaporean students go to study, such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. They connect overseas Singaporeans students with home. In this section I show how familialist policies in Singapore expressed through the OSU are linked to SingSocs in the relationships they create between overseas students and home.

The OSU is the main government organization tasked with funding and organizing SingSocs as well as connecting parents, overseas students, schools and ministries to share relevant information. The OSU was started in 2006, it is run by the National Population and Talent Division. Its mandate is “to reach out more proactively to overseas Singaporeans and facilitate return migration” (Ho and Boyle 2015, 10). The National Population and Talent Division is charged with fostering what they call a “vibrant economy” with a “strong Singaporean core” (NPTD 2014)⁷. The OSU claims to have supported programs which engaged with 90,000 overseas Singaporeans from 2006-2011 (Hean, Pin, and Kiak 2012). The National Population and Talent Division’s 2011 progress report to parliament explains, “It is also essential that we engage our Singaporeans overseas. They are part of our family while overseas and the valuable skills and exposure they gain will enrich our economy and society when they return” (Hean, Pin, and Kiak 2012).

OSU recruitment events which I attended in Singapore were full of games, prizes, and other fun activities to attract young students thinking about studying overseas. I attended three of these events at conference centres around Singapore. They were staffed by senior student volunteers who gave young students advice about studying overseas. In addition to recruitment events, they regularly host Singaporean cultural events in Singapore and in popular destination cities like New York and London, and publish articles and links to practical information about living overseas on their website and social media groups (see for example OSU 2016).

⁷ Contact Singapore is another funding source for SingSocs funded by the Ministry of Manpower founded in 1998 that was the main government organization tasked with managing the Singaporean diaspora before the OSU was created in 2006 (Ho and Boyle 2015).

SingSoc clubs are a key part of OSU programs. SingSocs frequently described themselves as grassroots organizations run by students. The terms “ground-up” and “grassroots”, common on the OSU website and at the events I attended, was a way of marketing the clubs by their administrative staff. Ho (2008) found that overseas students in London would critique the top down nature of SingSoc funding. The idea of grassroots SingSocs reflected the student organization but not the government funding.

Eight sons and four parent respondents mentioned SingSocs. They were brought up in relation to events such as getting used to living in a new country, finding new housing, and celebrating holidays abroad. When I asked John, a respondent with Singaporean roommates, why he ended up living with other Singaporeans while living overseas he told me, “It was through the Singaporean Society that we met each other.” Posts about available housing was a common use of SingSoc web pages, but SingSocs also regularly brought together overseas Singaporeans for community building activities.

Two respondents had run SingSocs in their universities. Both explained to me how they saw student and government interests negotiated during the funding process in ways they understood to be grassroots. Both of them said they would construct events on their respective campuses to satisfy one or two of the following three criteria set out by the OSU on their website, which could grant up to 80% funding for their events: 1. Celebrate Singapore’s culture and heritage; 2. Keep Singaporeans abroad abreast with developments in Singapore; and 3. Strengthen a sense of community amongst the Singaporeans abroad through meaningful projects and activities (OSU 2015). These kind of events were often casual or celebratory events which introduced Singaporeans to each other while sharing Singaporean food and culture. Respondents described SingSocs’ role

as: “They would arrange with you after you arrive to orientate you to important places”, “Just get together, have a meal, catch up,” or “they are mostly food events. Like Christmas dinner, [and] a mid-autumn dinner.” Respondents described casual networks that were part of regular activities overseas. Conditions for funding meant student organizers had to appeal to national heritage, and promote networks between Singaporeans, in ways that could be verified and audited by a government task force. In the next case Tan describes his experience organizing a SingSoc around these conditions.

Tan: Tan was a SingSoc organizer studying and organizing at a large American university. SingSoc student organizers were gatekeepers between the OSU’s familialist financial support and the informal communities of overseas Singaporeans that SingSocs promoted. When they were not in Singapore the student organizers could be strategic about how they presented events and negotiate their relationship with the funding office. Tan told me what he meant by the term grass-roots organizing:

Tan: Did you go to the ... screening, *To Singapore with Love?* ...this film is banned in Singapore, it’s all about Singaporean exiles, so I don’t know if you’re familiar with Singaporean history, but in the 60s and 70s there was this huge exile of dissidents. So this filmmaker went to England, London, went to Malaysia, all these places went to meet them, but the film was banned in Singapore.

Raviv: How does that work in terms of your taskforce (the OSU employees in charge of monitoring SingSocs), do they know [you showed the film at a SingSoc]?

Tan: That's a bit sensitive...they know, but they don't fund it. So they cannot fund it, but they do not prohibit it from happening.

Tan was able to work around the barriers the government of Singapore put up against *To Singapore with Love* by unofficially showing it as part of his SingSoc events. Overseas students have more opportunities to engage with censored media and less risk of repercussions. Concern around alternative historical narratives was not enough to affect OSU's core responsibility to create an overseas Singaporean community which keeps students anchored to the Singaporean economy. In this case one part of the state's power, over the national historical narrative, was given up so that the OSU can continue to promote overseas Singaporean communities. In this case the state prioritized its role reinforcing the ties of overseas Singaporeans.

Parents and sons both expressed relief that they or their children had other Singaporeans to connect with overseas in addition to foreign friends. Tan explained to me that it wasn't about closing your mind to another culture. SingSocs were something that provided grounding because they kept him close to his culture while also taking advantage of where he was living:

Tan: I felt really supported by them and I didn't feel lost. But at the same time I didn't feel that I was obliged to spend time with my Singaporean group, I could still have my American friends, you know? It doesn't become social pressure for me to stick with Singaporean friends. So I can have my Singaporean fix.

Being able to speak Singlish, eat Singaporean foods, and share experiences from home to get a Singaporean fix was a positive experience that brought many students like Tan into these groups.

Many of the sons I interviewed maintained close connections with Singaporean friends while overseas, living with Singaporeans or going to Singaporean senior students

for advice on school and living abroad. That indicates the OSU may be successful in their mandate of sustaining overseas communities which connect Singaporeans. Wudao said on SingSocs “it’s not just trying to be an association to get Singaporeans together, it’s more a networking association.” Even though the number of Singaporean students overseas was small compared to other international students, it surprised me to learn from several respondents how many activities overseas Singaporeans did together, such as finding housing, picking classes, and celebrating holidays. Living with fellow Singaporean students was more common than living with non-Singaporeans among student participants when looking for housing in their initial years overseas. In interviews, some students described the close networks between overseas Singaporeans as a bubble that insulated students.

The example of censored media, *To Singapore with Love*, shown in a SingSocs, demonstrated how government control is not absolute over overseas Singaporeans. However, the SingSoc organizer’s anxiety about maintaining his anonymity in the interview and keeping his voice hidden implied the ever-present potential for serious repercussions to his career if he was caught criticizing the state directly: a student could lose access to financial support for his SingSoc, or lose scholarship support if he was perceived to threaten the state. This could have long term costs for him and for his family because of the bonds they had given over. The control of the state is not total, but it is enough to make scholarship students and community leaders self-censor what they say in public. The choice to take action is always available, but it can come at a higher cost for bonded students and required careful negotiation with the state.

SingSoc's are a means through which a sense of national community is maintained overseas. SingSocs and the OSU encourage students to return and reintegrate into the Singaporean economy after their studies. Based on the National Population and Talent Division's mandate to encourage the reproduction of family for the sake of a vibrant economy, maintaining a bond between overseas Singaporeans and the nation is an important part of the more general mandate of the state to maintain support for a familialist system by reinforcing ties between children and their parents (Teo 2010, Hean, Pin, and Kiak 2012, Ho 2008). It demonstrates recognition by the government of Singapore of the importance of reinforcing ties in the families of transnational students who are otherwise more flexible because they are studying overseas (Ong 2006). I argue that SingSocs seek to give students a reason to take personal responsibility for their parents and their community by providing a cultural anchor to Singapore and reinforce the networks between Singaporeans overseas. In the concluding section I describe how NS, scholarships and SingSocs all contribute to a transnational familialism.

4.5 Conclusion

The three cases explored in this chapter are strategies used by the state of Singapore to maintain overseas educated sons' support in their young adulthood for their family's intergenerational contracts. These state programs co-create feelings of responsibility and gratitude for parents. Parents feel comfortable or at least sufficiently assured that after going through National Service, sons are mature enough to take on the responsibility to study overseas. NS pressures sons to be self-reliant in ways defined by the state. Scholarship students' financial bonds require long-term repayment that require commitments of responsibility for many years. Scholarships create financial bonds that

are costly for sons to break on their parents' behalf. Last, SingSocs support overseas Singaporeans by constructing national communities abroad and help provide a Singaporean fix to students. This format of grassroots community is flexible in how organizers can introduce critical discussions, but the OSU's basic requirements for funding keeps SingSocs within an insulating network. These programs promote the state and parents' expectations for sons overseas to stay linked to Singapore and family. This shows a seamless connection between national and transnational governmentality and that familialist policy is relevant to global Singaporeans.

In the next chapter I talk about the choices transnational sons made through the process of studying overseas. I describe the process by which the values of intergenerational contracts become normalized by communities in Singapore and reinforced by the state. I discuss how as sons go overseas the flow of activities they can access becomes more expansive while they continue to maintain the importance of The Parent Tax in their lives. I examine male students' agency and its limits in the intergenerational contract. Choices which do not support parents become hard to make for overseas sons even when they are independent. I argue that values of reciprocal gratitude make it difficult for sons who feel gratitude towards their parents to choose to stay away from Singapore for too long.

Chapter 5: Transnational sons' experience: Agency under contract

In the previous chapter I showed how government programs targeted at young men or overseas students reinforced ties to Singapore and feelings of reciprocal gratitude to family among overseas sons. In this chapter I look at the choices that Singaporean sons make after living overseas: what they feel they should do, and why they feel they should do it. I look at how Singaporean overseas educated young men make choices given familialist policies. Scholars have shown that governance of subjects' values creates the conditions upon which citizens' actions starts to reflect the will of the state (Foucault 1991, Li 2007a, Ong 2006). I argue in this chapter that sons' conduct after living independently overseas frequently reflects the will of the state to create self-reliant families because of the financial responsibility sons take on for their families before, during, and after living overseas.

First, I look at how intergenerational contracts are created by parents making examples for sons to follow which are reinforced through sons' educations and in state discourses on family. I draw from parents and sons' interviews on how sons learn to give back to parents to show how sons internalize these values as part of their own responsibility. Next I look at education in two faith communities to show how the values of reciprocal gratitude that parents taught were common across multiple Singaporean values systems. I discuss the government discourse on family in print ads for healthcare subsidies and in political campaign speeches. These government ads show similarities between government portrayals of family and parental expectations for their children.

In the second half of the chapter I talk about how sons view their personal agency and how returning respondents continued to uphold values of reciprocal gratitude. I

discuss how overseas sons continue to act out an agency influenced by the state in the context of family. I develop the term “flowy” to elaborate on the agency that overseas sons suggest they have as a result of the independence they experience in their studies. By agency, I mean capacity of action within a network of social factors (Ahearn 2013, 240); the actions that are possible for sons to make within their relationships to parents, community, and government institutions (Ahearn 2001, Elyachar 2014). Kenway et al. (2013) link the agency of international education to the desires of parents to give their children opportunities overseas to create new actions that would not have been possible otherwise. Transnational education gives children autonomy over their lives, but interviews with respondents suggest sons’ agency continues to be framed by the internalized values of familialism and bonds of financial obligation which produce the conditions for them to study overseas.

In the last section I summarize how students make plans for their futures within the limits of intergenerational contracts that are meaningful to them. Sons’ choices about their future are weighted towards returning to live in Singapore as long as they feel gratitude towards their parents for supporting their goals.

5.1 Learning self-motivated gratitude

Most sons interviewed in this study categorized their reasons for giving back to show gratitude as totally self-constructed because no one had told them they had to do it, and therefore it was through their own agency that they chose to give The Parent Tax. In fact, many wealthier parents had explicitly told their children they did not need support and still most sons would offer because they were motivated out of gratitude. For example, one respondent, Kyle, said, “Oh, my dad has openly said that he doesn't, like,

want me to support him in his retirement. So he's already got his retirement funds. But I think I'll still continue to support him regardless.” In interviews with parents, two wealthy parents reiterated this point, saying that their children would not be asked to give because they already had sufficient retirement savings. They would be happy to know their children would offer though, because then they would know their children really cared.

The case of Rick shows upholding intergenerational contracts can be a product of sons' critical thinking and personal agency and not necessarily perceived as feelings of obligation resulting from traditions.

Rick: Rick, the student who came from a debate background, gave an example of learning to give where he identified his reciprocity towards his parents with critical thinking classes in school that reinforced his values. Rick was good natured easy talker who felt more comfortable at his church than his Chinese school, and had the self-confident charisma of a pastor. Learning to give back out of gratitude was also taught to him in high school. He felt his beliefs were dynamic and self-aware but were not an obligation because he had learned to critically analyze his reasons for giving back to parents and had come to terms with it.

Raviv: Where do you think your feelings about [filial piety] comes from?

Rick: I don't think it comes from my family, I feel that it's just something that I have developed over time. From probably in school as well, it probably got solidified.

Raviv: Can you think of an example of where this came up in school?

Rick: ... So we had a class on critical thinking, called “men and ideas”. So that

introduced us to some philosophical concepts, from Epistemology, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Logic. So I think that helped me to re-look at some of the values that I have felt were, that I have previously felt were unchangeable, and helped me to come to terms with how do I want to, conduct my relationships.

Rick's education stood out to him because its purpose was to teach him how to think for himself, and in doing so helped him construct a truth which fit with the kind of family relationships he had learned by example as Singaporean values. In this case it was reinforced for Rick through the logic of rationalistic schools of philosophy. Religious, secular and family educations can all encourage young men to pursue maturity. These values make the conduct of The Parent Tax something that sons choose to do out of their own agency. Rick later said "I don't think being independent means that you are not with parents" as he was studying in New York. Rick did not see this as a contraction; he felt he could retain his personal values of reciprocal gratitude in a transnational lifestyle.

In the next section I look at two examples of religious education seminars I attended as parts of observation methods which show how Singaporean values of reciprocal gratitude were learned in many different communities and applied by sons to their own life choices. I draw from my participant observations at lectures on family at Darul Arqam and at the Chinese Methodist Church in which I saw examples of how intergenerational contracts are taught to young adults in Singapore.

5.2 Learning the quickest pathway to paradise

Researchers looking at elder care and reciprocal gratitude in Singapore have shown that parents' expectations of children's financial support are consistent with traditional Chinese-Confucian beliefs (Devan and Heng 1995, Göransson 2009, Wee

1995, Yun 2013). I look instead at examples of Christian and Muslim communities, the two largest religious communities in Singapore outside of traditional Chinese beliefs (Statistics Singapore Statistics-Singapore 2015), to show how they also teach values of reciprocal gratitude and motivate children to choose to give back to parents. The consistency of intergenerational contracts in Muslim and Christian faiths with Confucian values of filial piety demonstrates that the value of children supporting parents out of gratitude is something which children growing up in Singapore might all learn.

Darul Arqam: Within religious communities in Singapore I saw references to underlining Singaporean values of family with discursive similarities to familialist policies. At a public lecture at the Muslim learning centre Darul Arqam titled *The Pathway to Paradise*, I learned about one version of the value of intergenerational contracts that exist in Singapore. The lecture was put on by an Imam who had grown up and learned trades in Singapore, and then went on to travel across the Middle East to study the Quran. Darul Arqam specializes in engaging with converts and youth and puts out regular lectures and classes on elementary knowledge of Islam. At the lecture the audience packed the small hall in numbers around 200 and was mostly young men and women. The thesis of the Imam's talk was that parents should treat secular education as equally critical to sons' upbringing as religious education because it gave sons the means to take care of themselves and their families. The Imam singled out sons and not daughters as providers of financial support for their families and the recipients of parental investment in education. The first verse of the Quran, Iqra, is a call to seek all forms of education he told us, and every parent had the fundamental responsibility to educate their children.

He explained his title at the end: “The quickest pathway to paradise is to care for elderly parents,” coming full circle to emphasize the reciprocal relationship of children’s education to achieving a successful intergenerational contract. This is why he had returned to Singapore himself. He said his greatest challenge has been putting faith into practice to care for his senile mother. It was one of the few times in the hour-long lecture that he related his own personal experience and it brought him to tears. The virtue of gratitude was a fundamental part of his teaching. The use of intergenerational contracts in Darul Arqam was personalized to the community but it reflected the national discourse on gratitude by children for their parents’ investment. In another example of community values and the agency of children to give back, I look at the Chinese Methodist Church and how they talked about Singaporean values of taking responsibility for parents.

Chinese Methodist Church: At a Methodist youth group that I attended, the pastor directed our group’s conversation about the meaning of existence to practical and Singaporean ways of thinking. The pastor situated his so-called Singaporean view based on practice within the historical Confucian debate of whether humanity was fundamentally virtuous or not, saying “are we *kiasu* [afraid of losing/failure] or generous?” His feeling was that the celebration of Singapore’s 50th birthday was a demonstration of how Singaporeans could be generous. In particular, the good deeds done for elders by youth like giving up seats on the metro were evidence of the virtue of Singaporeans as a society to show gratitude for their elders. The narrative of these discussions at the church were always about Christian faith but the content was about a Singaporean identity which was defined by giving back to family with gratitude. For example, the songs at the youth group compared sacrifice to Jesus to the sacrifice of a

father for a child, and therefore expected the congregation to feel gratitude for the sacrifice. The presence of this theme reiterated in religious events indicates that it may be an everyday phenomenon for religious communities in Singapore.

This section has shown that among two examples of religious lectures oriented towards youth in Singapore that I attended, the idea of reciprocal gratitude towards parents was a repeated theme. The examples I used show that this theme of children having to learn to show gratitude towards parents in religious communities is not unique to Chinese-Confucian beliefs but applicable to many of the major religious groups in Singapore. This suggests that reciprocal gratitude is widespread, and a part of most young Singaporean's moral education and promoted by the state in collaboration with community actors. It is through these common values that sons' agency to choose how to support parents becomes a self-motivated obligation.

In the following section I look at expressions of the state's discourse on family found in such mundane subjects as subway ads and political campaigns. I show that the state discourse links Singaporean family with familialist national values using the same themes as family, secular and religious education in Singapore. In its pervasive presence in public transit and political campaigns, the state continues to reinforce a message of gratitude and personal agency to support parents.

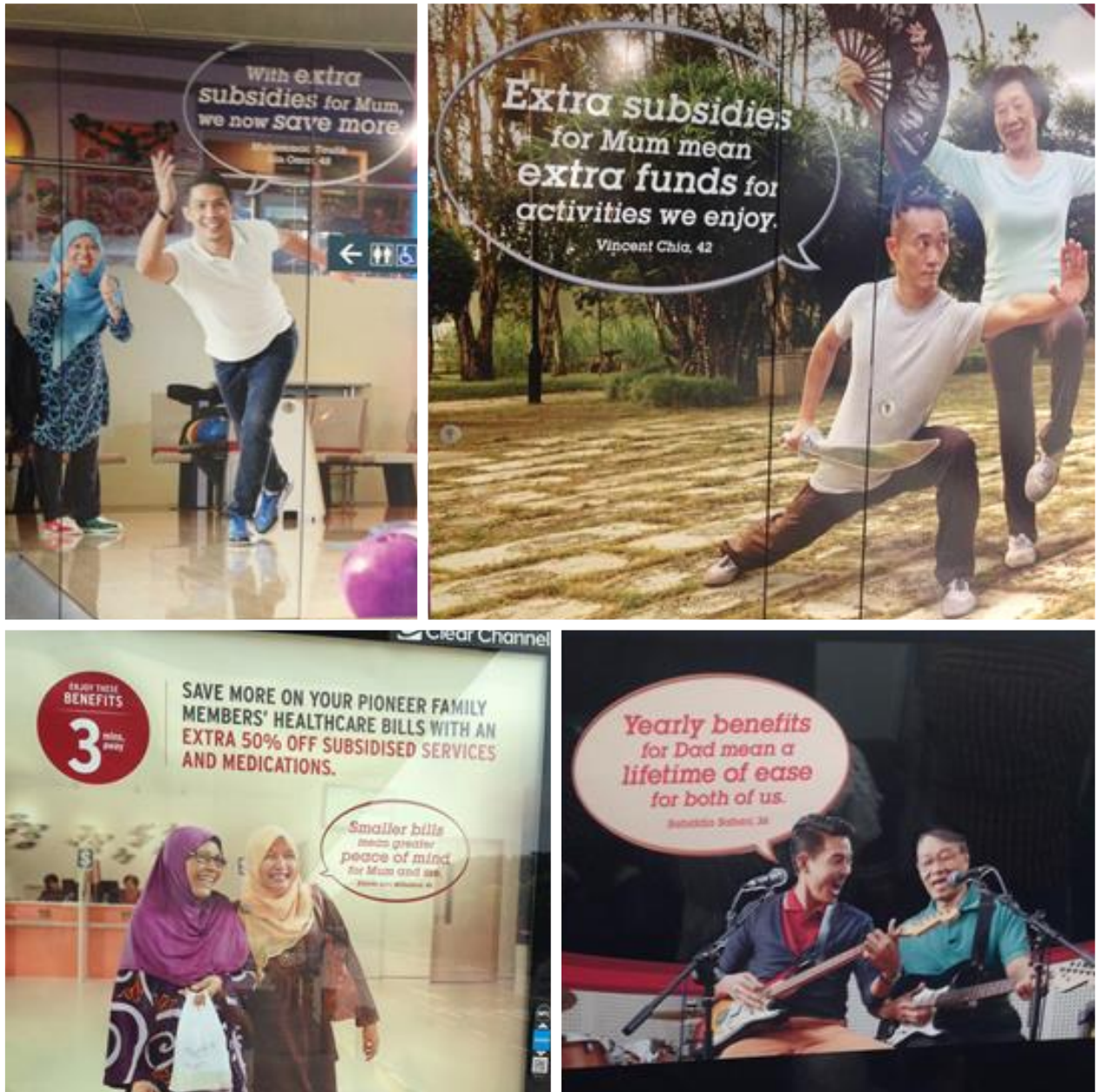
5.3 The state discourse on gratitude

In this section I look at how values of gratitude and responsibility for parents were used in a state discourse on sons' roles in their families. These values came up overtly in state discourse in social marketing campaigns to inform citizens about government social programs. I argue that the state of Singapore employs a discourse of

intergenerational contracts to promote government programs. By promoting families with intergenerational ties in social marketing the government is co-creating the values of responsibility to reciprocate along with parents (Wee 1995).

I examine in depth an example of a familialist ad campaign in the billboards and subway ads for the Pioneer Family Member's Health Card, a medical subsidy for seniors (see Figure 6), which focused on the parent/child relationship to emphasize the benefits this program would have for adult children by alleviating part of the financial burden on children of caring for aging parents. These ads displayed two family members engaging in a recreational activity with a quote about the increased spending power they both had as a result of subsidies for the elder member. The ads featured mostly sons in their 30s and 40s. The emphasis of these ads was on the children and not the parents, even though the program is for the benefit of their parents. The children are the prominent players in all the recreational activities shown and they are the only ones talking. The children are the forefront actors in these ads and in the speech bubbles they use terms related to mutual investment, such as "we now save more" and "lifetime of ease for both of us." It's clear that the makers of these ads were relying on the idea that financial and emotional relationships should be closely linked among parents and children in Singapore.

Figure 6: The Pioneer Family Member's Health Card promotional ad campaign
(Photos supplied by the author)



When I showed these metro ads to one key respondent Cheng, he told me he felt the Pioneer Family Members Card was an attempt by the ruling People's Action Party to "buy the votes of the Pioneer Generation" (Singaporeans who grew up around the 1950s or 1960s). I believe that the format of showing children in the forefront as the central actors in the ads shows the marketers who designed these ads were more concerned with purchasing the younger generation's support through the Pioneer Generation by using language which emphasizes the investment of children in parents' welfare. This link between children and financial support for parents is an idea that the government wants to reinforce because it justifies familialist policies and it implies children should be grateful for any help the state is willing to give, no matter how small. Familialist policies like this one show a reward for reciprocal gratitude by showing children that the government will assist those who take responsibility for their parents' welfare. The marketers, in this case the Ministry of Health, draw on this link to try to demonstrate that they are helping children fulfill their obligations to support parents. This theme was reinforced in my fieldwork, in particular when I observed some of the general election campaigns and found that among the ruling party this idea of supporting children who show gratitude towards parents was a campaign argument.

During one of my observations of a political rally of the People's Action Party in the downtown core, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong emphasized about the idea of helping children by helping parents in an anecdote in one of his campaign speeches. In his story, a young man came up to thank him for providing subsidies for the elderly. Lee Hsien Loong said he was confused, since these subsidies did not apply to the young man.

The young man said by helping his parents, the government was relieving the financial burden on his generation too. The prominence of sons in the health care ads was similar to the Prime Ministers speech, both of which demonstrated government support for children who choose to take responsibility for their parents' welfare.

This prominence of father and son ties is reflected not only in the government's discourse but also in the actions of the prominent members of government. Lee Hsien Loong epitomized the ideal pattern of overseas education and gratitude in Singapore: he studied mathematics and public policy on military scholarship in Cambridge and Harvard, and then returned to continue his father's legacy as Prime Minister (Lee, 2000). Lee Hsien Loong praises his father Lee Kuan Yew's legacy in government and shows gratitude to his father to reflect his own public expression of intergenerational ties. When his father passed away Lee Hsien Loong made a point of reinforcing the importance of his father's legacy in his party and honoring his memory in his speeches.

In the above sections I have described an overwhelmingly homogenous discourse about responsibility which sons are exposed to as they grow up in Singapore. Religion, schools, government promotions and politicians all articulate a simple and coherent message which parents feel they are teaching their children, that is to be self-motivated to take responsibility for parents' welfare. The motivation for giving back to family in order to demonstrate responsibility and maturity begins with family leading by example. After this value becomes normalized it is reinforced through educational programs which teach children to be self-motivated to demonstrate gratitude. In the state's discourse on family, children are shown to be engaging in financial bonds with their parents and grateful for subsidies which alleviate a part of this burden. The governmentality of family in

Singapore is reliant on children's own agency in providing for parents out of gratitude which is then transferred to gratitude towards the state for their supplemental aid in assisting in part of this process.

In the next section I talk about overseas students' choices and how the values of gratitude which are co-created by parents and the state continue to influence students. I show how in spite of the feelings of independence from home that students experience overseas which allow them to engage in activities they could not in Singapore, students continued to reproduce the bonds of The Parent Tax themselves. I look at how students' agency is managed overseas through two in-depth case studies.

5.4 The flow of living overseas

“Everything just doesn't stop, just flows, doesn't stop.” – Spocky

When Spocky compared Singapore with overseas living he associated overseas with a lack of structure. He described these different feelings by saying he felt living in Singapore is a metaphorical pressure cooker, whereas the feeling of living overseas was more like flowy-ness, that is less controlled because of the independence he had overseas. He said in terms of living in the USA, “there is a lot more space, it's a lot more free over there.” In this section I evaluate the possibility of flowy agency, the sense of freedom to choose and experiment in new ways while overseas, within the contractual limitations of feelings of gratitude. Rick's case gave an example of the flowy bond of an overseas education: opportunity for new choices, but limitations because of his scholarship bonds and obligations to family.

Rick: Rick and I had been discussing what he planned to do next after graduating with his degree and how his parents felt about his plans. He said he saw a growing

distance between him and his parents because he was succeeding in the educational and financial arenas they had expected him to take on. These opportunities were easier for him to obtain than his sister's because his parents believed he was mature as he had completed NS. He had a lot of choice and mobility overseas. However, the scholarship bond and military service were the conditions that kept him from acting on potential mobility or choices for the next 12 years.

Rick: Once I sign the scholarship agreement... the next 12 years were kind of planned... I also felt that, at least for my parents, once I went overseas, they kind of realized that they can't really help me as much as they would like. They very much...both my parents don't have university degrees, so for them it's like...I think traveling more when I was abroad is one of the examples of how I became more independent.

Rick was exercising his flowy-ness in new ways which were enabled by living overseas outside of his parents' control. There were things Rick could see and do overseas that were new opportunities, such as for Rick traveling to North Korea and Palestine. Now that Rick is back in Singapore he makes seeing his parents a routine; "I try to spend my weekends with them now", and he will send money to them once he starts working; "when I start working after university I will be able to." Like other participating sons who felt gratitude towards their parents, living overseas did not affect Rick's feelings about what he should do for his parents. Instead of experiencing an increased sense of flowy-ness, Rick in fact became more conscious of obligations to family and its importance in his life because of his increasing sense of gratitude after he returned. Returning to Singapore reinforced the expectation that he would spend more

time with parents. Financial bonds like those used in government scholarships and nation building activities like SingSocs and national service steer students' actions while in a flowy environment when there would otherwise be very little parental influence over them.

The next section looks at the ways sons planned their futures around feelings of gratitude and responsibility towards parents within the dreams sons have for their futures. The case of John shows how there are limits on flowy lifestyles because of a combination of responsibility to family and bonds with government programs. This shows how sustaining financial ties between overseas students and family keeps overseas educated sons rooted in Singapore, despite having some aspirations of a more long-term transnational flowy lifestyle.

5.5 Singapore dreaming

In this section I look at how overseas educated Singaporean sons imagine their futures. These sons' dreams are affected by flowy experiences overseas and by contracts with home for when they return. Imagined futures are the fantasies and dreams that are possible to be imagined within the framework of what someone feels they can and cannot do. I draw from Gammeltoft's (2014) discussion of family and imagined futures on how fantasies and fears form beliefs about what can happen in the future. These beliefs limit the agency of individuals to choices that reflect what they believe is possible.

Through governmentality the state can manage the pre-existing imagined futures of citizens: "the imaginaries that suffused day-to-day lives were not simply produced by or identical with state ideologies. Rather, party-state rhetoric tapped into a substrate of long-standing fears, fantasies, and desires that preceded and exceeded contemporary state

policies. State ideologies and people's imaginaries were co-constitutive (Gammeltoft 2014, 160).” Government and family are both involved in constructing sons' ideas about the future. I show in this section how imagined futures among overseas male students often involve coming back home. I draw from student interview data, online observations and an interview with an overseas recruitment agent to show how sons imagined a future in Singapore enacting gratitude towards parents. In the case of John, family and scholarship bonds kept him from realizing a desire to make his home where he studied.

John: John, a government scholarship student in the middle of his degree the United Kingdoms, described how his scholarship had given him a unique opportunity to study overseas with a clear path for his future. John comes from a large family (he is the second youngest of six children), so when he got his government scholarship his family agreed it would be a great way for him to fund his education. When we talked about his feelings about giving money to his parents, he said that with such a large family, it was up to him to decide whether to give to his parents. Despite his financial independence from parents he felt giving tokens of gratitude was something that he ought to do as soon as he started working. The government scholarship he received had a bond which kept him working in Singapore for six years after he completed his studies. When I asked him what he would want to do if he could break the scholarship bond or when it was done, he replied that he had a desire to live in London, but ultimately he was rooted in Singapore because of family.

John: If I don't have the scholarship I would probably consider moving abroad but...eventually I wouldn't. It's a very tempting idea. Because after three years there, I like it there! I've made myself at home in London after 3 years. It was

quite sad for me. But...um, ultimately family is still in Singapore so that's where I am deeply rooted. I don't want to leave my family.

John lived with his parents, grandfather, and three siblings while in Singapore, and with three friends in London. He had a quiet life in Singapore compared to that in London. In London he would regularly go out with friends and stay out all night or travel by himself around Europe on a whim, and he would cook, clean and provide for himself. In comparison Singapore seemed "restrictive", and his parents were likely to scold him for staying out at night, let alone travel alone. Despite feeling at home in London, John felt leaving Singapore would mean leaving family. He said his family was unlikely to move either, since they also had deep roots in Singapore. In spite of experiences of independence overseas, John could not imagine leaving Singapore for more than a few years. In Colin's case, ties he had with home also made it difficult to justify going overseas repeatedly after studies were completed because of feelings of guilt.

Colin: Colin, a returning student who spoke with a slight hint of the Australian outback, said that as he prepared to intern in Hong Kong after studying overseas his mom made him feel guilty about spending so much time away from home.

Colin: My mom had the expectation that I would come back after. She wasn't that into the idea that I would go to Hong Kong after graduating, whether it is in terms of expenses wise or just in terms of like, ya, she just was like... I mean it's my life. I mean that's her attitude as well, it's like it's your life, but I just thought you would stay around a little longer.

When we talked about what he thought about doing next, his thoughts were on a career in Foreign Service and moving out from living with his parents to a house in the

centre of Singapore. These were compromises that would allow him to travel and live independently but also stay close to his mom. His mom was not demanding he stay but her presence made it difficult for him to choose to leave despite feeling like he did not totally belong in Singapore. Spending more time in Singapore with her felt to Colin like the right thing to do even if it wasn't always what he had wanted to do. When it came to looking for a career Colin said "I'm open to wherever. But Singapore would be different because it is my home."

This feeling of deep ties to Singapore limits how long Singaporean youth feel comfortable living overseas. As one reddit commentator complained in an online discussion, studying overseas can feel temporary because of the permanence of Singapore in their lives. "Singapore is my hotel California – I can check out anytime I like but I can never leave." Riffing on The Eagle's 1976 hit single, *Hotel California*, this commentator is saying that despite opportunities overseas for students with scholarships or parental funding, they would stay in Singapore permanently and resigned to feeling regretful about lost opportunities. This resignation to ties to family in Singapore by John and Colin reflects Goransson's (2009) idea of generations of Singaporeans being bonded together through the intergenerational contracts; "the contractual relationship between parent and child is reinforced by the state...that is deeply entwined with the sentiments of indebtedness and repayment, which makes the notion of 'contract' doubly accurate. In this context, transactions of money, goods, and services have a regenerating effect of intergenerational relations that goes beyond purely material survival (114)." It also shows that sons' imagined futures are not as flowy as the often temporary experience of studying overseas made them seem.

Sons' flowy-ness overseas was affected by their choices to take on government scholarships or parental funding from before they left as well. In an interview with an agent for one of Singapore's many private exchange companies (which are commissioned by overseas universities to direct Singaporean students to their placements overseas), the agent suggested the two priorities of students seeking assistance from their organization were "discovering who you are as a person," and "a mission to get a degree." This mission, however, was defined by the degree's utility back in Singapore. He said the things students look for in a degree was "whether they are able to get employed back here in Singapore. Whether the degree is recognized here in Singapore." The biggest conflict that occurred between parents and sons in this agent's office was when parents wanted to prioritize a degree's cost effectiveness while sons wanted to live somewhere fun. Through the process of going overseas, sons sometimes had to resign themselves to a probable future in Singapore in order to get parental support. By picking overseas educational paths based on opportunities in Singapore, students were preparing themselves to ultimately check back into Hotel Singapore.

The limitations family's expectations could have on overseas students was less apparent for the student respondents who did not feel gratitude towards their parents or felt unsurmountable differences between them. For example, Marcus, who felt abused by his father, was certain that he would move to the United States. He told me after graduating he wanted to get on track for an American green card, because "for me it feels like I finally found my place in the world." Similarly, Cheng, who considered literally buying out his father's contributions in the past, was making plans to live in London in the future as well, a place he felt suited his tastes. During a participant observation

session while we were having lunch at his company club, he told me London appealed to him because he wanted to live somewhere more sophisticated and only a lack of career opportunity held him back. Sophisticated was a word he also used to describe the quality which his parents lacked, and which he found hard to come by in Singapore or other less globalized cities he had lived in.

Overall, there was a connection between feelings of gratitude towards parents and sons' willingness to fantasize about a future in which they moved away from Singapore. The agency of overseas sons was limited by the ties they had to family which were managed by parents and the state. Flowy lifestyles were generally limited to time spent studying overseas and did not continue after. Exceptions like Cheng and Marcus suggest that the more common responses, those of gratitude towards parents, would cause sons to feel more rooted in Singapore and those sons who don't feel like they fit in at home might be more interested in migrating overseas.

5.6 Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that familialist values are co-created by families and the state and internalized by sons so that their agency while overseas is limited to returning to Singapore if they feel gratitude towards their parents. I have shown that family was the key reason why respondents felt they ought to return to Hotel Singapore. Education in schools, churches or mosques can reinforce intergenerational contracts. State discourses on public welfare start with the assumption that children should be primarily invested in parents' welfare. When sons go overseas to study, their experiences are flowy and independent from parental or state surveillance. In the midst of this flowy experience, sons continue to imagine their futures in Singapore because they have

internalized familialist values. These ties to Singapore from overseas reflect the relevance of intergenerational contracts to overseas students. The exceptions show us that gratitude towards parents was the important factor in whether Singaporean state governmentality was effective at keeping students coming back.

In interviews, sons' responses to the questions of "will you give a portion of your monthly income to parents when you start working?" and "will you live in Singapore in the future?" were variations of "Yes" because they felt gratitude for their parents' investments. This makes family a transnational source of state power in Singapore because sons have internalized the idea that to abandon their obligations to the state would demonstrate a lack of appreciation for family. Overseas educated sons who felt gratitude towards their parents imagined a future in Singapore. Staying in Singapore was a condition upon which they could demonstrate that they loved their parents and appreciated that they had given them the support they needed to study overseas.

Within the pressure to study, to serve, to succeed, and to give back, overseas Singaporean sons still talked about pursuing goals that didn't fit into state or family expectations. Taking a gap year or semester, applying for a job overseas, or simply trying to make more foreign friends and networking outside of the Singaporean bubble were choices students made which could be expressions of dissent and flowy-ness. Jokes like "I am my father's retirement investment", "Ah, the parent tax" and "#filialpiety" were powerful because they subverted the unspoken expectations by making them humorous and therefore a topic of debate. Singaporeans sons question the conduct of their self-motivated gratitude by acknowledging the intergenerational contract as a negotiable financial transaction. Despite these cracks in the hegemony of The Parent Tax,

governmentality in Singapore related to family obligations continues to severely limit the agency of sons. While overseas studies enable sons to experiment with independence from family expectations and experiment with fantasies about overseas lives, the dominant outcome is that sons ultimately will acquiesce to the demands they have internalized; to feel and express gratitude as constructed by parental and state expectations.

In the concluding chapter I summarize the thesis, describing how familialist policies applied to sons in Singapore and how governance of family applies across borders in overseas education, limiting the agency of sons through the self-motivated obligation to show gratitude to family as managed by the state. I suggest further research on Singaporean students who had broken their scholarship bonds and otherwise chosen not to fulfill their contracts which will provide an important viewpoint on how some students reject expected compliance with the objectives of the state for international education and family.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis contributes to our understanding of the force of global governmentality beyond the borders of the state in the context of The Parent Tax. I have shown how the state in Singapore fosters a sense of gratitude towards family among overseas male students through the bonds of national service, scholarships and Singaporean Societies. Parents and the state co-create intergenerational contracts between parents and sons in their discourse of family values. I have focused on how The Parent Tax given by sons to parents demonstrate sons' feelings of gratitude towards their parents while also affirming Singapore's familialist policies of self-reliant families. Singaporean sons demonstrated agency in their choices related to studying and living overseas but an agency which is significantly framed by the conditions of financial obligations and demonstrations of maturity, which was necessary to allow them to travel overseas in the first place. In spite of the ambivalence that some sons felt about their relationships with their parents and desires to relocate overseas, familialist values maintained ties between sons and their parents and kept many sons coming back to Singapore.

This thesis has shown that familialist policy goes beyond the boundaries of the state of Singapore. As a result, this research was constrained by being conducted only in Singapore. For example, the outreach of SingSocs primarily occurs in global cities like New York, London, and Sydney to reach the increasingly interconnected Singaporean diaspora. Without drawing from participant observations of Singaporean communities in those cities my understanding of students' agency overseas and day-to-day practices of transnational education was limited to the experiences of those returning to Singapore over the summer. This limitation may have silenced examples of students who cut their

bonds with Singapore and/or with family and lived with the financial consequences of moving overseas on a more permanent basis. Based on online discussions of the subject, scholarship bond breakers are not an insignificant sub-set of Singaporean students and the decision to break government bonds and leave family with debt or take on personal debt is heavily debated in student communities.

The topic of Singaporean bond breakers deserves more anthropological inquiry for its ability to address the financial and emotional costs of students resisting the state, and/or institutions of family, and what the context is where students are able to make that decision. Do bond breakers have families that pay the losses and support them? Do they have the same feelings about The Parent Tax as those who don't? It would be an important topic for future research on overseas Singaporean communities because bond breakers contradicted the state of Singapore's goals for overseas students and pay the consequences.

This thesis focused on students who successfully negotiated the multiple obligations imposed on them in their studies. There is an important issue here in how serious the consequence of familialist policies can be for the agency of young students overseas. In the cases where children felt their parents deserved their gratitude, it would be a very hard choice not fulfill their contracts and this made friction between their desire to be flowy and their self-motivated obligation to show gratitude. This could keep students in line with national priorities not just for a year or a degree, but for most of a lifetime.

The implications of these relationships between Singaporean students, family and the state is that young Singaporean men's agency becomes less flowy as they return from

living overseas and more bonded to parents' through The Parent Tax. The application of governmentality in Singapore to maintain family self-reliance and national bonds with overseas students through intergenerational contracts is a feature of international education from a Singaporean perspective. This may have significant implications for the imagined futures and mental health of overseas Singaporean students who expect themselves to switch between flowy and bonded lifestyles when they begin giving back after returning home. Foreign educational institutions should not underestimate the power of organizations like National Service, Government Scholarships and Singaporean Societies to continue to affect the agency of overseas Singaporean students in overseas institutions and manage their conduct through family from abroad. In spite of the experiences of an international flowy agency on overseas campuses, governmentality in Singapore continues to successfully limit the choices of overseas sons in order to reproduce a familialist state and maintain the bonds of The Parent Tax in order to keep transnational Singaporeans returning to work in Singapore.

In the case of Singapore where the state perceives an economic and social threat in the brain drain of international students, The Parent Tax is one example of how the concepts of governmentality can be applied to global governance. The state is seeking to control flexible citizens through their familialist policies by reinforcing the debt of gratitude young Singaporean men feel they owe to their parents after receiving the privilege of studying overseas. Global governmentality may have applications beyond Singapore in other developing states who attempt to reinforce family bonds as a means to limit the mobility to transnational citizens or to increase the financial responsibility of overseas students and workers to provide for their families from a distance.

Bibliography

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1990. "The romance of resistance: tracing transformations of power through Bedouin women." *American ethnologist* 17 (1):41-55.
- Ahearn, Laura M. 2001. "Language and agency." *Annual review of anthropology* 30 (1):109-137.
- Ahearn, Laura M. 2013. "Privileging and Affecting Agency." In *Privilege, Agency and Affect*, edited by Claire Maxwell and Peter Aggleton, 8. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Allen, Lindy, and Louise Hamby. 2011. "Pathways to knowledge: research, agency and power relations in the context of collaborations between museums and source communities." In *Unpacking the Collection*, 209-229. Springer.
- Allison, Anne. 2009. *Nightwork: sexuality, pleasure, and corporate masculinity in a Tokyo hostess club*: Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Anagnost, Ann. 2013. "Life making in neoliberal times." In *Global Futures in East Asia: Youth, Nation, and the New Economy in Uncertain Times*, edited by Ann Anagnost, Andrea Arai and Hai Ren. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bengtson, Vern, Roseann Giarrusso, J. Beth Mabry, and Merrill Silverstein. 2002. "Solidarity, conflict, and ambivalence: complementary or competing perspectives on intergenerational relationships?" *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64 (3):568-576.
- Bengtson, Vern L., and W. Andrew Achenbaum. 1993. *The changing contract across generations*. New York: A. de Gruyter.
- Bernard, H. Russell. 2011. *Research methods in anthropology: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
- Boellstorff, Tom, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and TL Taylor. 2012. *Ethnography and virtual worlds: a handbook of method*: Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*: Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Brooks, Rachel, and Johanna L. Waters. 2011. *Student mobilities, migration and the internationalization of higher education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Butt, Leslie. 2008. "A transaction in ambivalence: adoption in contemporary Highlands Papua." *Pacific Studies* 31 (3, 4):107-130.
- Cheng, Yi'En. 2012. "Transnational masculinities in situ: Singaporean husbands and their international marriage experiences." *Area* 44 (1):76-82.

- Cheng, Yi'En. 2014. "Time protagonists: student migrants, practices of time and cultural construction of the Singapore-educated person." *Social & Cultural Geography* 15 (4):385-405.
- Coe, Cati. 2011. "What is love? The materiality of care in Ghanaian transnational families." *International Migration* 49 (6):7-24.
- Croll, Elisabeth. 2000. *Endangered daughters: discrimination and development in Asia*. New York: Routledge.
- Croll, Elisabeth J. 2006. "The Intergenerational Contract in the changing Asian family." *Oxford Development Studies* 34 (4):473-491.
- Descartes, Lara. 2007. "Rewards and challenges of using ethnography in family research." *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 36 (1):22-39.
- Devan, Andjanadas, and Geraldine Heng. 1995. "State fatherhood: the politics of nationalism, sexuality, and race in Singapore." In *Bewitching women, pious men: Gender and body politics in Southeast Asia*, edited by Aihwa Ong and Michael Peletz, 195. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.
- Elyachar, Julia. 2014. "Upending infrastructure: Tamarod, resistance, and agency after the January 25th revolution in Egypt." *History and Anthropology* 25 (4):452-471.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and punishment*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, Michel. 1991. "Governmentality." In *The Foucault effect: studies in governmentality*, edited by Michel Foucault, Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gammeltoft, Tine M. 2014. "Toward an anthropology of the imaginary: specters of disability in Vietnam." *Ethos* 42 (2):153-174.
- Göransson, Kristina. 2011. "Ethnographic family research: predicaments and possibilities of doing fieldwork on intergenerational relations in Singapore." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 42 (6):903-918.
- Göransson, Kristina. 2015. "Raising successful children: children as accumulation strategy and the renegotiation of parenting arrangements in Singapore." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 16 (3):211-226.
- Göransson, Kristina. 2009. *The binding tie: Chinese intergenerational relations in modern Singapore*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Graham, Elspeth, Peggy Teo, Brenda SA Yeoh, and Susan Levy. 2002. "Reproducing the Asian family across the generations: "tradition" gender and expectations in Singapore." *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* 17 (2):61-86.

- Hairong, Yan. 2003. "Neoliberal governmentality and neohumanism: organizing suzhi/value flow through labor recruitment networks." *Cultural Anthropology* 18 (4):493-523.
- Hammersley, Martyn, and Paul Atkinson. 2007. *Ethnography: Principles in practice*: Routledge.
- Harold, Rena D, Margaret L Palmiter, Susan A Lynch, and Carol R Freedman-Doan. 2015. "Life stories: a practice-based research technique." *J. Soc. & Soc. Welfare* 22:23.
- Harvey, David. 2005. *A brief history of neoliberalism*: Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hashimoto, Akiko. 1996. *The gift of generations: Japanese and American perspectives on aging and the social contract*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hean, Teo Chee, Sitoh Yih Pin, and Lim Wee Kiak. 2012. Programmes by Overseas Singaporean Unit (OSU). The Twelfth Parliament of Singapore [http://www.nptd.gov.sg/portals/0/news/Parliamentary%20reply%20on%2014%20May%202012%20\(on%20OSU%20and%20Sg%20Day\).pdf](http://www.nptd.gov.sg/portals/0/news/Parliamentary%20reply%20on%2014%20May%202012%20(on%20OSU%20and%20Sg%20Day).pdf).
- Ho, Derrick, Gracia Chiang, and Sharon Lin. 2008. "Wooing overseas S'poreans: Time to get more personal? - Food, finances and flying the flag fail to draw them back. A third F - family - may bring the diaspora home." *The Straits Times*, June 14, 2008.
- Ho, Elaine Lynn-Ee. 2008. "'Flexible Citizenship' or familial ties that bind? Singaporean transmigrants in London." *International Migration* 46 (4):145-175.
- Ho, Elaine Lynn-Ee, and Mark Boyle. 2015. "Migration-as-development repackaged? The globalizing imperative of the Singaporean state's diaspora strategies." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 36 (2):164-182.
- Hooi, Joyce. 2012. "Singapore's emigration conundrum." *The Business Times*.
- Hoon, Chang-Yau. 2006. "Defining (multiple) selves: reflections on fieldwork in Jakarta." *Life Writing* 3 (1):81-102.
- Hudson, Chris. 2013. *Beyond the Singapore girl: discourses of gender and nation in Singapore*. Vol. no. 8. Copenhagen: Nias Press.
- Ikels, Charlotte. 1993. "Settling accounts: the intergenerational contract in an age of reform." In *Chinese families in the post-Mao era*, edited by Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell, 307-333. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.
- Izuhara, Misa. 2002. "Care and inheritance: Japanese and English perspectives on the 'generational contract'." *Ageing and Society* 22 (1):61-77. doi:

- Kenway, Jane, Johannah Fahey, and Aaron Koh. 2013. "The libidinal economy of the globalising elite school market." In *Privilege, agency and affect: understanding the production and effects of action*, edited by Peter Aggleton and Claire Maxwell. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Koh, Aaron. 2014. "Doing class analysis in Singapore's elite education: unravelling the smokescreen of 'meritocratic talk'." *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 12 (2):196-210.
- Koh, Aaron. 2015. "The (semiotics of) social aesthetics in an elite school in Singapore: An ethnographic study." In *In the Realm of the Senses*, edited by Johannah Fahey, Howard Prosser and Matthew Shaw, 67-85. Singapore: Springer Singapore.
- Lee, Kuan Yew. 2000. *From third world to first: The Singapore story, 1965-2000*. Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings, Times Editions.
- Li, Tania. 2007a. *The will to improve: governmentality, development, and the practice of politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Li, Tania M. 2007b. "Governmentality." *Anthropologica* 49 (2):275-281.
- Li, Tania M. 1989. *Introduction to Malays in Singapore: Culture. Economy and Ideology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lüscher, Kurt, and Karl Pillemer. 1998. "Intergenerational ambivalence: A new approach to the study of parent-child relations in later life." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 413-425.
- Maehara, Naoko. 2010. "Emotional ambiguity: Japanese migrant women in mixed families and their life transition." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36 (6):953-966.
- Margold, Jane A. 1995. "Narratives of masculinity and transnational migration: Filipino workers in the middle east." In *Bewitching women, pious men: gender and body politics in Southeast Asia*, edited by Aihwa Ong and Michael G. Peletz, 274-288. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Markham, Annette, and Nancy Baym. 2008. *Internet inquiry: Conversations about method*. New York: Sage Publications.
- McKay, Deirdre. 2007. "'Sending dollars shows feeling'—emotions and economies in Filipino migration." *Mobilities* 2 (2):175-194.
- McKay, Deirdre. 2010. "On the face of Facebook: historical images and personhood in Filipino social networking." *History and Anthropology* 21 (4):479-498.
- MOE. 2015. *Education Statistics Digest 2015*. Singapore: Ministry of Education.

- Neo, Jack. 2012. *Ah Boys to Men*. Singapore: Golden Village Pictures.
- NPTD. 2014. "About NPTD." Government of Singapore.
- Ong, Aihwa. 1999. *Flexible citizenship: The cultural logics of transnationality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ong, Aihwa. 2006. *Neoliberalism as Exception*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ortmann, Stephan. 2010. "Singapore: The politics of inventing national identity." *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 28 (4):23-46.
- OSU. 2015. Fundings For Communities. In *Overseas Singaporean Unit*: <https://www.overseassingaporean.sg/resources/students/staying-abroad/fundings-for-communities>.
- OSU. 2016. "National Service: The Rite of Passage for our Singaporean Sons." *Overseas Singaporean Unit*. <http://www.overseassingaporean.sg/articles/d/national-service-the-rite-of-passage-for-our-singaporean-sons>.
- PuruShotam, Nirmala Sreeram. 1998. *Negotiating language, constructing race: disciplining difference in Singapore*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Quah, Stella R. 2003. *Home and kin: Families in Asia*. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press Singapore.
- Ramdas, Kamalini. 2015. "Is blood thicker than water? Single Indian Singaporean women and the geographies of 'being' family." *Gender, Place & Culture* 22 (2):255-270.
- Rose, Nikolas S. 1999. *Governing the soul: the shaping of the private self*. New York: Free Association Books.
- Rozario, Philip A., and Song-Iee Hong. 2011. "Doing it 'right' by your parents in Singapore: a political economy examination of the Maintenance of Parents Act of 1995." *Critical Social Policy* 31 (4):607-627.
- Sasson-Levy, Orna. 2002. "Constructing identities at the margins: masculinities and citizenship in the Israeli army." *The Sociological Quarterly* 43 (3):357-383.
- Sasson-Levy, Orna. 2003. "Military, masculinity, and citizenship: tensions and contradictions in the experience of blue-collar soldiers." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 10 (3):319-345.
- Schindlmayr, Thomas. 2006. "Reconsidering intergenerational concerns." *International Journal of Social Welfare* 15 (2):181.

- Shatkin, Gavin. 2014. "Reinterpreting the meaning of the 'Singapore Model': state capitalism and urban planning." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38 (1):116-137.
- Sinatti, Giulia. 2014. "11 Masculinities and intersectionality in migration: transnational Wolof migrants negotiating manhood and gendered family roles." In *Migration, Gender and Social Justice: Perspectives on Human Insecurity*, edited by Thanh-Dam Truong, Des Gasper, Jeff Handmaker and I. Sylvia Bergh, 215-226. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
- Smith, James A, and Annette Braunack-Mayer. 2014. "Men interviewing men: the benefits and challenges of using constructed mateship as a tool to build rapport when interviewing Anglo-Australian men about their health." *International Journal of Men's Health* 13 (3):143.
- StatCan. 2015. Postsecondary enrolments by institution type, registration status, province and sex (Both sexes). edited by Statistics Canada.
- Statistics-Singapore. 2015. General Household Survey.
- Sun, Shirley Hsiao-Li. 2012. *Population policy and reproduction in Singapore: making future citizens*: New York: Routledge.
- Sze Meng, Soon. 2005. Is moral obligation an economically justifiable sanction for overseas Singapore government scholars who breach their contractual service obligations? *From a Singapore Angle*.
- Tan, Eugene K. B. 2008. "A union of gender equality and pragmatic patriarchy: international marriages and citizenship laws in Singapore." *Citizenship Studies* 12 (1):73-89.
- Teo, Peggy, Elspeth Graham, Brenda SA Yeoh, and Susan Levy. 2003. "Values, change and inter-generational ties between two generations of women in Singapore." *Ageing and Society* 23 (3):327-347.
- Teo, Valerie. 2012. "Returning overseas Singaporeans as sources of social resilience." (RSIS Commentaries, No. 146) Singapore: Nanyang Technological University
- Teo, Youyenn. 2010. "Shaping the Singapore family, producing the state and society." *Economy and society* 39 (3):337-359.
- Teo, Youyenn. 2011. *Neoliberal morality in Singapore: how family policies make state and society*. New York: Routledge.
- Teo, Youyenn. 2015. "Differentiated deservedness: Governance through familialist social policies in Singapore." *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and-National Studies of Southeast Asia* 3 (01):73-93.

- Tuchman, and Levine. 1993. "New York Jews and Chinese food: The social construction of an ethnic pattern." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22:3.
- UNESCO. 2016. "Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students " <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>.
- Walsh, Sean P. 2007. "The roar of the Lion City: ethnicity, gender, and culture in the Singapore Armed Forces." *Armed Forces & Society* 33 (2):265-285.
- Waters, Johanna. 2006. "Geographies of cultural capital: education, international migration and family strategies between Hong Kong and Canada." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 31 (2):179-192.
- Waters, Johanna. 2015. "Educational imperatives and the compulsion for credentials: family migration and children's education in East Asia." *Children's Geographies* 13 (3):280-14.
- Wee, Vivienne. 1995. "Children, population policy, and the state in Singapore." In *Children and the Politics of Culture*, edited by Sharon Stephens. Princeton, CA: Princeton University Press.
- Wong, Theresa, and Brenda SA Yeoh. 2003. *Fertility and the family: an overview of pro-natalist population policies in Singapore*. Singapore: Asian MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis Singapore.
- Ye, Rebecca, and Erik Nylander. 2015. "The transnational track: State sponsorship and Singapore's Oxbridge elite." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 36 (1):11-33.
- Yen Yen, Woo, and Colin Goh. 2006. *Singapore Dreaming*.
- Yeoh, Brenda SA, and Tou Chuang Chang. 2001. "Globalising Singapore: debating transnational flows in the city." *Urban Studies* 38 (7):1025-1044.
- Yeoh, Brenda SA, Heng Leng Chee, and Grace Hy Baey. 2013. "The Place of Vietnamese marriage migrants in Singapore: social reproduction, social 'problems' and social protection." *Third World Quarterly* 34 (10):1927.
- Yeoh, Brenda SA, and Katie Willis. 2005. "Singaporeans in China: transnational women elites and the negotiation of gendered identities." *Geoforum* 36 (2):211-222.
- Yeoh, Brenda SA, and Katie Willis. 2004. "Constructing masculinities in transnational space." In *Transnational spaces*, edited by Jackson, Peter, Phil Crang, and Claire Dwyer. London: Routledge.
- Yun, Hing Ai. 2013. "Children and their fathers in Singapore: a generational perspective." In *International handbook of Chinese families*, 323-341. New York: Springer.

Appendix

Appendix A: Guiding questions in in-depth interviews

For Sons:

1. What was it like growing up in your household? What did your family expect from you?
 - a. Do they have expectations about respecting elders? Like what?
 - b. Do they have expectations about relationships and marriage? Like what?
 - c. How do you manage these expectations?
2. What was it like being overseas?
 - a. When you lived overseas who did you communicate with in Singapore regularly?
 - b. What did you use to communicate (probe for text, email, skype, etc.) and how often? How do you feel about using these technologies?
 - c. Did you return for the holidays or did family ever come to visit? If so, how was that? What kind of topics came up frequently?
3. How does it feel to return to Singapore? What's changed for you since you returned?
 - a. Has the way you are treated changed? If so, how?
 - b. Has your attitude towards your family changed? If so, how?
 - c. Has your family brought up their expectations of you since you returned?
If yes, can you give me an example? How did you react? What was the outcome? Are you happy about it? Are they happy about it?

4. How important do you think family is in Singapore? Why is it important/not important?
 - a. How important is family to your family members?
 - b. How important is family to you?
5. Have you had any experiences where government policy was relevant to your life? If yes, what are some examples? (probe for HBD flats, National Service, 'Asian Values', education system, demographic campaigns ['have three or more' and 'Romance Singapore']). How effective were they?
6. What are your major goals for the future?
 - a. (probe for each major goal)
7. Do you discuss your future with your family?
 - a. If so, do relationships, marriage, housing, employment, filial piety or children ever come up (probe for those issues that come up)? In what context? Who in your family do you discuss these issues with?
 - b. Are you and your family mostly in agreement about your future, or is there much conflict? (if yes) How do you plan to deal with these conflicts?
8. Tell me a little bit about your educational experience abroad. What did you like, what didn't you like?
 - a. What kinds of activities did you do abroad that you may not have been allowed to do at home?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add about your life and family in Singapore or abroad? Do you have any questions for me?

For Parents:

1. How important do you think family is in Singapore? Why is it important/not important?
 - a. What kinds of sacrifices have you made for your family? (probe for filial piety, education)
 - b. What kinds of sacrifices do you expect of your family members? What do you expect of husband/wives? Of sons? Of daughters? Of others?
 - a. Have you had any experiences where government policy was relevant to your family life? If yes, what are some examples? (probe for HBD flats, National Service, 'Asian Values', education system, demographic campaigns ['have three or more' and 'Romance Singapore']). How effective were they?
2. What are some examples of things you might expect your son should do in the future for his family (probe for housing, marriage, filial piety, career, citizenship, etc.)?
 - a. How well do you feel your son is living up to your expectations?
 - b. Would this differ for daughters?
 - c. What do you think makes these things important/ not important for him?
3. Do you think your son has changed much since he went overseas?
 - a. If so, how his attitude changed? How do you feel about this?
 - b. In what ways does he treat you differently, or do you treat him differently compared with before? Can you give me some examples?
 - c. How do you think the culture of his host country effected his attitude?

Appendix B: Example informed consent form

You are invited to participate in a study entitled 'Overseas-educated young men and changing expectations of family in Singapore' that is being conducted by Raviv Litman. Raviv Litman is a graduate student in the department of Anthropology at the University of Victoria

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of a degree in Anthropology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Leslie Butt.

This research is being funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Scholarship program.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to see how young male students studying abroad interact with their family and government's expectations of them upon their return to Singapore.

Importance of this Research

This research is important because it will contribute to our understanding of the experience of being a son in the context of international education. The impact of international travel on what a family is and what people think family should be is a growing field of interest in the social sciences. This kind of research can change the way we think about family and therefore more accurately inform government social policies.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a young man from Singapore who has studied abroad and returned to Singapore within the last four years.

What is involved

If you consent to participate in this research, your participation will include being asked to participate in an interview that will last between 1-1.5 hours.

I will tape this interview and I will also take notes and make a transcription of these materials for use in the study.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you by taking time out of your schedule to conduct interviews.

Risks

In this interview I will ask you questions that are personal and related to family. If you feel uncomfortable we can take a break, skip a question, reschedule, or end the interview, you do not need to complete the interview.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher to use the data when you withdraw. If you want to withdraw data after it has been collected I will remove and destroy that data.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity I will use pseudonyms when analyzing and disseminating the data. I will generalize or change details about identifying information such as locations, schools, and family.

Confidentiality

Everything you tell me in this interview will remain confidential. I will generalize details about identifying information about you so that you cannot be personally identified in this research. You will not be identifiable in the data or the results.

Dissemination of Results

The results of this study will be presented to my university department as a thesis, which they will publish online through their library system. It is also possible that this research will be used in journal articles and anonymized data may be shared with my graduate supervisors. If you are interested in the results of this study you can contact me by email and I will send you copies.

Disposal of Data

I will store all interviews on a password encrypted computer and disc drive. No information about you will be made public. Data from this study will be disposed of once I have completed my thesis project and published results from it. All computer files and field notes will be deleted and destroyed within 5 years of this research.

Your signature in the first line below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.