

*Ode to Joy: Pop Cultural Representation
of White-Collar Migrant Women in a Chinese Megacity*

by

Linda Yang

Bachelor of Arts, University of Victoria, 2018

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

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies

© Linda Yang, 2020
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

*Ode to Joy: Pop Cultural Representation
of White-Collar Migrant Women in a Chinese Megacity*

by

Linda Yang

Bachelor of Arts, University of Victoria, 2018

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Andrew Marton, Department of Pacific and Asian Studies
Supervisor

Dr. Angie Chau, Department of Pacific and Asian Studies
Departmental Member

Abstract

This thesis examines the pop cultural representation of white-collar migrant women (WCMW) through the popular Chinese TV series *Ode to Joy*. Focusing on various aspects of their lives, this TV series raises many issues about the experiences of WCMW, including perceptions of them as “outsiders” in the megacity, gender inequality, and the tensions between female migrant identity and urban status. Over the past four decades, most popular culture producers and academic work on migrant women in China have focused on the experiences of *dagongmei* (working sisters) of the 1980s and 1990s, and few have adequately represented well-educated migrant women of the post-2000s. Accompanying China’s economic reforms from central planning to a socialist market economy since 1978, China’s rural migrant women have changed largely in values, educational levels, ways of life and work, as well as personal aspirations. This thesis argues that the realistic representation of *Ode to Joy* is crucial to its popularity and the TV series has raised issues that impact the wellbeing of WCMW in large cities. This study analyzes those issues by drawing on intersectional theories which examine structural inequalities from the perspective of the interactions of multiple axes of social categories. This thesis asks three major questions: In what way does *Ode to Joy* represent the experiences of WCMW?; To what extent do issues raised in *Ode to Joy* impact the wellbeing of WCMW in large cities?, and; What are the “joys” in *Ode to Joy* for WCMW? In addition to collecting data from the TV series, this study interviewed WCMW informants to provide first-hand accounts of their experiences in an urban culture. The major findings of this research include: contrasting representations of the urban landscapes of cosmopolitan Shanghai versus the cramped living spaces of WCMW which reinforce their status as “outsiders” in the megacity; gender inequalities resulting from the interplay of multiple factors, such as class, place of origin, and gender norms, and; structural

differentiations of region and social identity which place WCMW in a subordinate position. Examining gender issues pertinent to WCMW from cultural and social perspectives helps to raise awareness of this cohort and contribute to the harmony and stability of an increasingly urbanized society in China. In particular, this study explores the reasons behind the popularity of this TV series and its significance for portraying and understanding the wellbeing of WCMW. By critically analyzing the representation of WCMW characters' experiences in *Ode to Joy*, this thesis provides insights on understanding the status of those women in a contemporary Chinese urban setting, thereby filling a gap in academic literature on the pop cultural representation of China's white-collar migrant women in a Chinese megacity.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
List of Abbreviations	ix
List of Protagonists, Supporting Characters and Abbreviations in <i>Ode to Joy</i>	x
Acknowledgments.....	xi
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Rationale for This Study	1
1.2 Context for the Research.....	4
<i>China's Mobility Control as a Legacy of the Maoist Era</i>	4
<i>Development of China's Internal Migration in the Reform Era</i>	5
1.3 Features of Migrant Women in Different Periods of the Reform Era	6
1.4 Defining White-Collar Migrant Women.....	7
1.5 The TV Drama Series <i>Ode to Joy</i>	10
1.6 Purpose of and Research Questions for This Study	12
1.7 Structure of This Thesis	13
Chapter 2 Literature Review	14
2.1 The Concept of Intersectionality Versus Migration Studies.....	14
<i>The Association of Intersectionality with Issues of Migrant Women</i>	17
2.2 The Concept of Intersectionality Versus the Study of Identity.....	26
<i>The Perspective of Identity on the Issue of Migrant Women</i>	29
2.3 Summary of the Theoretical Framework for this Research	33
Chapter 3 Methodology	35
3.1 Mixed-Methods Approach to Media Representation, Interview, and Document Analysis.....	35
3.2 The Use of the TV Drama Series <i>Ode to Joy</i> as a Televisual Text	37
3.3 Data Collection and Data Organization	39
<i>Participant Selection and Recruitment</i>	41
<i>Interview Procedures and Questions</i>	41
3.4 Data Presentation	43
3.5 Data Analysis	44
<i>Analyzing Data of Ode to Joy</i>	44
<i>Analyzing Interview Data</i>	44
3.6 Ethical Considerations	47
3.7 About the Chinese-English Translation Used in this Thesis	47
Chapter 4 Findings.....	48

4.1 WCMW as “Outsiders” Represented through Contrasts and Comparisons	49
<i>History of Shanghai Versus Attitude of Shanghai Natives towards “Outsiders”</i>	49
<i>Spectacular Scenes of Modern Shanghai Versus Cramped Rooms of WCMW</i>	52
<i>Comparisons of Housing between Local and Migrant Women in Ode to Joy</i>	56
4.2 Differential Representations in <i>Ode to Joy</i>	59
<i>The Portrayals of Qiu as a “Sha Bai Tian” (傻白甜)</i>	59
<i>The Portrayals of Qu as a “Superwoman”</i>	62
4.3 Gender Inequality Encountered by WCMW Represented in Unequal Treatment from Family and WCMW as “Leftover Women”	65
<i>Fan’s Suffering of Unequal Treatment in Her Family Represented by Her Cries</i> ...	65
<i>Fan as a “Leftover Woman” Represented through Visual and Audio Elements</i>	73
4.4 Summary of Findings	78
Chapter 5 Extra Findings on the Representation of WCMW in <i>Ode to Joy</i>	80
5.1 Employment Issues of WCMW Represented in <i>Ode to Joy</i>	80
5.2 Impact of Social Stratification on WCMW in <i>Ode to Joy</i>	85
<i>An Overview of Social Strata in Ode to Joy</i>	85
<i>Mapping Social Strata of the Main Characters in Ode to Joy</i>	86
<i>Guan’s Internal Conflicts Represented through Facial Expressions</i>	89
5.3 WCMW’s Agency and Resilience Represented through the Theme Song	91
<i>Introduction of the Theme Song “Ode to Joy”</i>	92
<i>Qiu’s Experiences Are Representative of What Is Expressed by the Theme Song</i> ...	94
5.4 Summary of Extra Findings	97
Chapter 6 Discussion and Conclusion	98
6.1 Realistic Significance of the Issues Reflected in <i>Ode to Joy</i>	98
<i>Why Has the TV Drama Series Ode to Joy Been So Popular?</i>	99
6.2 Main Issues Raised in <i>Ode to Joy</i> and Their Impact on WCMW Characters	100
<i>WCMW’s Tensions with Their Families in Relation to Gender Inequality</i>	101
<i>Issue of Housing, a Highlight in Representing WCMW in Ode to Joy</i>	103
<i>WCMW’s Employment Issue Mirrors Gender and Structural Inequality</i>	105
<i>Issue of Romance, the Most Highlighted Representation about WCMW</i>	107
6.3 What Are the “Joys” for WCMW Characters in <i>Ode to Joy</i> ?	112
6.4 Significance of the Research	119
6.5 Limitations of the Study	123
6.6 Recommendations for Future Research	124
Bibliography	126
Appendix A	137
Appendix B	138
Appendix C	139
Appendix C-1	140

List of Tables

Table 1	Comparison Between Early and New Generation Migrant Women	9
Table 2	2016 Per Capita Disposable Income of Chinese Residents by Region	20
Table 3	Analytical Framework and Research Themes	45
Table 4	Average Monthly Salary of Shanghai (2014 - 2018)	54
Table 5	Life Standard Indicators of Shanghai (2018)	54
Table 6	Comparison of HRM Practices of Urban Employees versus Migrant Workers	83

List of Figures

Figure 1	Map of China Showing Shanghai	50
Figure 2	Bird's Eye View of Shanghai	52
Figure 3	Modern Architectures of Shanghai	52
Figure 4	High-speed Train of Shanghai	52
Figure 5	Cramped Sitting Room of 2202	53
Figure 6	Guan's Small Room	53
Figure 7	Fan's Small Room	53
Figure 8	Room shared by Xu and Five Other Women	56
Figure 9	Dark & Narrow Corridor in the Building	56
Figure 10	Qiu Eats Soup Dumpling	60
Figure 11	Qiu Talks while Eating	60
Figure 12	Qiu Keeps Eating While Crying	60
Figure 13	Qu Gets Zhao's Card	63
Figure 14	Qu Comforts Zhao	63
Figure 15	Qu Has Dinner with Zhao	63
Figure 16	Qu and Zhao Dance Together	63
Figure 17	Fan Cries at a Bus Stop	67
Figure 18	Fan Cries Worrying about Her Mother	67
Figure 19	Fan Cries at a Concert	67
Figure 20	Fan Cries Feeling Unequally Treated	67
Figure 21	Fan Applies a Pink Lipstick	75
Figure 22	Fan Takes off Her Pink Slip	75
Figure 23	Fan Wears a Pair of Red High Heals.....	76
Figure 24	Fan Enjoys Her Red Dress	76
Figure 25	Lianjie as a Nice Coach	77
Figure 26	Lianjie as a "Lover"	77
Figure 27	Fan Feels the "Love" of Lianjie	77
Figure 28	Guan Appreciates Zhao	89
Figure 29	Guan Happily Dreams of Dating Zhao	89
Figure 30	Guan's Depression in Losing Zhao	90
Figure 31	Guan Is Saddened by her Failure	90
Figure 32	Qiu Exposes Bai	95
Figure 33	Qiu is Slapped by Bai	95
Figure 34	Qiu Negotiates with Ying's Mother	95

List of Abbreviations

ACWF	All China Women's Federation
CBD	Central Business District
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CNSB	China National Statistics Bureau
Eps	Episode in <i>Ode to Joy</i>
EQ	Emotional Quotient
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resources Management
IQ	Intelligent Quotient
NGO	Non-government Organization
S	Season of <i>Ode to Joy</i>
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
ShH	Shanghai
SOE	State-operated Enterprise
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WCMW	White-Collar Migrant Women

List of Protagonists, Supporting Characters and Abbreviations in *Ode to Joy*

Andy He (Andy)

An orphan in childhood who was adopted by an American couple, returns to Shanghai as a CFO of a Financial Group, lives in Apt. 2201 in one of the buildings of “Ode to Joy” Strata

Bao Yifan (Bao)

Second boyfriend of Andy: a successful entrepreneur

Fan Shengmei (Fan)

Senior HR of a foreign company, then a financial advisor in a financial service company, lives with Qiu and Guan in Apt. 2202 of “Ode to Joy”, the same building with Andy and Qu

Guan Juer (Guan)

Intern of a top-500 foreign company, lives in Apt. 2202, roommate of Fan and Qiu

Qiu Yingying (Qiu)

Officer of a private company, then a salesperson in a coffee shop, roommate of Fan and Guan

Qu Xiaoxiao (Qu)

Rich secondary-generation from Shanghai, lives in Apt. 2203 of the same building with Andy, Fan, Qiu, and Guan

Qu Lianjie (Lianjie)

Half-brother of Qu Xiaoxiao, businessman who has a sexual relationship with Fan

Tan Zongming (Tan)

President of Shengxuan Financial Group, Andy’s boss and old friend

Wang Baichuan (Wang)

Fan’s boyfriend, comes from Fan’s hometown to create a small business in Shanghai

Wei Wei (Wei)

Andy’s first boyfriend: an entrepreneur in import & export business in Shanghai

Xiao Bai (Bai)

Qiu’s first boyfriend and colleague

Xiao Lin (Lin)

Guan’s admirer and schoolmate

Ying Qin (Ying)

Qiu’s second boyfriend

Zhao Qiping (Zhao)

Qu’s boyfriend: a physician of No. 6 People’s Hospital in Shanghai

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Andrew Marton. My research and writing of this thesis would not have been possible without his inspiring guidance and continuous support. Andrew has nurtured my intellectual vision and academic research capacity since I was an undergraduate student at UVic, and his encouragement has prompted me to continue my interest in understanding the status of contemporary Chinese women. I am grateful for my committee member, Dr. Angie Chau, who has provided me remarkable mentorship in the process of my research with her insightful thoughts. I would like to thank Dr. Sujin Lee for offering good insights to my research, especially with Judith Butler's vision on gender. My thanks also go to EAL specialists of CAC, UVic, who provided me great help in refining parts of my thesis. I thank the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies for giving me the opportunities to work as a TA and TAC and offering all the resources I needed for my work. I would like to express my special thanks to Guihuan Li, my friend and my colleague in the UNDP Tianjin women's project, who assisted me to organize the interviews of this study. I am also grateful to my participants who shared their personal stories with me selflessly, from whom I learned a lot about life and women's empowerment. I would also like to thank my dear friends Anne Vaasjo and John Steward. The virtual dinners "together" gave me warmth and energy to keep on doing my research during the gloomy days of the pandemic. This research has also benefitted tremendously from scholarships of UVic and beyond, particularly the SSHRC Award. I am grateful for all their generous supports. I thank my family for their supports. Finally, I would like to thank the team of *Ode to Joy*, whose creative and realistic work provided a basis and a source of aspiration for my research.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Rationale for This Study

While dining with friends, his girlfriend included, Ying Qin leaves the table abruptly after learning that his girlfriend is not a virgin and dramatically breaks up with her. This description is a scene from the popular Chinese TV drama series, *Ode to Joy* (*Huanlesong*, 欢乐颂), which depicts the life stories of five professional women who live on the same floor of an apartment building in Shanghai. This representation generated much discussion on social media and mainstream Chinese newspapers. To understand this scene, one needs to know that in the Chinese cultural context, women are expected to conform to gender norms such as subordinating themselves to men and preserving their virginity before marriage. These Confucian values seem out of date in a modern society, but a lot of men still hold that women need to follow those traditional gender norms. The experiences of white-collar migrant women (WCMW) as portrayed in *Ode to Joy*, have inspired me to explore how pop culture represents such women and to understand the status of women in a contemporary Chinese urban setting.

WCMW are a unique group of women, many of whom have received higher education. Their horizons have been broadly widened living and working in modern cities in the new millennium. Moreover, their experiences in megacities are distinguished greatly from those of earlier generation women migrants (the distinctions will be discussed in more details later in this chapter). However, such migrant women are not as well represented in both popular culture and academia. Over the past few decades, with the increase of Chinese rural migrant women to cities, the image of *dagongmei* (working sisters) in the early stages of the reform era has become deeply embedded in China since these women have been widely represented in popular culture. This

image appears in such films as *Girl from Mt. Huangshan (Huangshan laide guniang)* (Zhang & Yu, 1984), which features a rural girl from Anhui who works as a maid in urban households; the TV drama series *Girls from the Outside (Wailaimei)* (Cheng, 1991), which details the stories of northern rural girls who work in the factories of Shenzhen; and the novel *Northern Girls (Beimei)* (Sheng, 2004), which depicts how rural girls from Hunan survive in Guangdong Province. Similarly, topics on early migrant women have been widely studied in such scholarship as represented by *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace* (Pun, 2005), and *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China* (Chang, 2008).

Indeed, rural migrant women in China's early period of reform and opening up were less educated and mostly the first generation to go out of villages to big cities. They were generally perceived as "easy to control and capable of tolerating hard work and... often identified as an important supply of cheap labour" (Fan, 2000, p. 435), who are well worth being represented in both mass culture and academic studies. However, with China's rapid urbanization and economic development, the landscape of female migrants in China has shifted over time against the changed social backdrop, and female migrants are increasingly white-collar workers in China's megacities. These changes appear not only in the outlook and educational levels of post-2000s female migrants, but also in types of employment, career pursuit, and romantic aspirations. Needless to say, WCMW are also an important labour force in the construction of urban modernization. Regrettably, they have been less well represented in both popular culture and academic studies.

This underrepresentation does not mean that WCMW have rosy lives living in the megacities. On the contrary, their "glamour" as office ladies may not reveal the real picture of their lives in terms of employment, familial pressures, and emotional setbacks, which are

impacted by gender, rural-urban duality structure, as well as other unequal factors that intersect and influence each other. According to a survey on the trend of graduates' employment locations in eight cities including Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, and Zhengzhou, 34 percent of the key university students selected first-tier cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen) for employment. 70 percent graduates in Shanghai selected remaining in that city ("Where do graduates like to go," *Youth Times*, 2017). Since migrant women in China's megacities are increasingly well-educated white-collar workers, issues of integration and representation directly influence the lives of these women. Therefore, the need to inquire into the representation of the experiences of WCMW has become a driving force for this research.

On top of that, I have research experience working on a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) women's poverty-reduction project in the megacity of Tianjin, China, which targeted urban women who were laid off in China's industrial restructuring in the late 1990s. Working in an urban setting to provide training and consultation to laid-off women in support of their business start-ups, I witnessed the transformation of those laid-off women workers from "disadvantaged" women to entrepreneurs and the mainstays of their community through empowerment and gender awareness. Since then, I became interested in understanding the status and role of women in China's contemporary urban culture. My first-hand experiences working *for* and *with* women have prompted me to critically reflect on the status of contemporary Chinese educated migrant women in large cities. Those experiences have also provided me with particular insights for this study. Ultimately, this research presents a critical analysis of pop cultural representations of well-educated migrant women in megacities to understand the status of Chinese women in an increasingly urbanized Chinese society.

1.2 Context for the Research

China's Mobility Control as a Legacy of the Maoist Era

Rural to urban migration in China had been strictly controlled in Mao's era (1949-1976) under the central planning system since the late 1950s with the enforcement of a household registration (*hukou*) system (Lei, 2001). The *hukou* system separated Chinese citizens into agricultural and non-agricultural residents according to their place of origin and thus, exerted "a strict control on individuals' status and identity" (Pun, 2005, p. 3). An important agenda of this arrangement was to "extract value from agriculture for subsidizing industry" (Fan, 2008, p. 4), and to ease population and economic pressure (Piotrowski et al, 2016). Differences in household registration were directly manifested in the enjoyment of rights by citizens which included employment, education, housing, and other social benefits. For instance, the state used labour planning to grant urban graduates and retired army officers jobs for life through a unified allocation system (*tongyi fenpei zhidu*), whereas "rural Chinese were generally not allocated urban jobs" (Xu, 2000, p. 3). The *hukou* system prioritized the city over the countryside because urban residents could work in an assigned work unit and enjoy rationed food, public housing, health care, and other social services, while peasants had no access to such resources and could hardly survive in the cities (ibid). In other words, "the countryside and the peasants were effectively 'othered' by being denied temporal equivalence with the cities" (Jacka, 2014, p. 36). The unified allocation of jobs and rationed food provided to urban *hukou* holders, not only widened the rural-urban gap by creating a protective scheme for urbanities, they also blocked migration by making it impossible for peasants to migrate from rural to urban areas under the central planning system in Mao's era.

Development of China's Internal Migration in the Reform Era

China started its economic reform and opening in 1978. While the rapid growth of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the coastal cities boosted the economy of the coastal regions, it also accelerated the worsening of regional disparities. As a consequence, China's rural-urban migration increased dramatically. Since the 1980s, China has loosened its *hukou* policy in response to the great demands for migrant labour force of urban development. It gradually permitted peasants to work in urban areas without "moving" the *hukou* registration from their place of origin. In addition, expanded markets for food and other necessities have made it possible for the migrants to work in cities (Fan, 2008). According to *China's Mobile Population Development Report 2016*, China's floating population, who live/work in places outside of their registered regions for more than six months, reached 247 million in 2015, about 18 percent of China's total population of 1.375 billion ("China's Mobile Population," NHC, 2016). It means that for every six Chinese, there was one migrant. Rural-urban migrants have made significant contributions to reshape the social landscapes of Chinese cities. Among the huge population of migrant workers, women migrants have played an important part in China's modern urban construction. Since "unequal realities and social experiences vary across time and space" (Collins, 2015, p. 14), it is important to highlight the historical context of how gender dynamics have changed over time in China. Traditionally, Chinese women were subordinated to men influenced by Confucian values – to their fathers before marriage, their husbands after marriage, and to their sons in old age. After Liberation in 1949, Mao proclaimed men and women were equal and their position was greatly enhanced as represented by their equal rights for work. In the post-Mao era since the beginning of reforms and opening, the position of many women has declined compared to men due to the impact of marketization (Chen, 2008).

1.3 Features of Migrant Women in Different Periods of the Reform Era

By 2010, among the 221 million Chinese floating population, about 110 million were migrant women, accounting for nearly half of that population (Chen, 2013). They occupied a large proportion of migrants in the reform era. In different stages of the reform era, Chinese migrant women had different experiences in terms of educational levels, modes of employment, and romantic aspirations in the changing Chinese society. According to Chen (2013), Chinese women migrants can be divided into three “generations”: the first-generation experienced the preliminary stage of China’s reform and opening up, such as *dagongmei* in the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in the 1980s. The second generation comprised those in the 1990s. And the third generation are migrant women of the post-2000s. Professor Zhou Xiaozheng of People’s University of China observed that first-generation *dagongmei* exhibited isomorphism or homogeneity (similar in structure among one another); second-generation *dagongmei* differed in terms of education and employment; and third generation migrant women are still more different in terms of education, employment, and personal aspirations (as cited in Chen, 2013).

Living in different phases of the reform-era, women migrants are perceived to have different characteristics. For example, early *dagongmei* were sometimes deemed as “...stupid, uneducated and uncivilized rustic women whose labor was cheap and despised” (Pun, 2005, p. 117), at the early phase of the reform era, when China began its transition from a planned economy to a “socialist market economy,” which is a hybrid of market economy and socialism (Marton & McGee, 2017). More recent women migrants are seen as generally better educated and increasingly work as white-collar workers or “white-collar beauties” – female professionals who dress elegantly, [have] a certain capability in the office, and are physically appealing and intelligent” (Liu, 2017, p. 17), who generally live in more developed and globalized large cities

in China. Unlike their migrant parents, many of whom returned to their hometowns at marriageable ages, WCMW mostly seek partners in the cities. More importantly, the purpose of their migration was not just to make more money, but “to have broader horizons and find opportunities and resources for their own development” (Chen, 2013, p. 37).

1.4 Defining White-Collar Migrant Women

In this study, the term “white-collar migrant women” is used interchangeably with “well-educated migrant women” since they share similar traits. Both terms refer to female migrants from the countryside, small cities, or towns who relocate to China’s large cities as white-collar workers after they graduate from post-secondary institutions. It is necessary to note that since many people who live in China’s small cities and towns are still agricultural *hukou* holders owing to urban planning, they are in effect rural residents in status (Lecture notes, Marton, February 03, 2020). On the one hand, their migration is linked to China’s higher education development, particularly China’s campaign to expand university enrolment in 1999 to “stimulate domestic consumption, promote economic growth and ease employment pressure” (“Higher education expansion,” *China.com.cn*, 2008). In 1999 alone, the number of post-secondary students increased by 42 percent than the previous year (*ibid*). According to a statistical report in 2015 the proportion of female students in China’s general colleges and universities reached 52.4 percent of the total number of 13.762 million students (“China Women’s Development,” *Stats China*, 2019). Women have been greater beneficiaries of China’s higher education expansion (Wang, 2019).

In addition to receiving higher education, women’s migration has resulted from China’s uneven economic development and increasing income disparity among different provinces, particularly between the highly developed coastal regions and less-developed western and central

areas (Lei, 2001). Needless to say, incredibly prosperous megacities like Shanghai are attractive to educated rural women not only because of their dazzling modern views, but because of better jobs that offer higher salaries than those in their hometowns. Apart from the above reasons that push educated migrant women to move to big cities, another factor might be that as influenced by neoliberal market forces, becoming a white-collar worker in the megacities can help female-migrant university graduates climb to higher social strata (Liu, 2017). Moreover, alienation from life in the countryside and enthusiasm for urban culture have made new generation women migrants less willing to return to their hometowns (Wu, 2011).

Previous scholarship on migrant women focuses on the issues of early migrant women during the initial stages of China's economic reform and opening up and overlooks the experiences of well-educated migrant women on this topic. The latter, white-collar migrant women, are active players in the reconstruction of the Chinese megacities where they work. They are likewise worthy of further attention. This study fills a gap in the research by examining a complex imagery of WCMW who live in a developed cosmopolitan setting. There are many features of the recent generation of migrant women in the new millennium that differ from those female migrants of the early reform-era. These features are highlighted in Table 1 that compares the old and new generations of migrant women in large cities with respect to age, education, skills, aim of migration, and other attributes such as level of integration and personal appeals that are listed in the table.

Table 1, Comparisons between Early Migrant Women and New-Generation WCMW

Compared Groups Features	Early Migrant Women	New-Generation WCMW
Era of migration	The 1980s and 1990s	Post-2000s
Age at migration	About sixteen and above	About twenty-two and above
Familial generation	First	Second
Educational level	Post-primary education	Post-secondary education
Type of jobs	Blue-collar worker	White-collar worker
Integration level	Lower	Higher
Homogeneity level	Higher	Lower
Mode of marriage	Return to hometown	Seek spouses in the city
Term of migration	Short-term migration	Long-term migration
Purposes of migration	To make money	To make money and for personal development
Personal appeal	Wage raise, better living conditions	Fair treatment, respect, and dignity

Sources: Chen, 2013; Fan, 2000; Jacka, 2014; Myerson et al, 2010; Pun, 2005; Wu, 2011; Xu, 2000

From these comparisons, we can see that WCMW are a unique group of migrants who are better educated to hold higher aspirations, and the main purposes for their migration to the cities are not just to earn money, but to see the world and find development opportunities. This study focuses on aspects of housing, employment, and romantic relationship that bring different experiences to a new generation migrant women who work in China's megacities.

1.5 The TV Drama Series *Ode to Joy*

The TV drama series, *Ode to Joy*, is a contemporary Chinese urban-themed melodrama about professional women set in Shanghai, China's largest cosmopolitan city, in the early 2010s. The TV series ran for two seasons (between April 2016 and June 2017) with ninety-seven episodes. It was produced in 2015, co-directed by Kong Sheng and Jian Chuanhe for the first season, and Jian Chuanhe and Zhang Kaizhou for the second season. Hou Hongliang was producer while Yuan Zidan was screenwriter for this TV series. And it was jointly produced by Dong Yang Daylight Film and TV Corporation with Shandong Film and TV Production Co., Ltd. *Ode to Joy* revolves around five unmarried professional women living on the twenty-second floor of a building in an upper-middle scale property development named "Ode to Joy," in Shanghai. The name "Ode to Joy" comes from the final movement of Ludwig Beethoven's famous Ninth Symphony, which was itself based on German poet Schiller's poem, *An die Freude* (1785) in praise of joy, friendship, and unity (Green, 2018). Three of the five main characters of *Ode to Joy* named Fan Shenmei (Fan), Qiu Yingying (Qiu), and Guan Ju'er (Guan), are educated women from China's small cities and towns whereas two other female characters, Qu Xiaoxiao (Qu) and Andy, are a local Shanghai resident and an overseas returnee respectively.

One of the five main characters, Qiu, 23, is a simple and unworldly character who is assaulted by her first boyfriend and despised by the second because she is not a virgin. But she is resilient and optimistic, and progresses in her career and romantic relationship through self-empowerment. Qiu's roommate Guan, 22, is a good-tempered woman from an ordinary college, who works extremely hard to compete with graduates from elite universities in a foreign company and aims to be promoted from her current employment status as an intern to become a formal employee. Another roommate of Qiu and Guan, Fan, 30, who is treated unfairly by her

patriarchal family, faces pressure as a “leftover woman” because of her “advanced” age. She fails in her efforts to change her life by finding a rich local husband in Shanghai. The fourth character Qu, 24, who comes from a rich local family, does whatever she wants to achieve her goals and succeeds in daringly pursuing a handsome physician. And the fifth character is Andy, 31, an overseas returnee with a complicated natal family background. She was adopted by an American couple at a young age and received her higher education in the USA. She is the CFO of a financial group – a cool and talented woman who is successful in both her career and romantic relationship. As an imported talent, Andy would have been granted a Shanghai *hukou*, so this study regards Andy as a local woman.

Given these differences in personalities, family backgrounds, education, economic and residential status, as well as values, these female characters initially misunderstand and experience conflicts with each other, but they gradually come to accept and support each other in Shanghai. In the end, they witness each others’ growth and transformation in the megacity (“Introduction of plots of *Ode to Joy*,” *tvmao.com*, 2016). By focusing on specific aspects of their personal and professional lives, this series has raised many issues about the experiences of professional women, particularly well-educated migrant women, in the megacity, including the arrogant attitude of local residents to “outsiders”; gender inequality in relation to unequal treatment in their families and in sexual relations; the impact of social status; and the tension between female migrant identity and urban status. As an urban-themed TV drama series featuring women’s lives, emotions and families, *Ode to Joy* has aroused great resonance with viewers, especially among the growing number of well-educated migrant women in large Chinese cities.

1.6 Purpose of and Research Questions for This Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how WCMW are represented in contemporary China's urban setting through a critical analysis of the portrayals of migrant women characters in *Ode to Joy*. This study argues that the realistic representation of *Ode to Joy* is crucial to its popularity as it raises issues which have an impact on the wellbeing of WCMW in the megacity symbolically, materially, and emotionally. This impact is seen as a consequence of the intersections of multiple inequalities that influence and reinforce each other. A key objective of this study is to raise awareness of the circumstances of WCMW, as they are portrayed in *Ode to Joy*, to help promote the balanced and harmonious development of Chinese society. The Chinese party-state frequently invokes the idea of “harmonious society” (和谐社会 *hexie shehui*) which has become a key slogan in the official discourse. More will be revealed in the following chapters, but it is possible to suggest that the idea of harmony is often a central theme in contemporary Chinese cultural output and *Ode to Joy* is no exception. Indeed, the title of the series signals the key theme of harmony.

The main research question for this thesis is, “In what ways does *Ode to Joy* represent the experiences of well-educated migrant women in a Chinese megacity?”

To answer this question the thesis will also address the following sub-questions:

1. Why has this TV melodrama been so popular?
2. What are the main issues/challenges facing WCMW characters living in an unfamiliar megacity without urban status?
3. What is the position of WCMW characters in sexual relations?
4. To what extent do those issues impact the wellbeing of WCMW characters?
5. What are the “joys” for WCMW characters in *Ode to Joy*?

1.7 Structure of This Thesis

With the purpose of examining popular cultural representation of WCMW in contemporary China's urban setting through *Ode to Joy*, the research for this thesis is structured around six chapters. Chapter One articulates the rationale for this research, introduces the context for this study and describes the organization of the thesis. Chapter Two introduces the theoretical framework of this study, the concept of intersectionality that relates to migration and identity studies associated with "disadvantaged" women. Chapter Three describes methodology, the mixed methods approach that involves media representation of *Ode to Joy*, interviews with WCMW in two large Chinese cities, as well as documentary analysis and scholarly perspectives. This chapter also informs how data is collected, organized, presented and analyzed. Chapter Four and Chapter Five present the findings of the research with a thematic approach. They cover the following themes: WCMW characters are perceived as "outsiders" in the megacity of Shanghai; gender inequality as represented by WCMW characters in their patriarchal families and WCMW as "leftover women"; impact of social stratification on such women; as well as the agency and resilience of WCMW characters in the megacity as depicted in various representations in *Ode to Joy*. Chapter Six provides a detailed discussion of the complexities, intersections and differences across the issues experienced by the main characters, particularly the three migrant women. It also undertakes a critical reflection on the "joys" pertinent to WCMW characters in *Ode to Joy* and reiterates the significance of the research by highlighting key theoretical contributions. The thesis concludes by acknowledging the limitations of the study and making recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

As issues raised in *Ode to Joy*, such as, gender inequality, differential treatment, and tensions between urban status and migrant women identity, are shaped not by one factor, but by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways (Collins & Bilge, 2016), it is necessary to understand and interpret them through a multidimensional analytical lens. Informed by intersectional theories, this study will review literature focusing on the studies of migration and identity that are closely associated with intersectionality. This is in line with the objective of this study - to examine the issues of WCMW in a China's megacity through popular culture and understand women's status in contemporary Chinese society.

2.1 The Concept of Intersectionality Versus Migration Studies

This study is informed by the concept of intersectionality to understand issues such as gender inequality as portrayed in *Ode to Joy* relating to the experiences of WCMW. Previous scholarship has contributed a great deal of literature using the intersectional approach interpreting the multi-layer inequalities, such as sexual violence and discriminations of employment facing the marginalized groups, particularly women of colour in America (Walby et al, 2012). This study will extend the theory by providing broader insights on understanding the inequalities in association with migration beyond the U.S social context by focusing on the experiences of Chinese educated migrant women in China's megacities. The notion of intersectionality was raised by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American legal scholar, in 1991. It is a particular approach in feminist theory to analyze the complex origins of multiple sources of women's oppression (Crenshaw, 1991; Nash, 2008), "the phenomenon of the merging and mingling of multiple markers of difference" (Ludvig, 2006, p. 246) against the social background

of the late 1980s, during which feminist movements in the USA were critical of mainstream feminism privileging the experiences and interests of white, middle-class women (Collins, 2015; hooks, 1999). The key critique was that the “Big 3” master categories of class, race, and gender were often used in isolation from each other in addressing inequalities experienced by women of colour (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008). Consequently, an interdisciplinary perspective was developed to analyze inequalities for minority groups (Ludvig, 2006). Since then, the concept of intersectionality has been widely adopted by more scholars, such as Sen and Grown (1987); Yuval-Davis (2006); and Dill and Zambrana (2009).

According to Crenshaw (1991), race, gender, and other identity categories are important frameworks to observe ways in which “social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different” (p. 1242). The significance of focusing on intersections of race, gender, and class is to highlight “the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (p. 1245). Crenshaw delineates intersectionality in structural, political and representational dimensions. Structurally, she points out that different dimensions of inequality are interwoven in various ways and the social position of disadvantaged women is defined by intersections of context-specific structural differences. Citing an example of a shelter in Los Angeles for battered women, Crenshaw affirms that women’s shelters cannot just address the issue of violence per se, they must first take into account “other multilayered and routinized forms of domination” (p. 1245), such as gender and class oppression in combination with racial discrimination in employment and housing policies, that brought them to the shelters first. Regarding the political dimension, Crenshaw asserts that antiracist and feminist discourses both fail to address the intersections of race and gender for the interest of people of color and women respectively, as “one analysis often implicitly denies the validity of the other” (p. 1252). That is,

the failure of antiracism to challenge patriarchy means that it will frequently strengthen the subordination of women, and the failure of feminism to interrogate race means that it will often reinforce the subordination of people of color. So, she is critical of the political strategies that ignore intersectional issues and jeopardize minority women for the purpose of “maintaining the integrity of the community” (p. 1253).

By representational intersectionality, Crenshaw refers to the cultural construction of women of colour, by which, she holds that representation of women of color in popular culture “can also become yet another source of intersectional disempowerment” (p. 1245). Crenshaw is strongly critical of the ways in which women of colour are represented in cultural imagery and how racist and sexist representations marginalize women of colour. Her account fits with the differential representation of the “disadvantaged” women characters in *Ode to Joy*, where WCMW, because of their rural family background and migrant women status, are portrayed either as silly and timid foodie, or greedy and sophisticated “*laoniū*” (fishing woman) in contrast to local women who are represented as smart and independent since they have sufficient social capital. Therefore, an intersectional approach that “focuses on gender as a social institution, combined with a multilevel view on inequality” (Bürkner, 2012, p. 183), is capable of examining the multidimensional experiences of discrimination and the diverse identities of disadvantaged women. This study adopts Collins and Bilge’s (2016) working definition of intersectionality based on Crenshaw’s insights:

Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. When it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. (p. 2)

Intersectionality analysis aims to examine how a multitude of factors such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, location, and culture etc. interplay to influence people's access to desired resources (Bürkner 2012; Davis 2008; Dill & Zambrana 2009; Yuval-Davis 2006;). Taking an anti-simplicity approach – “to include multiple dimensions of social life and categories of analysis” (McCall, 2005, p. 1772), intersectionality focuses on the differences and their intersections within individuals as well as in the relations with others, particularly in the analysis of power struggles and inequalities for minority groups (Ludvig, 2006). As intersectionality has contributed greatly in highlighting “the interconnected and constitutive nature of multiple forms of oppression (and privilege) in migration processes” (Bastia, 2014, p. 238), recent migration studies have adopted this framework to examine the implications of intersections between gender and other axes of difference to understand migration (Silvey, 2004).

The Association of Intersectionality with Issues of Migrant Women

Intersectionality challenges the exclusivity of viewing inequalities, favouring an inclusive understanding of migrant women's experience (Bürkner, 2012). Take Ludvig (2006) for example. He used it to highlight the intersection of categories of difference and identity from the dimensions of gender, class, and nationality by making an interpretive analysis of the narrative of a Bulgarian migrant woman to Austria. Dora, a master's student at an Austrian university, was a non-EU national living in Austria, who had to work illegally in low-paid and informal jobs with a student visa. Despite her academic qualifications, Dora's migrant status means that she was confronted with political and institutional barriers that constrained her being treated equally. In addition, as her parents spoiled her brother by providing all resources to him, she could not get any help from her family, which made her life extremely hard in a foreign country. Her migrant status and her poor economic constraints together with her oppression in the household were that

of nationality intersecting with gender and class. Intersections of gender with other categories of difference constitute the specific gender identity of migrants.

Scholars, such as Silvey (2004), Bürkner (2012), and Bastia (2014), have engaged the gendered migration processes with the notion of intersectionality, given that female migrants encounter multiple boundaries of ethnicity, racism, class, and gender, and that “migrant women are fast becoming the new ‘quintessential intersectional subjects’” (Nash, 2008, p. 1). Though the contexts of research in Western scholarship centre on international migration, in which migrant women move from one country to another, they shed light on the situation of Chinese educated migrant women, who move from rural areas or small cities/towns to China’s megacities as represented in *Ode to Joy*. As Chinese internal migrant women share similarities in issues of gender inequality, social injustice and racial and/or ethnic discrimination with their international counterparts, the intersectionality approach, which focuses on intersection of categories of difference and identity to interpret multilayer oppression of disadvantaged women, is well suited to this study. While the concept of intersectionality, with its origins in Western scholarship, incorporates the specific issues of race and ethnicity, since most migrant women in China are ethnically Han, it is their place of origin – most often from the countryside – which results in broadly similar forms of discrimination. Hereafter, for the purposes of this research, I will instead refer to “place of origin” rather than ethnicity when discussing well-educated female migrants in China.

Feminist migration research focuses on analyzing “the power-laden, socially constructed and gender-and-difference inflected nature of spatial scales” of migration (Silvey, 2004, p. 492). Silvey illustrates this through comparisons between neoclassical migration research and feminist migration studies. She asserts that while neoclassical studies of migration focus on the spatial

categories within which migration processes take place to examine migration patterns, such as within and between nations, from rural to urban areas, and between regions, it does not address the gender-specific processes linked to the construction of the politics of scale. Feminist migration research, however, examines the construction and operation of scales - including the body, the household, the region, and the nation, concerning the migration processes that are “tied to the politics of gender and difference” (p. 492). For example, on the national scale, neoclassical researchers see the nation as an objective scale and understand national economic conditions as the key forces driving international migration (ibid).

In contrast, feminist migration scholars represented by Yeoh and Huang (1999) argue that “the national scale is produced through social and political processes that privilege particular identities and exclude others as national subjects” (as cited in Silvey, 2004, p. 493). They illustrate that the nation is constructed in conjunction with gendered migration, based on their observations of the ways in which this particular view of the nation associates with the marginalization of foreign maids in Singapore, who do the work of cooking, caring, and cleaning for the wealthy Singaporeans, but are deemed as different by the privileged in terms of ethnicity and degrees of modernity. “Their differences are used to symbolize the class, ethnic and gender relations central to the [Singaporean] nationhood” (ibid). As women migrants move from one place to another, “they also create new possibilities, for themselves, the people who are ‘left behind’ as well as those they encounter on the way to and at their destinations” (Bastia, 2014, p. 238). Therefore, the gendered processes of migration intertwine with broader social forces.

In a similar vein, feminist migration studies also takes an intersectional stance on household scale, which “takes on its meanings and composition through its members’ mobility and migrants’ interactions with national, transnational and regional labor processes” (Silvey,

2004, p. 494). Take Fan, a WCMW character in *Ode to Joy*, who comes from a small city to Shanghai, the largest and arguably most modern city in China. She works as an HR officer in a foreign company from which she earns a “good sum of money,” in the eyes of her family, given the regional disparities of income in China. (See Table 2, Per capita disposable income of Chinese residents in different regions). An assumption based on Fan’s expenditure shows that Fan’s monthly salary should be over 6,000 Yuan (about CAD 1,150). Though only at medium income level for a higher living cost in Shanghai, she is viewed as a rich person by her family which always asks for more money from her. However, although she is a mainstay of the household - heavily depended upon economically as she has migrated to an advanced megacity with a higher income, she is placed in a secondary position to her brother in the son-privileged family.

Table 2, Per Capita Disposable Income of Chinese Residents by Region (2016)

Shanghai	¥ 54305.3	Guizhou	¥ 15121.1
Beijing	¥ 52530.4	Heilongjiang	¥ 19838.5
Zhejiang	¥ 38529.0	Qinghai	¥ 17301.8
Tianjin	¥ 34074.5	Xinjiang	¥ 16859
Guangdong	¥ 30295.8	Gansu	¥ 13697

Source: China National Statistics Bureau (2017), available at <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/nds/2017/indexeh.htm>

The above table illustrates that due to China’s unbalanced economic development, the income gap is big between different regions. Though Fan is the rich one in her family, however, like many other migrant women living in the megacity, she not only cannot enjoy many social services that are bestowed to local residents without a local status, such as housing and medical

insurance, but also endures psychological pressures for being despised by local residents. For example, Fan's mother is stopped by a building service woman to the building where Fan lives without a gate card. Whereas Bao, Andy's boyfriend, is permitted for entrance without a gate card by the same woman. This is because Andy is a house owner while Fan is a tenant, as the woman says. Thus, she faces various challenges. She is marginalized in the city, just as what feminist migration studies conceive, the socially differentiated migration process plays not just as an outcome of gendered processes, but as intersections of the various gender politics of migrants' lives and broader political and economic processes (Silvey, 2004). The intersectional approach thus informs in examining the issues and experiences of well-educated migrant women of this study.

By the same token, Bastia (2014) asserts that migration has become a key development issue and has been seen as an "avenue of social change" (p. 237). Migration helps to promote the development of the regional (and national) economy as migrants make remittances to families in their hometowns, and their movement and work across multiple boundaries are a key factor for social changes. Although in China's context, migrant women move from the countryside or small towns to megacities within China, they equally make significant contributions to social change and economic development of the country. Intersectionality has opened new inquiry for challenging the primary focus on gender in migration studies, which helps to understand "how gender is also constituted by class, race, ethnicity and informed by normative notions of sexuality" (p. 238). And intersectionality proves to be flexible enough to enable the analysis of class, gender, and ethnicity, or place of origin, defined according to locally constructed norms and definitions to understand social relations in which the "disadvantaged" women are oppressed in multiple ways. Similarly, Bürkner (2012) explored how intersectionality is applied to

gendered migration from a structural perspective. He asserts that “gender relations within or around migration systems were seen as structurally pre-fixed so that the gender-specific modes of inclusion or exclusion of migrants were just one additional aspect of the systemic production of inequality” (p. 187). This multidimensional view of gender inequalities in migration is applicable to this study as issues facing well-educated migrant women as represented in *Ode to Joy* mirror the structural inequalities such as rural-urban duality system and regional disparities that are interrelated to impact the daily lives and experiences of such women living and working in the large cities without local status.

What merits special noting is that some China studies scholars such as Ma & Cartier (2003) and Fan (2000) have also touched on the intersectional notion in their research relating to the Chinese diaspora and gendered migration. Ma & Cartier (2003), in discussing diasporic space, assert that the nature of diasporas is far beyond the geographic or spatial factor. Family needs, social network, and many other factors influence migrants’ lives in an intersectional manner. For example, in the 19th century, large amounts of Fujian Chinese came to Singapore for reasons of poverty reduction, language, culture, family ties, shared experience and social networks, which interacted to bind them together and help them achieve local integration more easily. With the nation-building strategy of Singapore since the mid-20th century, the status of Chinese ethnicity had been largely impinged in terms of language, clan associations, and ethnic identity. Those factors impacted the migrants’ experiences in political, economic, and cultural dimensions. The circumstances of WCMW in Shanghai as represented in *Ode to Joy* share some similarities with the early Singaporean Chinese in that their experiences are also shaped by multiple-dimensional factors such as class, social status, and place of origin. Thus, intersectionality is a useful analytical tool for this study.

In the same light, Fan (2000), who examines how migration affects gender roles, relations and division of labour in the context of Chinese migration, argues that factors of gender hierarchies, traditional norms, and structural differences interplay to influence the decision-making process, pattern and consequence of migration. She observes that as migration is an important means of social change, the agency of migrant women, who work independently and pursue their happiness in the cities, seems to suggest that these Chinese women can control over their lives. However, their seemingly autonomy continues to be influenced by the “structural constraints, including deep-rooted patriarchal traditions, the *hukou* system that denies rural migrants’ permanent residence in urban areas and the increasing gender segregation of the labour market” (p. 445). Cases of Fan and Qiu in *Ode to Joy* well illustrate that due to the interplay of multiple factors relating to their migrant status, they cannot afford to even rent an individual apartment for themselves, let alone buy one. As they have no local status as migrant women, they might feel insecure living in the megacity, and tend to put themselves in a subordinate position in sexual relationships with men with the hope for a stable life.

Nonetheless, like any other theoretical concept, intersectionality is not without flaws. Scholars including Nash (2008) and Bastia (2014) have pointed out some weaknesses of intersectionality, such as lack of scale and particular methodology, perceived duality between structure and identity, and the lack of conceptualizations of power. On lacking a particular methodology, Nash (2008) argues that Crenshaw’s intersectional approach does not present an inclusion of an examination of multiple oppressions as “black women are treated as a homogeneous, unitary social group” (p. 7). Because gender inequalities are working together in a multidimensional and mutually influencing way, it should be inclusive of more than the ‘Big 3’ - gender, race and class, and should include more categories of differences according to context-

specific norms and definitions. In the context of WCMW in the Chinese urban setting, for the intersectional analysis, factors such as age, rural-urban duality system, and national interests, as well as place of origin are to be incorporated to fully articulate the issues of multiple-axes of structural differences facing such women in the megacity.

However, from an epistemological perspective, Ludvig (2006) insists that the endless differences seem to be a weakness of intersectional theory as “the list of differences is infinite” (p. 246). To resolve this issue, Collins’s (2015) proposes to “produce a loose set of guiding assumptions or guiding themes” (p. 14), such as applying an intersectional lens to social problems and giving considerable attention to identity with a thematic approach to provide an effective guideline. This all-inclusive approach is also a concern this research - if broadness is focused, is there a risk of weakening the analytical potential? Therefore, this study will be grounded in the principle differences of identity, such as gender, focusing on the specific contexts of educated migrant women.

For the issue of scale, Collins (2015) also provides further insight – to attend to social inequalities facing “disadvantaged” women, it needs to go beyond the unitary American Black community. Nash (2008) shares this perspective by raising the question of “who is intersectional?” He wonders “whether only those who are marginalized have an intersectional identity” (p. 9). To Nash, if intersectionality is an inclusive tool, then it needs to include both the privileged and disadvantaged and address how axes of differences work to interact with each other to produce both. Some scholars also hold that intersectionality can be applied to any kind of groups regardless of being privileged or disadvantaged (Anthias, 2002; Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Maynard, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 2006). This viewpoint illuminates this research in framing the breadth of analysis by including all five women characters of *Ode to Joy* – not just the

“disadvantaged” WCWM characters, as they are all interrelated in one way or another in the series. Still another weakness of intersectionality seems to be its limited theorization of power, for which Bastia (2014) argues that since there has been no consensus on whether identity needs to be the focus of feminist research, it should include a more general theory of how power is organized within society and social structures. Although an intersectional approach is effective in incorporating gender, class, and race in its analytical framework to interpret their interrelations, it needs further grounding in the historical “context-specific analysis of social relations of difference in order to avoid depoliticizing and simplifying complex realities” (p. 245).

This critique of the intersectional approach provides good insight to this research in analyzing the issues of the professional women in *Ode to Joy*. It requires analyzing issues encountered by WCMW by exploring their complex reasons, such as the root cause of an issue and the implications in the structural and/or sociocultural reasons behind the issue. For example, in dealing with the issue of gendered relations that impairs the wellbeing of migrant women in *Ode to Joy*, this research needs to discuss the issue in gender hierarchical and power structural dimensions, which interplay to influence the protagonists, to acquire a clearer understanding of this particular issue. One point that needs to be stressed is that as intersectionality has been conceptualized based mainly on the experience of the Black American women, and grounded in the American historical context, with few exceptions of European evidence, this study will enrich the literature by adding the evidence and experiences of Chinese internal migrant women “in order to provide alternative perspectives which would or would not be similar to those well-documented American experiences” (Ross, 2002, p. 4).

To sum up, intersectionality is an original approach, grounded in feminist theories of power and difference. It provides a fresh perspective in understanding multiple and complex

categories of identification. “One could even say that intersectionality is the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far” (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). This approach highlights the interconnections of the multiple sources of women’s oppression and focuses on those differences that have been excluded so far in feminist analysis. As migration has played an important role in social change, and there are clear parallels between the experiences of “minority” and “migrant” women, intersectionality has opened new areas of inquiry for scholars to address some key concerns in migration literature where categories of differentiation have generally been addressed separately. As in the context of WCMW, inequality is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as age, class, region, and sexuality, the next section will review literature on identity studies.

2.2 The Concept of Intersectionality Versus the Study of Identity

So far, by reviewing literature of inequalities related to migration studies, it is evident that the concept of intersectionality is highly associated with identity. Some have argued that intersectionality’s most significant contribution has been its general theory of identity (Zack, 2005). Intersectionality is an analytical tool grounded in feminist theories to interpret the multidimensional structural inequalities facing “disadvantaged” women based on the experiences of American women of colour while identity is the central theme and concern of intersectionality. The strengths of intersectional approach are that “it reflects on ‘otherness’ and strives to avoid essentialized, fixed and homogenized assumptions of identities” (Ludvig, 2006, p. 246). This section will focus on the meanings and significance of identities relating to disadvantaged women. Upon her observation that violence against women of colour is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, Crenshaw (1991) asserts that “because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of colour within discourses that are shaped to respond

to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both” (p. 1244). The meaning of identity is well worth being studied because the identity issue has been a leading thread throughout *Ode to Joy* that shapes the experiences of the protagonists and orients the development of the plots in the series.

In order to make clear why identity is so crucial to the lives of the characters in *Ode to Joy*, it is necessary to get informed about the concepts of “identity” from different perspectives. “Identity refers to the extraction of sense of self, based on place: when people identify with the locality where they live, they develop an identity that incorporates their experience of place” (Du et al, 2018, p. 3189). Social identity is a person’s knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group. In identity theory, the self is reflexive in that it can “categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 224), through the processes of self-categorization, one’s identity is formed. Simply put, identities are constructed the moment that “people appeal to differences within such classification systems” (Ludvig, 2006, p. 249). And through a social comparison process - those who are similar to oneself are categorized and labeled as the in-group while persons who differ from oneself are categorized as the outgroup. In other words, difference can be used to create positive insider perceptions while it can also be used to construct a negative view from the ‘outside’, which will lead to results of “xenophobia, sexism, racism and so on” (ibid). The two important processes involved in social identity formation, namely self-categorization and social comparison, produce different consequences. The social categories in which individuals place themselves are parts of a structured society and exist only in relation to other contrasting categories, for example, black vs. white. And “the binary oppositions of difference construct classification systems through which meanings are produced” (ibid). These notions shed lights

on understanding the differences between the poor and rich, the rural and urban, and between the “privileged” and the “disadvantaged” in *Ode to Joy*.

As each of these social identities can give us the sense of affiliation and loyalty, so religious and secular conflicts and confrontations arise in our world (Sen, 2006). Therefore, in making sense of identity, Sen notes that the singularity assumption of identifying ourselves and others as members of a single group may have negative, even dangerous effects as some sectarian activists have used it as a weapon to produce social tension and terrorism. Sen is highly critical of the ‘identity disregard’ - ignoring or neglecting “the influence of any sense of identity with others, on what we value, and how we behave” (p. 20), not only in political and religious domains, but also in the “single-mindedly, self-seeking economic behaviours” (p. 22), for which Sen gives an example - a person might become a “rational fool” when he or she is a single-focus person as he/she cannot give different answers to the questions in economic behaviour, such as “What serves my best interests?” and “What choices will best promote my objectives?” and “What should I rationally choose?” (p. 22). Sen argues that a sense of identity with others can exert very important influence on one’s behaviour “which can easily go against narrowly self-interested conduct” (p. 23). Therefore, he urges us to recognize our multiple identities and those of others (Poole, 2010).

While much of social identity theory deals with intergroup relations - how people see themselves as members of one group/category (the in-group) in comparison with another (the out-group), Stets and Burke (2000), take a role-based identity approach, by which they address the view of social identity on what occurs when one takes on a role as a group member. It focuses on the expectations of the role - how to coordinate and negotiate with role partners, and control the resources relating to the responsibility of the role. In other words, role-identity theory

emphasizes how individual meanings of occupying a particular role match the behaviors a person enacts in that role in interacting with others (Burke 1980; Burke & Reitzes, 1981). The key distinction between the group-based and role-based identities lies in the uniform perception and action among group members for the former, and the different ones among members for the latter relating to counter roles (Stets & Burke, 2000). By taking on a role identity, individuals adopt self-meanings and expectations that vary across persons to accompany the role as it relates to other roles in the group. Thus, the emphasis is not on the similarity with others in the same role, but on the individuality and interrelatedness with others in counter roles in the group.

The Perspective of Identity on the Issue of Migrant Women

The unique role-based identity perspective speaks to the different appeals and behaviours of the WCMW characters in *Ode to Joy* in their pursuit for a better life in Shanghai. Although they are in the same direction striving for a better life in the megacity, they take different approaches or paths to achieve their dreams. For example, Fan, who desires to live a stable life by having a house in her name in Shanghai, tries endless blind dates with the hope to find a rich local guy and ends up breaking with her boyfriend as he cannot share with her the ownership of the house for their marriage. At the end of the series, Fan is determined to be a “free” “leftover woman.” Guan, an elegant and good-tempered woman, always wants to find a “right man” by herself. She falls in love with a Rock-N-Roll singer after her ideal lover Zhao is “taken” by her rich neighbour, Qu. Although her romance with the singer is not blessed by her parents because they think that he cannot guarantee her a secure life with an informal job, she insists on following her own heart. Besides, Guan challenges to compete with those elite graduates in her company for employment positions with her resilience, intelligence, and hard work. Qiu, who is deeply hurt by her first romance with a “bad guy”, establishes self-esteem by taking up a new job

and developing an on-line coffee-sales business for her company. She goes steady with Ying, who previously despises her and breaks up with her as she is not a virgin. And she wins the negotiation with her would-be mother-in-law, who would not like to accept her due to her former love affair. She is to marry Ying, the man she loves at length. Although the three migrant women's future lives are full of uncertainties, this approach stresses their individual role within the same identity group facing challenges.

Intersectionality stresses that inequalities, which are derived from race, ethnicity or place of origin, class, gender, and their intersections, put specific groups in a privileged position while placing other groups and individuals in low social and economic positions based on identity classification. According to Dill & Zambrana (2009), one of the key features of intersectionality is to unveil power relations in the interconnected structure of inequality. This insight is helpful to this study not only in interpreting the inequalities experienced by the WCMW characters, but also in informing the informants to “understand the concepts of power and privilege as they are implicated in systems of racial, gender, and class oppressions” (ibid).

Similarly, Crenshaw (1991) in her “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour” notes that, although all social categories including race or gender are socially constructed, they have meanings and consequences in the way “power has clustered around certain categories and is exercised against others” (p. 1297). This insight that identity embodies difference in social hierarchies is shared by Pun (1999), who asserts that the identity formation involves the politics of differences – “those of gender, class, residential status, region, and even language that categorize people into different groups” (p. 3). Pun illustrates her insights of identity, difference and hierarchies with the example of the identity of *dagongmei*, a term denoting a new kind of labour relationship in reform-era China that

became popular in Shenzhen in the late 1970s. She asserts that the production of the identity of *dagongmei* “deploys a play of difference, establishing a hierarchy between the rural and the urban, the northerner and the southerner, and male and female” (Pun, 1999, p. 2). Pun further states:

Dagongmei, a Cantonese term, means “working for the boss”, connoting a capitalist exchange of labour for wages. *Mei* means younger sister. It denotes not merely gender, but also... single, unmarried and younger. In contrast to the term “worker” (*gongren*), which carried the highest status in the socialist rhetoric of Mao’s day, the new word *dagong* signifies a lesser identity that of a hired hand - in a new context shaped by the rise of market factors in labour relations and hierarchy. (p. 2)

This example illustrates that identity signifies difference in social hierarchies.

Dagongmei, who worked for their boss with a low wage in the city, were at the bottom of the social strata because of their place of origin and their identity as rural migrant women. Their situation embodies the intersections of gender, class, place of origin, and regional disparities. Similarly, in the opinion of Collins (2000), oppression experienced by disadvantaged women tells unjust situations where, “systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society” (p. 4) owing to the power relations in the social hierarchies. The examination to the constraints of WCMW in *Ode to Joy* through an intersectional lens unveils the contemporary outcomes of historical structural patterns of inequality, by which many people including the Chinese migrant women as represented in the series have been placed in a disadvantaged position linking to their identity, showing the hierarchies in classification (of identity) of the state. As a legacy of Maoism, the *hukou* system extracts rural resources to support the urban people. Thus, the politics of residential identity in China has been associated with a distinctively unequal social structure of urban-rural dichotomy (Fan, 2000). These problems are accelerated by the economic restructuring and neo-liberal

reforms that “have caused increased social inequality and economic polarization” (Deweever et al 2009, p. 151).

As far as the relationship between structure and agency is concerned, Bourdieu (1976) asserted that individuals can shape the structures and are mutually shaped by them depending on their positions or their resources in society, and vice versa. It means, “the more the individual’s identity is shaped by structure, the less it can influence the structures; the more it has the ability to create and define its identity, the more it might shape the structures themselves” (as cited in Ludvig, p. 249). Individuals’ ability to define their identity depends on the resources they have, or on “their social, cultural and economic capital” (ibid). Nevertheless, in terms of consciousness of the disadvantaged women, one thing is certain – being poor or oppressed is not their life choice (Dill and Zambrana, 2009).

WCMW characters in *Ode to Joy* facing challenges in housing and employment in the megacity, are not just passive recipients in the process. For example, at a job fair Qiu bravely informs the employer who is going to employ Bai, her former section chief, about Bai’s wrong deeds by taking the risk of being revenged. Her brave action is appreciated by the boss of a coffee store, who recruits her as a result (Eps 12, S 1). With her wits and courage, Qiu defends her dignity and redefines her migrant woman identity. In addition, the three female migrants bond together like real sisters in a family – they listen to and support one another, dealing with any harassment and/or challenges that come upon them in and outside their living spaces. At the same time, they are willing to befriend the “privileged” to reconcile contradictions that separate their internally defined images of self “with [their] objectification as the Other” (Collins, 2000, p. 99). Their negotiations for self-definition are vital to their wellbeing in the city where it is hard for them to access to equal resources with the urbanities.

2.3 Summary of the Theoretical Framework for this Research

With the overarching purpose of understanding issues and experiences of WCMW in China's urban culture via *Ode to Joy*, this study, drawing on the concept of intersectionality, reviewed the existing literature of intersectionality relating to the theme of inequality in migration and identity pertinent to migrant women. Section 1 focused on the perspective of migration studies. Grounded in black feminist Crenshaw (1991)'s theories of power and difference, intersectionality aims to examine how a multitude of factors influence each other affecting people's access to desired resources. Ludvig (2006) uses an empirical evidence of a Bulgarian migrant woman to illustrate how factors, such as race, class, gender, nation, and household, intersect each other to constitute inequalities that hinder the wellbeing of migrant women. Similarly, C. Fan (2000) argues that many Chinese migrant women cannot control their lives as they are strongly influenced by the structural constraints, such as patriarchy, *hukou* and gender segregation of labour market. As for flaws of the intersectional approach, Nash (2008) and Bastia (2014) criticize its lack of a particular methodology in examining multiple oppressions, its lack of a proper scale to include both the privileged and disadvantaged for analysis of inequalities, and its absence in presenting a theory of how power is organized within a society relating to social structures.

This study reviewed the literature of identity in relation to disadvantaged women. Identity is formed through self categorization and social comparison which produce in-group and out-group differences. Some argue that identity embodies different social hierarchies, for which Pun (1999) asserts that identity formation involves the politics of differences that categorize people into different groups. She illustrates identity formation through the example of *dagongmei* to verify the different hierarchies produced by those women's home regions, residential status and

even languages. Experiences of well-educated migrant women in present-day Shanghai represented in *Ode to Joy* resemble those of early *dagongmei* to some extent in that they cannot enjoy the same benefits with their local women neighbours as they are structured with little access to equal social resources. In *Ode to Joy*, the distinctions in social hierarchies are apparent, such as in housing – while the two local women live in their own houses on the same floor, the three migrant women are cramped in a rented apartment. And the social hierarchies have impacted the well-educated migrant women from living a more meaningful life in a large city. It resonates with Burke's (1997) assertion that meaningful activity within a role is concerned with the control of resources for an identity. However, WCMW characters who empower themselves by making use of their wits and capacities though with little bargaining power, bravely negotiate and reconstruct their self-definitions facing inequalities. Their agency, resilience, and consciousness have helped them to grow and pursue a better life in a megacity to a certain extent.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Mixed-Methods Approach to Media Representation, Interview, and Document Analysis

Informed by the theoretical framework of intersectionality to address the research question of how experiences of WCMW are represented in the TV drama series *Ode to Joy*, this study employs qualitative methods to unpack knowledge and conduct critical analysis.

Qualitative research refers to a range of data collection and analysis techniques. It seeks to explain “how” and “why” a particular social phenomenon, or program, operates as it does in a particular context and helps us to understand the social world in which we live (Mohajan, 2018). In addition, it explores people’s experiences, relationships, and social processes and contextual factors that marginalize weak group(s) (ibid). In line with these notions, this study takes a mixed-methods approach to media representation, interviews, and viewers’ comments and scholarly analysis in order to raise the validity of results through triangulation. For example, Chapter Four triangulates the theme of “WCMW as ‘outsiders’ in the megacities” through the media text of *Ode to Joy*, interviews with informants, and critical essays from academic journals.

For this mixed-methods approach, first of all, the overriding objective of this study is to examine the representation of WCMW by popular culture, as represented by *Ode to Joy*. According to McKee (2003), textual analysis is a methodology, a data-gathering process to understand the ways, in which people make sense of the world around them, and, more importantly, “by seeing the variety of ways in which it is possible to interpret reality, we also understand our own cultures better” (p. 2). To borrow Baym’s (2012) notion that “if we think of media content as a text that offers lessons in how to understand the social, cultural and political worlds within which we live our daily lives” (as cited in Puppin, 2018, p. 67), an insightful viewing of *Ode to Joy* will not only help us to understand the text itself, but also the issue of

inequalities that the characters of well-educated migrant women encountered in the megacity, of which the text speaks.

Second, as the objective of this study is to examine the representation of WCMW in pop culture and understand the status and issues of WCMW in China's large cities, in addition to collecting data from *Ode to Joy*, this study uses interviews with well-educated migrant women in two Chinese megacities because participants could provide first-hand accounts of their experiences *within* that urban culture. And their perspectives are valuable to this study about how these may or may not be portrayed in the popular TV series *Ode to Joy*. One of the strengths of using the approach of interview is the close engagement between the author and the participants, which provides the author with an "insider" positionality in the research. It allows her to find issues that are often missed by other enquiries (Mohajan, 2018). Thirdly, in order to strengthen the key arguments of this study, scholarly insights from peer-reviewed journal articles and published documents are drawn on for the issues and experiences of well-educated migrant women. As what Matheson (2005) suggests that it is a good way for analysis to approach the study of social and cultural life in multiple valid ways and that "it makes sense to try to draw on more than one perspective" (p. 12). Together, these approaches strengthen a thesis on migrant women's issues through pop cultural representation. More importantly, by way of cultural translation to observe social phenomena, this study conducts research on the in between-spaces across the televisual series and reality, which also renders the author an "outsider" to observe and make analysis of the issues more objectively in relation to WCMW. Thus, this approach is unique and intriguing in its perspective and approach as well as in its significance to examine the issues and experiences of WCMW through popular culture.

3.2 The Use of the TV Drama Series *Ode to Joy* as a Televisual Text

The TV drama series *Ode to Joy* is an apt lens to examine the experiences of WCMW for multiple reasons. First, TV dramas, particularly urban-themed TV dramas series, have become an integral part of television programs, and they are loved by many viewers, especially women, as they are close to the times and people's daily lives (Jiang, 2017). Schneider (2012) also observed, "soap operas or telenovelas has gradually taken the place of cinema and become the most popular audio-visual narrative form" (p. 30). According to Wang Pengju, General Secretary of the Trade Association of Chinese TV Drama Production, China has ranked the first in the world in the volume of TV drama production, broadcast and audience for several years ("China ranks the first," *Sohu*, 2018). In addition, "entertainment and media play a significant role in shaping popular discourse and influencing public opinion" (Feldshuh, 2018, p. 39). In other words, TV dramas can produce dynamic impacts on the perceptions of viewers. And *Ode to Joy*, which depicts the life stories of five professional women in Shanghai, was hugely popular among both domestic and foreign viewers. By the time the last episode of Season 1 of *Ode to Joy* was shown, the total number of overseas viewers on YouTube had surpassed 50 million, "making it the most popular Chinese show on the site" ("Mainland Drama *Ode to Joy*," *Global Times*, 2016). It was on top of China's TV rating in the week of May 08 to 14, 2017 ("In 2017 TV ratings," *Askci*, 2017), and "reached a phenomenal rating" (Yuan, 2017, p. 99), and has received great responses from the viewers.

Its popularity can be attributed to varied factors, such as high-quality *mise-en-scènes*, unique sound effects, fashionable elements, and the excellent performance of stars, such as Yang Zi, Jiang Xin, and Liu Tao, and particularly Shandong Film and Television Production Co., Ltd., which has produced many popular TV drama series in recent years. Second, in *Ode to Joy*,

narrative method breaks through the conventional hero-heroine linear style by using a parallel structure presenting simultaneously the life stories of five main characters “with female consciousness as the main expressive object, by which the female image of the drama has carried a more profound significance” (Yuan, 2017, p. 99). This is rarely seen in recent years in pop culture. Thirdly, “its ‘realism’ (*Xianshi zhuyi*) in depicting the life pressures of urban women” (Sima, 2018, p. 39), has produced a great impact on audiences, just as one viewer commented, “The show really teaches me some valuable lessons in life by telling an anti-fairy tale that pulls us into reality” (“Mainland Drama,” *Global Times*, 2016). The valuable lessons that *Ode to Joy* teaches the viewers, particularly female viewers, range from conforming (or not) to traditional gender norms, following the invisible rule in the workplace, to challenging the rhetoric of “leftover” woman as independent women.

As portrayals of *Ode to Joy* reflect the issues and concerns of professional urban women, particularly WCMW, this show has resonated strongly with well-educated young professional women. This is evidenced by the data of Sina Entertainment about who mostly loved to watch this TV series. The data shows that online viewing volume exceeded 5 billion by the time episode 28 of season 1 was aired on May 03, 2016. And it found that among those who discuss *Ode to Joy* on web blogs, 84.2 percent are women. This is not surprising as this cultural product focuses on the experience and emotional appeals of women. In terms of age group, it found that 73.1 percent of viewers are the 90ers, those born in the 1990s. This is because young female audiences can find things common within themselves from those personas. Another striking feature that the data reflects is that 82 percent of the fans are highly educated with undergraduate and above degrees. One interpretation is that the Daylight Film and Television Production Corporation, which had produced many male-theme TV dramas, finally presented a women-

themed TV series this time, reflecting the sorrow, struggles, and hope of intellectual women to some extent (“Online viewing volume,” *Sohu*, 2019). The fact that most viewers are well-educated female 1990ers, who are approximately in the same age range with WCMW of this study, speak to the realistic significance of this TV series and of this research.

3.3 Data Collection and Data Organization

This research also collected data by interviewing with participants from two Chinese megacities in addition to collecting data from the TV series *Ode to Joy*. This is to align with the overarching research objective of this study – to examine pop cultural representation of WCMW in a Chinese megacity through *Ode to Joy* and understand the status of urban professional women, particularly WCMW. On top of that, this study referred to primary and secondary sources, such as social media, mainstream newspapers, and scholarly articles to provide more valuable insights in the research. For data from *Ode to Joy*, as this TV series has two seasons with 97 episodes in total, it is impractical to cover all episodes for analysis, this research took a thematic approach by collecting data according to the major themes presented in the drama. Basically, this study collected data from about twelve episodes of the TV series *Ode to Joy* to critically analyze the representations of the experiences of WCMW according to themes. For example, this study used Episodes 1, 16, 25 of Season 1 on the theme, “WCMW as ‘outsiders’”; Episode 30 of Season 1, 16 of Season 2 on “gender inequality”; Episodes 27, 28, 37 of Season 1 on “impacts of social strata”; and, Episodes 1, 4, 9, 10, and 17 of Season 1 on “differential representations of migrant women.” Nonetheless, although certain episodes are selected to analyze issues according to themes, there are some overlaps in episodes underpinning the discussions on different themes as they are inherently interrelated with each other. For instance, Episode 1 of Season 1 illustrates not only the theme of WCMW characters as “outsiders” but

also gender inequalities and differential treatment of migrant women as well. Furthermore, to fully articulate an argument, this study was not absolutely limited to the selected episodes. It may refer to some additional sequences or scenes to emphasize the effect of an argument. For example, the sequence of Qu sneering at Fan's cheap clothing in Eps 6 of S 1 is mentioned in the discussion of social strata of characters together with the chosen episodes.

Second, this study collected data from interviews with participants from two Chinese large cities – Tianjin, and Beijing. The reason why these two cities were selected for the interviews was that both Beijing and Tianjin are municipalities like Shanghai (large provincial-level cities that are under the direct leadership of the central government. There are four municipalities in China, the fourth one is Chongqing) where many well-educated women have migrated after graduation. Take Beijing for example, according to the *2018 Beijing Employment Quality Report for Graduates of Higher Education*, among the total number of 226,300 graduates in 2018, 117,771 were female students, occupying 52.05 percent, with a male-to-female ratio of 1:1.1. About regional distribution of the graduates, 62,685 graduates were from Beijing, accounting for only 27.7 percent, whereas 163,615 were from other regions, accounting for 72.3 percent (“Beijing: the number of graduates,” *ict.edu.cn*, 2018). In addition, as the author used to live and worked in the city of Tianjin for many years, a good rapport in engaging the participants can be easily established and an “insider” positionality can be built up as well for this study. Besides, facing with the same restriction of *hukou* status, well-educated migrant women have similar issues in these two cities as in Shanghai. This study takes interviewing as a key component of data gathering as this approach focuses on realistic inquiries that “observe the world in its natural setting and interpret situations for understanding the meanings that people make from day to day life” (Mohajan, 2018, p. 24).

Participant Selection and Recruitment

In line with the objective of this study, participants for this study were a sample of WCMW of the two Chinese large cities of Beijing and Tianjin. Participants were recruited with the help of the researcher's personal contacts who connected participants via email, cellphones, personal contacts, and/or WeChat (a popular social media platform in China). And participants were informed about the outlines of this research and the voluntary nature of participation, and a consent form was attached to the recruitment email highlighting the voluntary nature of participation. This study aimed to include participants who would like to share their perceptions on the representation of WCMW characters' experiences in China's large cities by the TV drama series *Ode to Joy* and/or their first-hand experiences living in a megacity. Participants are well-educated women who come from regions other than these two cities; their ages are not restricted, but generally they are in their 20s and 30s, as they are mostly born in the 1980s and the 1990s. Three types of participants were recruited: 1) Those who have seen the whole of the 97-episode TV drama series *Ode to Joy*; 2); Those who have seen part of the TV drama series *Ode to Joy*; and, 3) Those who may not have seen this TV series but would like to share their experiences living in a megacity. The desired number of participants was 15. The study conducted interviews with 9 participants as a result.

Interview Procedures and Questions

Interviews of this study were taken using a semi-structured and face-to-face technique with open-end questions grounded in interpretive perspectives. Each interview took approximately 60 to 90 minutes in duration at a place chosen by the third party at the convenience of the participant. The questions, which served as guidelines in sharing their perceptions, did not confine the freedom of the participants to articulate other relevant contents

yet still maintain a focus on the major themes of this research, but rather encouraged the participants to talk more deeply beyond face value, just as Pawson (1996) noted, the realistic interview technique focuses on creating “a situation in which the conceptual structures under investigation are open for inspection in a way that allows the respondent to make an informed and critical account of them” (p. 313).

Participants were provided with an opportunity to reflect on her experiences in a large city, which would make their voices heard, and ultimately, help to raise awareness and improve the well-being of this cohort and contribute to the harmony and stability of an increasingly urbanized society in China. Besides, their participation will also contribute to the production of knowledge regarding WCMW, as this group of women has been less well represented. Interview questions were designed based on the principle that it is from the points of view of the informants without prejudgement of their perceptions and their backgrounds. Additionally, open-ended questions do not presume that the reflections of participants serve exactly the purpose of this study, although personal life stories might illuminate the understanding of issues being addressed by this study. Furthermore, the questions do not attempt to pigeonhole the participants as a target group of this study. Scholarly books and articles on relevant topics were also explored to illuminate the analysis of this study. For example, books *Migration and Gender in China* (Fan, 2000) and *Gender, Media, and Mythmaking: Constructing China's Leftover Women* (Feldshuh, 2018), and articles, “Migration and Gender in China” (Fan, 2000) and “Becoming *Dagongmei*: the Politics of Identity and Difference in Reform China” (pun, 1999), provided critical accounts in interpreting issues of contemporary Chinese women. Together, these approaches strengthen a thesis on well-educated migrant women.

3.4 Data Presentation

In terms of the methodological strategy to present data from the TV series of *Ode to Joy*, this study uses the approach of screenshot with an interpretive analysis to reinforce themes such as WCMW characters as “outsiders” in the megacity and tensions of migrant women with their families in relation to gender inequality, as well as impacts of social stratification on WCMW characters pertinent to the experiences of WCMW. Screenshots can be effective in exhibiting the development of plots and characters, especially in displaying different layers of conflicts in the series. Such conflicts involve those between WCMW characters and the social environment around them; those between the characters and other people, such as their families, their neighbours, and their colleagues; as well as the inner conflicts of the WCMW characters themselves. At the same time, this study deploys some other effective elements of representation including colouring around the character of Fan such as the feminine colours of red and pink, voiceover, and theme song, as well as facial expression to strengthen the arguments. For example, in the representation of Guan’s inner conflicts for the “failure” of her romantic love to the *gaofushuai*, Zhao, Guan’s various facial expressions are exhibited to reinforce the argument that social stratification has impact on the wellbeing of WCMW characters; and when showing the ill effects of gender inequality by the discourse of “leftover women” to WCMW characters, Fan’s body language, feminine colours, and sensuality, as well as a male voiceover are represented to strengthen the theme of gender inequality, to name only a few. These approaches not only work to reinforce the arguments of this study, they also vividly exhibit the ways how the TV series *Ode to Joy* represents the experiences of WCMW in the megacity.

3.5 Data Analysis

Analyzing Data of Ode to Joy

Informed by the theories of intersectionality, findings of this study based on the data selected from the episodes of *Ode to Joy* will be discussed and analyzed from the perspectives of intersectionality that involves history, gender, culture, and socio-politics. For example, issues that WCMW characters are faced with, such as employment discrimination, cannot be understood from a single dimension of income gap or differential recruitment, as they are shaped by many axes that work together and influence each other (Collins and Bilge, 2016). They are examined by this research from gender, class, and place of origin as well as rural-urban duality factors to understand the issue grounded in the Chinese urban cultural context. In the case of American women of colour, who were battered and resorted to the shelters in Los Angeles, Crenshaw's insight on intersectionality shows the limitations of only dealing with the battering itself, as the issue involves factors of other dimensions, such as, unemployment, heavy family burden, and inequality of housing policies, which intersect each other in powerful ways to impact the lives of women. In line with this, an interpretive approach is used to analyze data from *Ode to Joy*, and to construct knowledge of this study.

Analyzing Interview Data

The purpose of qualitative research is to describe and interpret issues or phenomena “from the point of view of the individual or population being studied, and to generate new concepts and theories” (Mohajan, 2018, p. 24). And the basis of qualitative research lies in the interpretive approach to social reality, and in the description of the lived experience of human beings (Atkinson et al, 2001). As interviews play an important role in making the entire discussion and analysis more holistic and objective, this study adopts a thematic approach in

examining the major findings from the interviews with the participants to proceed the interconnectedness between one another in alignment with the interview questions (See Table 3).

Table 3, Analytical Framework and Research Themes

Research Questions	Analysis of Characters		Major Themes
1. If you are familiar with the popular TV series <i>Ode to Joy</i> , do you feel empathetic with any character(s)? Why?	Fan is double pressured with her family and her own issues in Shanghai	Qiu is struggling where to survive- back home or staying in Shanghai	WCMW are faced with social unfairness -They don't have local status for favourable housing policies and other social benefits. -They don't have anyone to rely on for day-to-day pressures such as paying rent and employment.
2. Which scenario(s) has impressed you most in viewing the TV drama series <i>Ode to Joy</i> ? Why?	Qiu is looked down upon and is abandoned abruptly by her boyfriend for not being a virgin	Qu, though a privileged woman, suffers from being treated unequally in the possession of family property due to son preference	Gendered inequality is a serious issue of society -Women have to bear the brunt of being blamed for premarital sexual behaviours. -Women cannot enjoy the same rights with men in both family and society.
3. Qiu expresses that the objective of a romance is for marriage and that love affair not for marriage is not ethical. Do you agree, or not agree, why?	The goal of romance for Qiu is marriage as she relies on a marriage as a	Qu and Andy, the privileged women, do not regard marriage so seriously as WCMW	WCMW have no social capital to "play with love" -Aims of their romance are to get married, have someone to count on in Shanghai, and live a stable life there. Local rich women do not need to worry about their lives with enough money,

	protection symbolically and materially	because they do not need to bind their romance to marriage	social networks, and local status. -They can afford to enjoy the “purity” of love without being pressured for a marriage.
4. Fan says to Andy, “To us ordinary people, it’s really hard to live in Shanghai thinking of the over-a-million yuan down payment for a house,” after she finds that her boyfriend’s BMW 3 series car is rented as a small boss of a start-up. What do you think she means by this? Why?	Fan means that if a man cannot buy a BMW 3 series car, how can he afford to buy a house and raise a family.	Andy comforts Fan that it is normal for a man to rent a car, even an office at the early stage of his business. She cannot understand Fan’s appeals for life.	WCMW don’t feel secure without a house/a fixed home in the host city -Having a house like local citizens not only can bring WCMW the sense of security, but also dignity in the city where they live. -However, because of the systematic and economic constraints, they are restricted to enjoy a stable and meaningful life as they wish.
5. If you were the director of the TV drama, would you like to make some changes to the portrayals of any character/s, Why?	Guan has good qualities (<i>suzhi</i>) to compete with Qu for the love of Mr. Zhao	Zhao breaks up with Qu because of her conceit, snobbery, and intellectual shallowness	WCMW should not be expected to maintain a low profile in striving for their dreams. -They should make their voices heard and be confident of themselves in their efforts to make a difference in life.

This table was created based on interview findings. Informants, who are well-educated women to large cities of Tianjin and Beijing, shared their perspectives on the portrayals of WCMW’s experiences with their lived experiences. Their accounts reveal that the show does not fully represented their realities, particularly their inner feelings, and that there are distinctions between the cultural representations and reality.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical approval by the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) of the University of Victoria on January 10th, 2020 (protocol number: 19-0539, see Appendix A). This is to ensure that the informants' identities are protected, and the interview notes are kept in confidentiality. Most importantly, the participation of informants are completely voluntary which was guaranteed by the mechanism of consent: 1) The contents of the letter of consent, which informs that participant's participation in the research must be completely voluntary, and that participants may withdraw at any time, or refuse to answer certain questions without any explanation, were well understood by both the researcher and the participants. 2) Consent forms were delivered to participants before interview and the researcher provided enough time for the participants to comprehend the form. 3) The researcher conducting the interview went over the letter of consent with the participant verbally prior to the interview and allowed time for discussion of any questions the participants may have. 4) Due to the cross-cultural nature of this research, cultural preference has been respected. As in Chinese cultural context, oral rather than written consent to a research interview is more preferred, participants were asked if they feel comfortable signing the consent form. If not, verbal consent would be used.

3.7 About the Chinese-English Translation Used in this Thesis

This study uses the Chinese TV drama series *Ode to Joy* and many Chinese references to examine the representation of the experiences of WCMW characters and analyse the issues around WCMW in megacities. Unless specified, all translations from Chinese to English were conducted by the author. In addition, this thesis uses *pinyin* system for the romanization of Chinese terms with an explanation in English for each word and/or expression of *pinyin*.

Chapter 4 Findings

Their place of origin, job, age, experience, including their boyfriends and families involve China from the smallest towns, counties to the largest city, Shanghai. We wanted to reflect the great changes in Chinese cities in the urbanization of the past few decades, showing modern city and people in it. I should say we have reflected social realities, such as son preference, workplace difficulties, gap between rich and poor in this TV series. We did not shy away from these issues. We look forward to drawing the attention of the society and better resolving them.

Source: Yuanzidan, screenwriter of *Ode to Joy* (“Special interview with Yuan,” *Sohu*, 2016)

The remarks of Yuan are informative of the framework and intention of the producers in creating the TV series *Ode to Joy*. In alignment with the purpose of this study – to examine how the experiences of WCMW are represented in *Ode to Joy*, this chapter will analyze the ways in which the main characters, particularly the three WCMW, are represented in relation to the key themes. Within the theoretical framework of intersectionality, the dimensions of structural and representational intersectionality will be applied primarily. The former will be used on the themes of WCMW characters as “outsiders”, gender inequality, and impact of social stratification on the wellbeing of WCMW characters; and the latter, representational dimension of intersectionality, will be applied to the differential representations of WCMW characters in *Ode to Joy* as “social divisions also exist at the level of representation, being expressed in images and symbols, texts and ideologies” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 198). Concepts of identity will also be applied in the discussion within that framework. This chapter presents the ways of representation to interpret the issues around the main characters through comparison/contrast, facial expressions, colouring, and voiceover as well as theme song. To better interpret the issue(s) raised in each section, some background information is provided where needed. Informants’ and scholarly insights are also employed to strengthen the arguments of this research.

4.1 WCMW as “Outsiders” Represented through Contrasts and Comparisons

History of Shanghai Versus Attitude of Shanghai Natives towards “Outsiders”

Like any other cultural phenomenon that has its root causes, the attitude of Shanghai natives towards people from outside the city can also be traced to its historical origin, which is inseparable from its economic development and geographical position. Shanghai began to establish its prominence since 1843 when it was opened to foreigners as a treaty port together with four other coastal cities of China as a result of *the Treaty of Nanking* after the First Opium War from 1840 to 1842 between China and Great Britain. Following closely Great Britain, fourteen other foreign nations, such as, the United States, Belgium, and France, obtained the status of “most favoured nations” to enjoy trade rights and extraterritorial privileges in Shanghai (Lethbridge, 1983). Although with the imprints of imperialism and humiliation, the process of about a century of foreign occupation had brought Shanghai “from a village into one of the world’s principal metropolises” (p. 4).

The prosperity and commercial importance of Shanghai was greatly associated with its strategic geographical location (See Figure 1, Map of China showing Shanghai). Shanghai is located on the southern estuary of the Yangzi River, the longest in Asia, and the third longest in the world from its source in Tibet to the Pacific Ocean. It is close to Japan in the East and meets Jiangsu to the West and Zhejiang to the south. As the Yangzi River provides natural advantage to the city, Shanghai is “the distributing port for more than one-tenth of the inhabitants of the entire world” (*All about Shanghai*, 1983, p. 27). It has served as a gateway to provinces in central and east China to the outside world. The fact that Shanghai accounted for 54.14 percent in China’s total foreign trade volume of 1,957 million dollars in 1933 shows the important position of this city in China (ibid).

Figure 1, Map of China showing Shanghai



Source: <http://nzchinasociety.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Location-map-Shanghai.jpeg>

Trade throughout the nineteenth century led to a flourishing of the Shanghai economy and helped promote the development of its industry. As adjacent to regions rich in natural resources of cotton and silk, textile industry in Shanghai developed fast. By 1894, the development of silk filatures and cotton mills together with shipbuilding and chemical plants made Shanghai the largest industrial centre in China, with more than 36,000 factory workers representing 46 percent of the total number of industrial workers in China (Honig, 1986). The development of industries tremendously shaped the physical appearance and social structure of Shanghai. Along the Shanghai Bund, various Western architectures could be found, and the multinational lifestyles were incredible, for which Shanghai was described as a “magic city” by the Japanese writer Murakami in 1924 (“Why is Shanghai called a ‘magic city’?,” *Zhihu*, 2017). And the exotic area was filled by foreign companies, banks, department stores, businesses, hotels, governments and night clubs. It is not surprising that Shanghai was also called “Oriental Paris” in the 1930s for its international and cosmopolitan features (ibid).

The advantageous geographical location coupled with its international features have made Shanghai a well-deserved hub for China's global connection and a window for the various world cultures into China. Since the 1990s, Shanghai continues to play a leading role in China in terms of GDP (e.g. 3,267.987 billion Yuan in 2018, about US\$ 20,000 per capita) ("Shanghai GDP Per capita," *Shanghai.gov*, 2019), finance, consumption, urban infrastructure, and the level of globalization. All of these advantages have helped cultivate the proud and arrogant attitude of the Shanghainese towards people from outside Shanghai. According to the theories of intersectionality,

Social divisions also exist in the ways people experience subjectively their daily lives in terms of inclusion and exclusion, discrimination and disadvantage, specific aspirations and specific identities. Importantly, this includes not only what they think about themselves and their communities but also their attitudes and prejudices towards others. (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 198)

The sense of pride and relevant attitude of Shanghai natives towards outsiders can be traced in Honig's (1986, 1992) historical accounts about how women factory workers from Subei, a poverty-stricken region in northern Jiangsu, were treated in Republican Shanghai. First, Subei women workers were discriminated in the division of labour in the cotton mills. For example, they were mostly doing dirty and difficult work with lower pay while women from Jiangnan (South of the Yangzi River) were doing light jobs with higher wages. Although women workers came from different regions, "their particular native place was crucial in shaping their experiences in Shanghai, both inside and outside the mills" (Honig, 1986, p. 57). In addition to discrimination in employment, Subei women migrants were also the objects of prejudice in many other respects, such as language and dressing style. The arrogant attitude of Shanghai natives has its long-standing historical roots.

Spectacular Scenes of Modern Shanghai Versus Cramped Rooms of WCMW

Back to the series, the opening scenes of each episode of *Ode to Joy* unfold with a panorama of the iconic modern Shanghai in the music of Beethoven's No. 9 Symphony *Ode to Joy*, while introducing the main characters of the series. At the beginning of the first episode, a bird's eye view highlights the famous TV tower – *Dongfang Mingzhu* (Oriental Pearl), the architectural icon of Shanghai's modernity, symbolizing the prosperity and modernity of Shanghai (See Figure 2). With the movement of the camera, a sequential photographing of modern skyscrapers (See Figure 3) and overpasses zoom in along the Huangpu River with high-speed trains passing by (See Figure 4). The spectacular images thus hint to the viewers that Shanghai, the dynamic modern city of China, is highly developed and full of opportunities, attractive to large numbers of migrants, male and female, to come and pursue their dreams for better lives.



2. Bird's Eye View of Shanghai 3. Modern Architectures of ShH 4. High-speed Train of ShH

In contrast to the brightly-toned and magnificent views of the Pudong New Area, the next few images exhibit the cramped and narrow living spaces of the three WCMW characters with a gloomy tone. The main setting of the TV drama is the residential property development “Ode to Joy,” where the main characters live. From its structure one can see that Apartment 2202 where the three WCMW characters live is originally a two-room unit. In order to accommodate three people, the owner has downsized the sitting room making space for another small bedroom, in

which Fan lives. From the perspective of the spectator, both the sitting room (See Figure 5) and, the bedroom (See Figure 6, Guan’s room) are cramped with very limited space for activity, not to mention the small room in which Fan lives, where every inch of her room is cramped with her everyday possessions (See Figure 7).



5. Cramped Sitting Room of 2202



6. Guan’s Small Room



7. Fan’s Small Room

The reason why the three migrant women share one rental apartment is not difficult to comprehend. On the one hand, the current housing policies of Shanghai (and some other large cities in China) restrict single persons without local *hukou* from buying houses (“Shanghai house purchase restrictions,” *the paper.cn*, 2020). On the other hand, even if there is no such restriction, the limited income of WCMW makes it nearly impossible to buy a home. This is represented in a sequence of Eps 1, S 1, in which Qiu says to Guan, “I only earn 4,000 Yuan. After paying my rent and daily necessities, I can hardly make ends meet without my father’s monthly support.” Then Guan echoes, “The same is true for me. I can’t afford to buy clothes, so it’s my mother who usually buys some for me. I’m only a window shopper.” Qiu emphasizes, “Suppose I work very hard and spend no money for a year, my salary can afford to buy only two square meters of a house in the outer ring of Shanghai.” It implies the high price of housing in Shanghai. Consequently, Qiu feels that her future is gloomy, and she is struggling with whether she should continue to stay in Shanghai or not. Table 4, Average Monthly Salary in Shanghai over the past few years, and Table 5, Life Standard Indicators of Shanghai in the year 2018,

further illustrate that migrant women are a marginalized group in Shanghai who cannot afford to buy homes with a lower-than-average salary and little disposable incomes.

Table 4, Average Monthly Salary of Shanghai (2014 to 2018) (RMB Yuan)

2018	7832
2017	7132
2016	6504
2015	5939
2014	5036

Source: 51sourcing.com., available at <https://www.51sourcing.com/post/47.html>

Table 5, Life Standard Indicators in Shanghai (2018)

Standard Items	Average Per Person
Housing	36.7 Square Meters
Car	Every 7 People
Purchasing Capacity	42304/person/year (Yuan)
Disposable Income	62596/person/year (Yuan)
Average Salary	9655/m (Yuan)
End-of-year Bonus	11913 (Yuan)
Commuting Time	14 Km (54 Mins on average)

Source: sh.leju.com (2018), available at <https://sh.leju.com/news/2018-04-07/16006384581263898229535.shtml>

Compared to the magnificent urban landscape outside their window, the small space of the three WCMW is like another world. The prevailing phenomenon that WCMW share rented rooms with poor living conditions in Shanghai can be easily found in other large cities such as Beijing, where millions of educated migrants come to seek opportunities for development. In China, over the past few decades, people refer to those educated youth who stay in Beijing without Beijing *hukou* as “*beipiao*” (“drifters” in Beijing, 北漂) (“Beijing Drifter,” *Chazidian*,

2020). While the “drifters” are striving for a better life in the megacity, they must have a place to live. Given the regulations in home buying and the high housing prices in Beijing, it has become a common practice among the migrants to share poor-condition rental rooms. Many of them live in basements, which are cold, damp, and lack sunlight, in order to save money. Even worse, when homeowners require them to move under “special circumstances,” they feel helpless without any other resources, or anyone to count on. This is evidenced by the experience of informant, Yu Li¹, of this study. In the early 2000s, when the region where Yu lived was officially designated as a construction site for the 2008 Olympic Games, the landlord asked Yu and her roommate, another migrant woman, to move within one week. They tried hard searching for a new place to live but could not find a suitable one as either the location was too far, or the rental prices were beyond their affordability. They cried together standing on the *Guomao* (International Trade) Bridge in the CBD of Beijing. Yu shouted, “Look at the numerous lights far and near, which one belongs to us?” (Interview notes). This imagery forms a sharp contrast to the warm and spacious houses of the local residents.

This scenario is also represented in the documentary entitled *The Group of Drifters: Hesitant Young people in Beijing (Beipiao Yizu: Zai Beijing Panghuang de Nianqingren)* (Lu & Guo, 2013). Set in the late 2000s, the film draws on the narratives of five young migrants, showing their hard times struggling for a better job in Beijing. Xu Linqing is one of them, who comes from Henan Province to strive for an opportunity in film industry. One of the most striking scenes of this documentary is the living conditions of migrant women. Figure 8 shows the six square-meter room, in which Xu shares with five other young migrant women by only four bunk beds. Figure 9 is the narrow and dark corridor of the building.

¹ For the confidentiality of informant’s identity, pseudonyms are used in this study.



8. Room shared by Xu and 5 Other Women



9. Dark and Narrow Corridor

This documentary reveals that amid the modern architectures and the millions-yuan houses of locals, WCMW's poor living conditions are not unique to *Ode to Joy*, rather, it is a common phenomenon in large cities. However, despite the harsh reality, the belief in the city as providing the possibility for their development and “being a part of an exciting modern world continue[s] to be a powerful incentive for these women to remain in the city for as long as possible” (Jacka, 2005, p. 63). Thus, representations on housing through contrast and comparison in *Ode to Joy* and beyond is effective in speaking to the experience of WCMW as “outsiders” in the megacity.

Comparisons of Housing between Local and Migrant Women in Ode to Joy

While representations through the contrasts between modern Shanghai and the poor living conditions of WCMW make sense in revealing the “outsider” status of WCMW characters, comparisons in housing between the two local women and the three WCMW in *Ode to Joy* likewise reinforce this theme as the series revolves around the stories of these five professional women on the same floor of a building as close neighbours. As introduced above, the three WCMW characters rent the apartment of 2202, whereas the two local women, Andy and Qu, live in the suites of 2201 and 2203 with ownership. Here the distinction appears between culture representation and real-life situation as in China's megacities, the social elites usually live in different quarters with people with lower income (Anagnost, 2008). In the same sequence

of Eps 1, S 1 above, Qiu and Guan have a conversation talking about their desires for a house in this building. Qiu says, “Guan, How I envy our neighbours! When will we be able to buy an apartment like this?” Guan agrees with Qiu, “Yes, the environment is so nice, and the size and layout of an apartment are very appropriate. Besides, it’s close to the metro. It is my dream to own an apartment here.” In the next sequence, what they hear in the lift is like a head-on blow to them. Qu’s father, who has just picked up Qu at the international airport and takes the same lift with Qu and Guan, sighs, “The environment of this neighbourhood is bad, and it has too little greenery. The space between buildings is too narrow like a pigeon cage. Is this a place for human beings? It’s much worse than the villa I prepared for you.” Then he complains about the poor quality of the lift. While Qiu and Guan are dreaming of having a “high-class” apartment here, Qu’s father looks down upon the building, which explicitly shows that the two migrant women characters are from a different world compared to the local woman, Qu.

Meanwhile, the purposes of the two “privileged” women characters living in this building are also intriguing. In the same episode, Qu’s mother reminds Qu that the purpose of her returning from abroad is to compete with her stepbrother, son of her father’s with his first wife, to inherit family property. She wonders why Qu chooses to live here instead of moving to the villa her father bought her. Qu’s mother worries that the expensive villa will go to Qu’s stepbrother. Qu explains, “The reason why I live here is to make my Dad feel guilty for me living in a “moderate” apartment. Then he will compensate me with a branch company. Compared to cars and houses, a company is more valuable. My target is vice president of a branch company.” The purpose of Qu living in this apartment building is just to deal with her father as an expediency. Similarly, the purpose of Andy, an overseas returnee, who lives in 2201, is also out of her temporary need – to find her lost brother, and help Tan, her friend, to conduct

an acquisition business. As her housing issue is handled by Tan, what she needs to do is just to inform him of her requirements for the house – “a quiet quarter not too far from company.” This is seen in Eps 1 of S 1 where Andy complains to Tan that her neighbours are too noisy, Tan responds to her that as it is a temporary lodge, he can buy another one near the river for her.

That’s why in Eps 17, S 1, Fan says to Andy, “When you decide to buy a house, it’s just a matter of a few words.” By contrast, to have a house in Shanghai is a great dream to Fan. She worries that her dream for a house will not be realized after learning that her boyfriend’s BMW 3 series is rented. To Fan, if a man is unable to buy even a BMW 3 series, how can he afford to buy a house and raise children, as in the Chinese cultural context, it is the man’s responsibility to buy a house, just as Fincher (2014) notes, in China, “home ownership is a defining feature of masculinity” (p. 59). While the three WCMW are cramped into one little apartment, Qu and Andy each one lives in a large apartment for a temporary need; and while buying a home in Shanghai is a breeze for Qu and Andy, it is a dream for the three migrants. The survey on a thousand migrant women conducted by All China’s Women’s Federation (ACWF) further reveals the living conditions of migrant women. It showed that most of the migrant women lived with others, and 45.7 percent share one room with 2-3 people, 3.7 percent live with more than 10 people, with a per capita area of less than 2 square meters (*“Survey Report on A Thousand Migrant Women,”* ACWF, 2007). Differences in housing between the two groups of women mirror structural differences in place and identity that are linked to income, residential status, and other institutional factors and their intersections. Representations of housing through contrasts/comparisons between WCMW and local women characters support the depiction of WCMW characters as “outsiders” in the megacity.

4.2 Differential Representations in *Ode to Joy*

In addition to the striking contrasts between the superbly modern Shanghai and the humble living conditions of WCMW characters, as well as the differences in access to housing resources between the local women and three migrant women characters as discussed in the last section, differential representations in personal behavioral pattern and capacity of characters likewise speak to the theme of WCMW characters as “outsiders” in the megacity in *Ode to Joy*. Feminist studies have shown that more and more scholars have acknowledged “the centrality of issues of representation in the reproduction of ... hierarchy” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1282). In line with the overarching research question of this study, “In what way does the TV drama series *Ode to Joy* represent the experiences of well-educated migrant women in a Chinese megacity?”, this section focuses on the differential representations of the two women characters, Qiu and Qu, highlighting the representational dimension of intersectionality to strengthen the argument of WCMW characters as “outsiders” in the megacity.

The Portrayals of Qiu as a “Sha Bai Tian” (傻白甜)

“*Shabaitian*,” an internet slang in China, literally meaning silly, white and sweet, refers to young women who are beautiful but simple and less sophisticated (“What’s the meaning of *Shabaitian*?,” *360doc*, 2016). In *Ode to Joy* Qiu is portrayed as such a simple-headed woman, who likes to eat and often has no idea what to do facing difficulties. In many sequences her representations revolve around eating. The way how Qiu eats is worth noting because eating cannot be ignored as it shows one’s upbringing (Yang, 2016). In other words, one’s behavioral pattern including the way he/she eats reflects his/her personal *suzhi*, a catchword in contemporary China, which means quality that connotes social hierarchies, often linking to one’s identity (Kipnis, 2006). In Eps 1, S 1, Qiu is having *xiaolongbao* (soup dumplings) with Guan.

Two details of the way Qiu eats food implicitly show that Qiu is unlike a mature urban adult. First, when there is only one soup dumpling left, Qiu takes it and eats it up quickly. She takes the whole piece of soup dumpling into her mouth (See Figure 10). Second, while she is eating with a mouthful of food, she talks to Guan, making her words unclear (See Figure 11), which indicates her poor table manners. Another example takes place in Eps 9, when Qiu is deeply depressed after losing both her job and boyfriend. While she is crying over her sufferings, she still eats without stop! (See Figure 12).



10. Qiu Eats Soup Dumpling 11. Qiu Talks while Eating 12. Qiu Keeps Eating while Crying

If eating is necessary for one's health and survival, then the way Qiu eats is portrayed as beyond the rational behaviour of an adult because when one is crying, he/she will normally not eat any food. The producers represent Qiu's extreme sadness – she is badly hurt by her loved one and her employer. As her two roommates are not available by her side to support and comfort her as if she was abandoned by the world, eating that can give her a sense of existence, is perhaps the best vent to express her depression and helplessness, even her resentment towards those who bully her. There can be lots of other ways to represent one's sad emotions. However, as the discourse on *suzhi* has become an official framework in “classifying Chinese people and has thus become a point of reference to understand ... gender and place of origin” (Xu, 2000, p. 17),

migrant woman character is a signifier of “otherness” – “She is, to use Judith Butler’s (1993) term, an ‘abject’ that threatens the project of national modernity. She is also an object of pity, titillation, and fascination. And she is a subject that must be both put to work and worked upon, if the project of modernity is to succeed” (as cited in Jacka, 2014, p. 31). The character of Qiu is well portrayed as an “outsider” of the megacity.

In addition to the portrayal of WCMW as “outsiders” in *Ode to Joy*, the experience of informant Zhao Qing of this study provides a first-hand account to strengthen the argument. Zhao works in a quasi-government organization in the city of Tianjin. As she comes from the interior province of Inner Mongolia, where there is less fresh seafood, whenever she attended a dinner/gathering with her local colleagues, she enjoyed eating more shrimp. Later she found that every time they ate together, her colleagues, especially the Director, always emphasized that they should let Zhao have more shrimp as she had not much chance to taste fresh seafood in her hometown before. Over time, their excessive hospitality has made her feel a kind of devaluation rather than warmth as it reminded her that she was an “outsider” from a far-away small city. Zhao expressed sentimentally, “I didn’t taste shrimp as a delicious food ever since then. Besides, I become inactive in attending the dinners or gatherings with my colleagues” (Interview notes). Zhao’s narratives suggest that one’s place of origin, plays a significant, if not determining, role in the shaping of his or her identity. Thus, when one group of people is deemed as the “Other,” they will be labeled and categorized inevitably one way or another by other group(s). The lowering representation of Qiu that reflects the intersecting differences of identity, is a good way of strengthening the argument that WCMW characters are “outsiders” in the megacity.

The Portrayals of Qu as a “Superwoman”

If portrayals of Qiu represent the images of WCMW characters as “outsiders” more directly in *Ode to Joy*, then the portrayals of Qu as a “superwoman” reinforce the theme otherwise by highlighting the “competencies” of a local woman character. Compared to the “*Shabaitian*” image of Qiu, the local woman character, Qu, is portrayed as a smart, charming, and extra capable figure. Qu is a “young nouveau-riche” (*fuerdai*, 富二代), a “playboy” type of woman playing with her Chinese friends and buying luxury goods while “studying” in the United States. Nonetheless, she is represented as being extremely smart, capable, and confident in whatever she wants to do, and able to achieve good results. There are plenty of storylines showing the character Qu’s “superpower” in *Ode to Joy*. This study focuses on two plotlines to present her “extraordinary” capacity. One is her pursuit of Zhao, the man she loves, and the other is her doing business.

In Eps 10 of Sn 1, Qu goes to the hospital after her ankle is hurt. As she finds that her doctor is a *gaofushuai* (高富帅), a tall and handsome young talent, she “flirts [with him] outrageously” (Sima, 2018, p. 39). Since then, she starts pursuing him with varied measures. Although she is diagnosed with only a slight wound, she pretends she is very painful and requests a name card from Zhao in order to “consult” him later (See Figure 13). Then, she searches for Zhao’s personal information through her networks and is pleased to learn that he is 31, unmarried, and is from Shanghai with a doctoral degree. Even though she gets to know that Zhao has a girlfriend, she is still bold in achieving her goal. She makes efforts to contact him wishing to “express her gratitude” in person. In episode 18 of season 1, her chance comes when Zhao is depressed after a surgical failure (See Figure 14). As she insists that he cannot drive home in such a bad mood, he agrees to take a ride with her, goes to dinner with her (See Figure

15), and they then go dancing together in a disco club (See Figure 16) until he is fairly relieved from depression.



13. Qu Gets Zhao's Card



14. Qu Comforts Zhao



15. Qu Has Dinner with Zhao



16. Qu and Zhao Dance Together

Step by step Qu “captures” Zhao. Though later Zhao finds that Qu is very shallow and wants to break up with her, she can still get over the crisis with her wits and confidence. The other plotline that represents Qu’s “superpower” is her capacity in doing business. After Qu returns from the USA, she starts up a small company. In order to show to her father that she is capable of doing business, she is determined to obtain the exclusive agency of a German air conditioner brand-GI. But as she has neither relevant knowledge nor experience, she faces lots of challenges. Firstly, she needs to develop a business plan. As her English is very poor, she cannot understand the English reference materials. This difficulty doesn’t stop her. Qu eagerly pleads with Andy, an excellent overseas returnee and CFO of a financial group, to help her (Eps 4 of S 1).

Andy is moved by Qu's "miserable" story: she was born into a complicated family. Qu's father favours her half-brother, and provides him a villa, luxury cars, and a few branches of his company while she has got nothing. So winning GI is her only opportunity to compete with her brother. She even fabricates that if she cannot accomplish this project, her mother might be abandoned as well, as her grandma does not like her, to arouse Andy's sympathy. Andy then helps her out at night out of sympathy. Magically, she completes the business plan in three days and is highly praised by her father. Next, she must attend a formal business negotiation with the foreign clients for the GI brand agency. Again, she becomes a "superwoman". During the negotiation, she continuously seeks answers from Andy for questions like "Why am I qualified for the agency?" through a "Bluetooth" earphone as if she has some spell that can evade the suspicion of the foreign professionals for her unusual talks. Again, she succeeds in the negotiation and wins the right of the agency (Eps 9, S 1). Anyone who has common sense in business can tell that Qu is a layman. Unless the business partner has decided to offer the agency to Qu beforehand, Qu's performance is hardly convincing.

If Qu succeeds in capturing the heart of a man she loves with her charm and her smartness, it is not impossible, as sometimes romance does not develop in a logical way, though there are quite a few far-fetched depictions. For instance, the sequence (images 14 to 16) above shows that Zhao, the highly educated physician, follows Qu to dinner, then to a disco dancing club obediently at a time when they are not so familiar with each other, and when their relations are just between doctor and patient. However, her competence in doing business can be hardly acceptable in a normal sense. First, her company is in effect a branch under her father's umbrella – she has used the resources of her father to start up a business in terms of capital, office venue, and business networks. Second, she is far from getting ready for a formal business negotiation

with foreign clients. Her English, her knowledge, and her business experience all fall short of the requirements. Instead of her “superpower”, it is Andy (perhaps the real super woman), who ensures her “success” in obtaining the GI brand agency.

Whether the portrayals of Qu are meant to claim that local women have superb capacity or not, such portrayals of Qu in these “unusual” plots suggest that local women are more capable and intelligent compared to migrant women. The key point is that these local women have sufficient resources they need to achieve their goals. More importantly, from the perspective of social identity, they can enjoy an “in-group privilege” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1293) to be represented “positively” by the producers, who are also the social elites. And as the socially constructed categories of identity and “the narratives on which they are based have privileged some experiences and excluded others” (ibid, p. 1298), representations of the differences in behavioral patterns and capacities between local women and WCMW characters well support the argument that the latter are “outsiders” in the megacity. They further strengthen the notion of intersectionality that social divisions also exist in the representational dimension.

4.3 Gender Inequality Encountered by WCMW Represented in Unequal Treatment from Family and WCMW as “Leftover Women”

Fan’s Suffering of Unequal Treatment in Her Family Represented by Her Cries

“A person’s family is her destiny, s/he can’t change it.” – Fan (Eps 27, S 1, Ode to Joy)

Fan comes from a small city. She was born into a poor family of son preference, a cultural practice, in which sons are preferred over daughters that is deeply rooted in rural China (Lu & Tao, 2015). In Fan’s case, she is treated unequally by her family in two dimensions: one, she is put in a subordinate position as a daughter; two, as she migrates to a large city, she is expected to support the family because she makes “big” money in their eyes, as “in China, the

average wage increases with city size” (Pan et al, 2019, p. 193). So, since Fan got a job in Shanghai, she has continuously sent money home as a filial daughter. Just as what Fincher (2014) observed about the son-privileged families in China, in which not only parents buy homes only for sons, “they often pressure their daughter into helping them buy the brother a home” (p. 82). Fan has paid the down payment for her brother’s house, and also his mortgage, even paying all the expenses for her little nephew. However, her economic capacity is limited. In addition to the family burden, she must pay her own expenses. Sometimes she must borrow money to fill the “bottomless hole” of her family. She is exhausted in dealing with her family’s financial issues. As an ordinary woman living in an unfamiliar megacity, she needs love and support from her family, but her family cannot give such things to her.

Many times, when Fan feels helpless facing family issues, she cries. So, in *Ode to Joy*, what strikes viewers most in Fan’s storyline are the scenes in which Fan cries by herself. Just from a preliminary statistic from episodes 27, 32, and 33 of season 1, this study found approximately 18 scenes in which Fan sadly cries. Figure 17 shows a sequence in Eps 27 of S 1: Fan’s mother asks her to pay the debts for his brother otherwise the “relatives” of the man who was wounded by him will ruin their home. Extremely sad, Fan cries at a curbside after getting off a bus. Figure 18 is also a sequence from Eps 27 where Fan hears through her mother’s phone call that a gang of “creditors” are threatening them to pay the money otherwise they will be in danger. As she cannot go there to help, she promises to borrow money, but she is still worried for them at that moment and she cries sadly. Fan has many reasons to cry. First, she was born into a poor rural family, which always requests money from her. Second, she is unequally treated by the patriarchal family. Third, she is unable to change the situation – poverty and patriarchy of her

family. Fourth, she lives a hard life in Shanghai lack of necessary resources and with no one to count on while she needs to appear very strong. So, deep in her heart she is very painful.



17. Fan Cries at a Bus Stop



18. Fan Cries Worrying about Her Mother



19. Fan Cries at a Concert



20. Fan Feels Unequally Treated

Figure 19 presents, at a string quartet concert of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* invited by Guan, Fan cries silently (Eps 25, S 1). The symphony *Ode to Joy* with a pleasant tone usually brings happy feelings to the audience, However, as Fan's life is filled with sorrows, anything might trigger her sentiment. Figure 20 is a scene in Eps 36 S 1, in which Fan goes home together with her neighbours to confront with the "creditors". Fan tells her mother that she decides to provide them less money and no more money for her brother. Her mother is angry with her "cruelty". On the way back, Fan cannot help crying, "Why are you treating me like this?" She is so sad being oppressed by the unequal family. According to Crenshaw (1991), "intersectional subordination need not to be intentionally produced; in fact, it is frequently the consequence of the imposition

of one burden that interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment” (p. 1249). Fan’s case illustrates that her sufferings are a result of the intersections of class, gender, place of origin, and regional differences.

In 2019, another TV drama series *Doutinghao*, (*All is Well* 都挺好) became popular in China. It tells the stories of love, hatred, and struggles among family members, highlighting the self-empowerment of the female protagonist, Su Mingyu, who protests the oppression in the son-privileged family and finds her pathway to business success in a large company. This series was adapted from the novel of Ah Nai, who is also the author of the novel *Ode to Joy* and was produced by the same company – Daylight TV and Film Corporation. In addition, the two protagonists – Fan and Su, both come from son-preference families. So, viewers of these two TV series have been active in online post bars comparing the two characters. While affirming Su’s ambition and success she strives to change her life, many viewers have different opinions on Fan. For example, viewer Dela (2019) thinks that while Su, who would not give herself up to fate, works extremely hard and creates opportunities for development, Fan, however, dreams to marry a rich man to change her life. Instead of focusing on work and improving herself, she spends a lot of time studying the hobbies of rich men. As she intends to rely on a man to change her life, she is wrong from the outset, and she is destined to be disappointed. Another viewer, Youyi (2018), on the other hand, thinks that Fan, who comes to Shanghai from a small city, has made great efforts in striving for a better life with a heavy family burden. Unlike Su, who cut ties with her family, Fan is not so “cruel”. Her life has been connected to her family. No matter how hard life is for her, Fan never stops supporting her family. So, her life is “ruined” by her family.

Reading between the lines of the two televisual texts, it is easy to find that although both characters encounter unequal treatment in son-privileged families, they are different at least in

three respects: first, Su is not a migrant. She is a resident of Suzhou, a big city near Shanghai, where *All is Well* is set, whereas Fan is a migrant who comes to Shanghai from a small city. Secondly, Su cuts ties with her family at a young age when she no longer tolerates her mother who bought her brother a house at the cost of her own room, whereas Fan does not do so no matter how hard it is for her to support the family. Lastly, Su meets Meng, boss of a large enterprise, at the saddest time of her life, who helps her out while Fan is not so lucky like Su. Fan has to fight on her own.

As previously evidenced, one's *hukou* status is crucial to his/her life in a big city. Today, China's policies on *hukou* have become much more relaxed than in the past, making it possible for rural migrants to work in urban areas. However, the *hukou* system has not fundamentally changed in megacities such as Shanghai and Beijing, and "*hukou* still plays a decisive role in shaping rural migrants' experiences, social identity, and sense of belonging" in those big city (Zhang, 2002, p. 275). In other words, an urbanity, who has local *hukou*, can have much more resources than a rural migrant, hence more opportunities to achieve her/his goal in either career or emotional life, and vice versa. Then, for most people, it is hard to cut ties with one's family, emotionally or materially, even if being unequally treated just as Fan, who would manage to send money home through various ways every time she hears her mother pleading for help, as family matters much to her, and to most of other common people. Moreover, not many people can have the kind of luck as Su, who meets Meng, president of a large company, to take her as his "disciple" in business and lead her to success in her difficult times. In reality, fewer people can be so lucky like the character Su, who can get help by "a great savior" at the badly needed moment. What Fan can count on in the city is just herself – her body, her intelligence, and her efforts, as a reliable resource, where she does not have a local status.

Fan is treated unequally by her son-preference family – she is put in the position much lower than that of her brother. On the one hand, her mother takes it for granted that Fan’s brother should be prioritized in the family just because he is a son. As “Confucianism imposes strict requirements and heavy burdens on women” (Jia & Zhang, 2017, p. 10), in China, particularly in rural areas, where the Confucian tradition of son privilege is deeply rooted, many families would sacrifice the benefits of their daughters in nutritious food, education, and even in marriage to guarantee the wellbeing of the sons (ibid). On the other hand, the gender norm that women should be subordinated to men has been naturalized in both women and men such as Fan’s brother, Shengying. In a number of episodes of *Ode to Joy*, one can see that Shengying does not feel ashamed to rely on his sister in buying a house, paying housing loans, and raising his son. Even his job as a security guard was obtained by Fan through the help of her classmate. After he loses his job due to fighting with his manager, he still asks Fan to borrow money to help him compensate the wounded. Fan’s experiences in her family has revealed that she is victimized by gender inequality that is rooted in the Confucian family tradition.

WCMW as “Leftover Women”

“Leftover women” (*shengnü* 剩女) has become a buzzword in China in recent years. It refers to urban educated professional women in their late twenties or older who are still unmarried (Fincher, 2014), and some categorize *shengnü* more specifically as “unmarried women over the age of 27 with advanced degrees” (Feldshuh, 2018, p. 39). This derogatory term that has been officially defined by the Ministry of Education of the PRC since 2007 and perpetuated by the All China’s Women’s Federation (ACWF) signifies a campaign to pressure such women “to stop being so ambitious and get married” (Fincher, 2014, p. 3). It makes young professional women confronting a “moralised female sexuality” (Sima, 2018, p. 39) that forces

them to choose from being an unsociable housewife or “a powerful woman (*nüqiangren*, 女强人) who achieves success at the expense of her feminine charm” (ibid). In addition, the ways in which the term “*shengnü*” is employed in official discourse and popular media imply that “women in this category present a social problem” (Feldshuh, 2018, p. 39) in China.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the natural sex ratio of male to female at birth is about 105 to 100 (cited in Barr, 2019). However, according to the most recent UN data of the 2015-2020 medium, the sex ratio at birth in China is roughly 113 :100 (“Sex ratio at birth,” UN Data, 2020), far exceeding the normal range. In addition, data from UN and World Bank indicates that in 2019, there were 37.465 million more men than women in China (“List of Countries by Sex Ratio,” *Statistics times*, 2019). The unbalanced sex ratio means that more men will face the challenge of finding wives, not the other way around. In effect, the *shengnü* phenomenon is not just an issue of sex ratio in China, it also involves other more complex issues such as stereotype, social-economic status, and official discourse etc. In addition, in the Chinese cultural context, marriage normally follows the principle of *mendang hudui* (matching socio-economic status) based on each other’s *tiaojian* or qualifications, a multifaceted concept that may include conditions such as age, education, personality, income, physical characteristics, class, family background and resources. It is a reflection of “the specific political-economic context” (Fan, 2000, p. 441). It implies that people usually find their spouses with equal or similar *tiaojian*, such as region and the *hukou* status, which means it is not easy for WCMW to marry local men.

Nonetheless, there is still possibility for WCMW to marry local men. According to the studies of Ding et al (1999), who examined the growth and characteristics of rural-urban marriages, the number of such migration marriages in Shanghai has increased dramatically since

the 1990s, in which the side from other areas were mostly women. For example, among the registered migration marriages in Shanghai from 1991 to 1995, migrant women comprised 91.6 percent of the total number of 35,830 (ibid). Then, research conducted by Zhang and Gao (2014) on migration marriage from 2004 to 2012 shows that the momentum of such kind of marriages, in which migrant women marry Beijing males, remains great in recent years. For example, in 2004, migrant women comprised 95.54 percent of the total number of 100,070, while in 2012, this number reached 96.03 percent in the total number of 129,440 migration marriages (ibid). However, those marriages overwhelmingly featured that migrant women were young, better educated and capable while the local men were mostly characterized with low-wages, unemployment, and/or with mental or physical disabilities, “factors that decrease their value in the urban marriage market” (Gaetano, 2008, p. 640).

Urban *hukou* status is key leverage in migrant marriage, rendering the urban side in a relatively superior position and making up for their deficiencies in age, physical appearance, income, and education etc. to a certain extent (Zhang and Gao, 2014). For many educated migrant women, if they do not want to be “leftover”, they could probably choose their spouses from male migrants who do not have local *hukou*, which means they will not have the rights to enjoy the welfare benefits of urbanities. Or if they do not want to live a hard life with a migrant partner in the city, some of them could seek to marry a marginalized local man who received social welfare benefits with an urban *hukou*, enduring the defects of their husbands’ physical or mental health after they get married. Informants’ experiences of this study shed some lights in this regard albeit indirectly. For example, Zhang Yuhua and her boyfriend are from Anhui Province. As they do not have Beijing *hukou*, they have encountered various difficulties and challenges in Beijing, such as in employment, particularly in housing. They moved from one

place to another to find cheap lodging. Similarly, Huang Qin and her husband have lived in rented rooms in Beijing after they got married for reasons mentioned previously. In addition, they cannot afford to have a child as they do not have enough resources to raise children in housing, medical insurance, and public education that are bestowed to local citizens.

Although Huang is married to a migrant man, when asked whether any of her friends or classmates are married to local men in Beijing, Huang gave me an affirmative answer. However, she felt ambivalent for those whose husbands are marginalized urbanities. For Huang, that kind of marriage is like a deal made between the two sides (i.e. female beauty for a Beijing *hukou*) (Interview notes). The underlying premise of this kind of marriage matching is the existence of unequal institutional system that excludes people like WCMW from enjoying normal rights for an urban life, just as what Butler (1990) asserts, “gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (p. 3). WCMW, who do not enjoy equal rights in citizenship with the urbanities, easily become victims of gender inequality, such as in the labeling of “*shengnü*” in China, which is discussed next.

Fan as a “Leftover Woman” Represented through Visual and Audio Elements

The “leftover woman” phenomenon has become a “mass media campaign” (Fincher, 2014, p. 15) that pushes the unmarried profession women to go all out to find a husband. In *Ode to Joy*, one can see that almost every migrant woman character faces the pressure of becoming a “leftover woman,” particularly Fan. According to the commonly recognized category of single woman in China, Fan has become a “*bishengke*” – “one who must triumph” at the age of 30 (Fincher, 2014, p.16). Other similar titles include *shengdoushi* – “leftover warriors” aged 25-27; *douzhan shengfo* – “Buddha of victorious battles” aged 31-35; and *qitian dasheng* – “Great Sage Equal of Heaven” aged 35 and older” (ibid, p. 17). Therefore, Fan is anxious to marry a local

rich guy to change her status. She tries numerous blind dates and goes to various parties. Fan's anxiety is well represented by the description of a voiceover in the opening episode of *Ode to Joy*. To highlight her efforts in dressing up for a blind date, a male voiceover introduces:

Fan Shengmei, 30 years, experienced HR in a foreign-invested company, is a worldly and sociable woman and a reliable friend. She is determined to find a rich husband. But those who pursued her have little money, and those with a lot of money have no interest in her. Seeing that she is slowly turning from a beautiful woman into a 'leftover woman', she has to be more and more courageous on the way to blind dating.

What is expressed above by the voiceover has an explicit gendered stance. First, the title of “leftover woman” is imposed upon Fan just because she is 30 years old, the socially constructed age of being “leftover.” Second, it speaks only about her objective – to find a rich local husband while overlooking the causes why she needs to marry such a man. Third, it only emphasizes that rich men have no interest in her, and does not provide any convincing reasons for that. Outside of Fan's “advanced age” and her migrant woman identity, she is a woman with good qualifications such as appearance, personality, and education. However, in the Chinese cultural context, in which male dominance and gender norms still have profound influences, and where *mendang hudui* practice is prevalent in romantic relationship and marriage that involves socio-economic status and gendered power relations, single professional women at a certain age are labelled as “leftover women” for the purposes of maintaining social stability as well as improving population quality according to China's mainstream rhetoric (Fincher, 2014). And the official discourse of “leftover women” has meant that gender roles are redefined by the state as derivatives of national interests (Xu, 2000). Consequently, Fan's age, her rural status, and her migrant women identity not only cannot be overlooked, instead, they work together to reinforce inequalities and impact her wellbeing.

Moreover, as the voiceover is from a male perspective, though it sounds impressive with a magnetic voice, it produces an effect of oppression, or even a sense of insult, to the victimized “leftover woman.” Similar representation by a male voiceover with the rhetoric of Fan as a “leftover” woman is also found in a sequence of Eps 12, S 1 of *Ode to Joy*, where Qu, the rich woman, encourages Fan to “play with” men with her good traits. Then, a man’s voice speaks,

“Yes, Qu is right, Fan has a good job and salary. She looks pretty, and with good tastes. All this could have made her live an easy and carefree life like Qu. However, she is more aware that age ranks the top among all other capitals, particularly in this area [of Shanghai].”

Regardless whether it is more effective to “tell” the inner feeling of a female character by a male voice, the use of a male voiceover carries some gender-bias connotations in depicting Fan’s “awkward scenario.” According to Fincher (2014), in China’s urban culture, while educated women in their late twenties face the crisis of being “leftover”, more educated single men over 30 are considered “in their golden ages, without the slightest bit of pressure to marry... and enjoy a privileged position in society in spite of the sex ratio imbalance” (p. 22). This presents another aspect of gender inequality in the male-dominated Chinese society.



21. Fan Applies a Pink Lipstick



22. Fan Takes off Her Pink Slip



23. Fan Wears a Pair of Red High Heels



24. Fan Enjoys Her Red Dress

In addition, the above four images that accompany the male voiceover are highly sexualized. It is represented through the way Fan dresses up, such as, repeatedly showing her nude legs and her slip being taken off, and the feminine colour tone around her – pink lips (See Figure 21), pink slip (See Figure 22), red stiletto heels (See Figure 23), and red dress (See Figure 24). Moreover, to add weight to feminine representation, Fan, who puts on a bright red dress with a sexual pose, speaks in the mirror accompanying a close-up shot of her body, “I’ve got a hot body and good tastes. You deserve it!” (*Woyouliao Woyoupin Nizhide Yongyou*, 我有料, 我有品, 你值得拥有) emphasizing her beauty and sex appeal. To Fan, her personal attributes and all of her efforts to make herself more beautiful help her achieve her goal to marry a rich local guy. It shows that “The feminine was not only imagined and inscribed but also self-desired” (Pun, 1999, p. 15). In a similar way, the highlighted red colour clothing is found in Eps 30 of S 1, in which Fan goes to a golf course with Qu Linajie (brother of Qu), a rich businessman. One can see that Fan wears red sportswear when playing golf. Lianjie at first teaches her to play golf by holding her arms (See Figure 25), then he kisses her unexpectedly while “teaching” her (See Figure 26). Next, Fan changes to a fancy red dress that is bought by Lianjie showing his “affection” to her, for which Fan takes as a message that Lianjie falls in love with her (See Figure 27).



25. Lianjie as a Nice Coach



26. Lianjie as a “Lover”



27. Fan Feels the “Love” of Lianjie

Fan then spends a night with him “willingly”. Later, when Fan expects her romantic relationship with Lianjie, it turns out that he is not serious at all, but simply “plays” with her, which makes Fan very disappointed. Lamentably, neither the red colouring nor her sensuality can bring Fan the emotion she desires. Even worse, sexualized femininity “reinforces a local urban cultural hierarchy” (Gaetano, 2008, p. 635).

Fan’s failure in romance is not because she lacks good qualities – she is very pretty, well-educated and has personal charm and good personality. Then, the reason why she cannot acquire the love she wants can be related to what intersectionality theories stress that inequalities derived from race, place of origin, class, gender, and their intersections categorize people into different groups and put specific groups in a privileged position while place other groups and individual in low social and economic positions based on identity classification and power relations (Pun, 1999; Dill & Zambrana, 2009). It indicates that due to Fan’s identity differences – that she was born in a poor rural family from a small city, and that she is a migrant woman at an “advanced age”, in addition to the official discourse of “*shengnü*”, it is easy for Fan to be put in an unequal and subordinate positionality in sexual relationship. In addition, the phenomenon of “leftover women” in China and the promotion by the state media and other institutions “reflects societal stereotypes, illuminating how the intersection of gender, sexuality and age creates a disadvantage

for women that is reflected in the wider ‘left-over women’ discourse” (Liu, 2017, P. 125). These geographical, genealogical, and cultural elements all work together to impact the life of Fan. Therefore, representation of the character Fan as a “leftover woman” is compelling through character’s sexuality, feminine colour, and male voiceover that effectively strengthens the argument of gender inequality.

4.4 Summary of Findings

In line with the overarching research question, “In what way does the TV drama series *Ode to Joy* represent the experiences of well-educated migrant women in a megacity in China?” this chapter covered various ways of representation in *Ode to Joy* relating to the themes pertinent to the experiences of WCMW characters. Using the technique of screenshot and an interpretive approach, this chapter delineated the intersection of gender, place of origin, social strata, official discourse, stereotype, and regional disparity that reinforce each other to impact the wellbeing of WCMW characters, highlighting the two dimensions of structural and representational intersectionality. Section one traced the historical root cause of the attitude of Shanghai natives towards “outsiders”, discussed the sharp contrast between modern Shanghai landscapes versus the poor living conditions of WCMW characters, and compared housing between local urban women and WCMW characters. It identifies the difference between culture representation and real-life situation as in China’s megacities, the social elites usually live in different quarters with people with lower income. The scenario where the “privileged” group live together with the “disadvantaged” group does not reflect real-life situation in present-day China. In addition, informants’ first-hand materials were adopted to enrich the analysis. Through contrast and comparison, WCMW characters’ status as “outsiders” in the megacity looms larger.

Section two focused on the differential representations of the WCMW character Qiu and the local woman Qu. The comparisons of characters' behaviours and personal capacities represent the smart and all-round characteristics of local women and the clumsy and unsophisticated characters of migrant women highlighting the argument of WCMW characters as "outsiders". Section three interpreted gender inequality experienced by WCMW characters in terms of unequal treatment in the son-preference family and being labeled as "leftover women". In China, the term "*shengnü*" involves the intersected forces of gender norms, stereotypes, national interests, and economic considerations. They work together to impose gender inequalities on women as represented by the character Fan's case in *Ode to Joy*.

Chapter 5 Extra Findings on the Representation of WCMW in *Ode to Joy*

In addition to the findings regarding the representations of WCMW as “outsiders” in the megacity, differential representations of characters, and unequal treatment in relation to gender inequality in the family, as well as WCMW as “leftover women”, this chapter will dwell on some other findings pertaining to the representation of issues and experiences of WCMW in *Ode to Joy*. It focuses on the following themes: 1) Employment status of WCMW characters; 2) Impacts of social stratification on WCMW characters; and 3) WCMW characters’ agency and resilience in redefining their identities. In light of the overarching research question “In what way does the TV drama series *Ode to Joy* represent the experiences of well-educated migrant women in a megacity in China?”, this chapter takes an interpretative approach analyzing the issues of such women through the representations of character’s facial expressions and the theme song.

5.1 Employment Issues of WCMW Represented in *Ode to Joy*

The way in which WCMW characters’ experiences in employment are represented in *Ode to Joy* embodies one of the most striking distinctions between the early-period migrant women and the new generation of well-educated migrant women. Previous literature on migrant women has focused on the experiences of *dagongmei* (working sisters), who were mostly doing blue-collar work either as maids in households or as factory workers in the export processing industries in China’s coastal cities, particularly in the Shenzhen SEZ of Guangdong province. This study, however, focuses on the representations of experiences of well-educated migrant women in a more developed cosmopolitan setting, in which migrant women increasingly work as white-collar workers in foreign companies and/or private sector under a more competitive labour market environment in the new millennium.

In current Chinese labour market, jobseekers generally find jobs in four categories: public service, state-run business, foreign company (or joint venture), and private enterprise. As the first two have many strict restrictions for application, such as work experience in relevant social service and local *hukou* status, migrant graduates would mostly select foreign companies or private enterprises for employment as they are comparatively less “formal” in the threshold of entrance. So, in *Ode to Joy*, we see that the three WCMW characters are all portrayed working in the non-public and non-SOE sectors – Guan and Fan work in foreign-owned businesses while Qiu works in a private company. This is not to say that these two kinds of employment are not good. By examining the representations of the WCMW characters in *Ode to Joy*, this study finds that these jobs involve more competition, pressures, and uncertainties.

First, the representation of Guan presents a good example of the issue in employment. In *Ode to Joy*, Guan works in a foreign company as an intern. She is portrayed as a character working very hard to compete with those from elite schools aiming to obtain an opportunity for employment. Why is Guan so eager to get transformed from internship to employment in the company? One interpretation is that as a migrant woman what she can rely on is just her own effort and ability. As she can hardly get a job in a SOE that features the easy, stable, and stress-free working mode (Liu, 2017), Guan and those like her are left with an option no better than working in a foreign company as Rofel (2007) notes, “individuals find their proper niche in the world order as subjects” (p. 31). Comparatively, a job in a foreign company not only can earn more money, it also carries a more modern image, and probably, it offers more opportunities to learn advanced skills though it often involves instability, great work intensity, and huge performance pressure (Zhang and Li, 2009). In the company, Guan feels hugely pressured in competing with more “privileged” colleagues – those with local status and/or from famous

universities. As she often works overtime with little sleep, she is portrayed as a sleepyhead. It is not rare that she falls asleep in the washroom (Eps 16, S 1). Moreover, Guan is resented for being treated unfairly in the company; she complains to Andy, her idol, that as an “outsider” intern she has done many things against her heart, and is often wronged for work errors made by others who have “good *guanxi*” with the management (Eps 16, S 1).

The portrayal of character Qiu presents another example on the issue of employment. Qiu works in a private company as a junior officer. Just because she exposes the misconduct of Bai, who takes advantage of his position to bring himself improper profits, in front of other employees, she is fired by the company. If the reason why Qiu is fired because her behavior breaks the labour law or impairs the interests of the company is not convincing, one possibility is that this form of arbitrary firing in the informal sector happens to her because she is a migrant worker, a female migrant in particular (Chen, 2013; Zhang et al, 2010). That migrant women are vulnerable in this respect has been indicated by scholars such as Fan (2000), who notes, “the general lack of labour protection laws and their enforcement has rendered... female migrants especially to discrimination, violation of rights and sexual harassment” (p. 436). And, according to Zhang et al., in many Chinese companies, employees are differentially treated based on their *hukou* status. It is not only the symbolic meaning of *hukou* that matters in what can be termed “othering,” but also the material value of *hukou* status. This argument is based on research conducted in 12 firms and interviews with 33 executives and 37 migrants and managers in Shanghai and Jiangsu regarding human resource management (HRM) practice. Table 6 highlights the phenomena whereby urban citizens were treated as core employees whereas rural migrants as peripheral workers. The researchers asserted that the hierarchical division in HRM practice reflects the larger institutional environment in China.

Table 6, Comparison of HRM Practices for Urban Employees and Rural Migrant Workers

HRM activities		Urban workers	Rural migrant workers
Recruitment	Position	Mainly technical and managerial	Mainly auxiliary
	Employment type	Mainly contracted	Mainly casual workers
Training	Content	Mainly operational and technical skills, safety, discipline and law knowledge Further study for skill certificate or college degree	Mainly basic operation skills, safety, discipline and law knowledge
	Amount	Extensive	Limited
Reward system	Salary	Mainly performance-and efficiency-based	Mainly piece-rate, time-rate or fixed
	Benefits	Full benefits	Partial benefits, no paid leave, less bonus
Performance evaluation	Honour rights	Full honour rights	Some firms evaluate the performance separately
	Promotion	More opportunity, can be managers of all levels	Less opportunity, confined to team leaders
Social security		The majority has been covered	The majority not covered
Unionization		Most are union members	Most are not members

Source: Zhang et al, 2010, p. 389

This table shows that migrant workers have fewer opportunities for training, welfare benefits, social insurance, and promotion than urban employees. They can only access partial benefits, and their employment type is mainly casual workers. The wage level of migrants is generally lower than that of local employees, “despite a marked improvement in income, rural migrants in Shanghai are still segregated from urban residents” (Pan et al, 2019, p. 194). This is exemplified by the case of Qiu, who earns only 4,000 Yuan monthly, far below the average wage level of Shanghai residents as exhibited before in Table 4. Qiu has to rely on her father, who sends money to her monthly to support her. Migrant status is a barrier for migrant women to enjoy equal treatment in employment. The blockade of *hukou* still exists in many SOEs in China’s megacities. For example, the job posting of Beijing Water Supply Group on March 26, 2020, for the positions of computer network, accounting, HR management, business administration, and clerk etc., clearly stipulated that the prerequisites for application include “non-agricultural Beijing *hukou*” among other qualifications (“Beijing Tap Water Group,” *Offcn.com.*, 2020). Xu (2000), who observed the hierarchies of employment relating to Subei migrant women in the silk factories of southern Jiangsu in the 1990s, asserts, “Job stratification is based on gender and place of origin, and Subei migrant women workers are at the bottom” (p. 13). Following a similar vein, WCMW characters in the new millennium have also encountered employment discrimination linked to differences of gender and place of origin, or their migrant women identities. As “gender intersects with class, ethnic [place of origin], sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (Butler, 1990, p. 3), portrayals of Guan and Qiu as marginalized women in employment further strengthen the argument that WCMW characters are faced with intersected inequalities, which impact their wellbeing in a megacity. They are compelling representations of the experiences of well-educated migrant women in *Ode to Joy*.

5.2 Impact of Social Stratification on WCMW in *Ode to Joy*

An Overview of Social Strata in Ode to Joy

Ode to Joy was produced in 2015, more than 35 years after China carried out its reform and open policies, and is set in the early 2010s. During the three and half decades since China started its reform and opening in the late 1970s, China has undergone tremendous changes socially and economically. One of the most striking features of the changes is the unbalanced social development with the formation of a group of social elites, such as, SOE managers, real estate developers, enterprise owners, and other high-end professionals, such as doctors and TV program producers. The class model under Mao's regime was replaced by social strata resembling ladders that aspire people to climb up (Anagnost, 2008). Shanghai, as a frontline of China's reform and opening to the outside world, is prominent in economic development, and in social strata as well.

According to official data, the per capita GDP in Shanghai in 2015 was 103,796 Yuan ("Per Capita GDP of Shanghai," *Stats.gov.cn*, 2016), whereas during the same period Guizhou in the southwest only had a per capita GDP of 29,847 Yuan ("Per Capita GDP of Guizhou," *Stats.gov.cn*, 2016). The comparisons reflect the regional disparities of development. In addition, in recent years, the practice of mapping the social strata has become an important aspect of popular culture, especially the representation of the middle class (Anagnost, 2008), and differences in economic status among individuals have become increasingly pronounced. However, the proliferation of images of "successful men" (*chenggong renshi*) depends on the marginalisation of other social groups such as rural migrants (Sun, 2005). As Hou Hongliang, producer of *Ode to Joy*, stated, the show "objectively" exhibited the so-called elite strata and the second rich generation ("Hou Hongliang: *Ode to Joy*," *China Daily*, 2016), the theme of social

stratification in China has been extensively expressed in the TV series. For example, Qiu is greatly depressed after she loses her job, then her father suggests her to read some successful stories to uplift her spirits. However, Andy discourages Qiu to read those “fake stories” (Eps 10, S 1). Andy as a “successful” woman, stands at a higher position to “teach” Qiu, but she cannot be in the shoes of Qiu over that matter. In addition, Qu’s labeling of Fan as a “*laoniū*” (fishing woman) and mocking Fan’s clothing as “*ditanhuo*” (cheap stall goods) (Eps 6, S 1) all reflect that Qu is higher up in economic and social status than Fan. In the first episode, Andy shows up in her super luxury car, and Qu’s father despises the buildings in the “Ode to Joy” property development, which are all associated with the classification of strata in China.

Mapping Social Strata of the Main Characters in Ode to Joy

The narratives of each character in the series reveal a picture of the main characters’ social strata: 1) Qiu, from a small town with no “big” background, comes to Shanghai with parents’ expectations. She can hardly make ends meet with a salary of 4,000 Yuan only. As she is simple headed “with lower IQ and EQ,” in the words of viewer Cui (2016), she tends to be in a lower stratum, and it is hard for her to climb higher. But as she works hard, she anticipates being self-sufficient in the near future. 2) Guan, a migrant from a small city, though an intern with a little income currently like Qiu, works in the financial sector with excellent English proficiency, which is important in a foreign company; she has great potential to climb higher up the social ladder if she continues to work hard and come to terms with the “privileged” colleagues after her internship. 3) Fan, from a poor family, with a much higher salary than that of Qiu or Guan, is dragged down by her family burden. By emphasizing too much on her outside “packaging” rather than improving herself inwardly, it is hard to change her mid-lower strata. 4) Qu, a rich second generation, belongs to a middle-upper class family, as indicated by the way her father

sends her to study in the USA, buys luxury villas and helps with Qu's start up. More importantly, Qu is smart in taking advantages of available resources, which is reflected in the ways she does business. It looks like she can go up further. 5) Andy, graduate of Columbia University Business School, and CFO of a financial group with a very high salary in addition to her property in America, is regarded as a "gold-collar" worker, a successful woman ("What strata is each person at," *Zhihu*, 2016). Although there are variables in measuring a social strata, Qu and Andy are apparently in the rank of upper-middle class.

Intersectionality attempts to unveil the processes of subordination and the ways those processes are experienced by people who are subordinated (Crenshaw, 1991). It focuses on the "particular values attached to the categories and the way those values foster and create social hierarchies" (ibid, p. 1297). With regard to the impact of social strata on the characters in *Ode to Joy*, Guan's experience of romance is a good example. Guan is a new graduate from a common university with a good personality. Although she comes from a relatively well-to-do family, her father still wants Guan to develop herself in Shanghai, the modern megacity, which implies differences in regions and related factors. Compared to her two roommates, Guan seems less anxious to find a partner. On the one hand, as she works very hard to compete with those from elite universities as an intern in a prestigious foreign company, she has less time and energy for that. On the other hand, she does not like blind dates for finding a boyfriend like her roommate Fan. So, she has rejected several match making occasions. She is determined to find a "Mr. Right" herself. The day comes when she meets Zhao, a handsome physician, at a music store and concert afterwards. She is deeply attracted by his artistic temperament.

However, it turns out that Zhao becomes the boyfriend of Qu, her rich neighbour. As mentioned earlier, Qu falls in love with Zhao at the first sight when she hurts her ankle and is

treated by Zhao in the hospital. Even though she gets to know later that Zhao has a relationship with a woman for seven years, she is still confident to “capture” him. Qu is so daring and confident in pursuing Zhao, whereas Guan dares not express her affection to him. Facing the daring Qu, Guan’s lack of confidence in pursuing Zhao might be related to Guan’s “timid” personality. However, from the way in which Guan refuses her admirer and schoolmate, Lin, who has provided much help to her and has done a lot to please her, one can see that Guan is not a coward at all. After Guan meets Zhao, she decides that Zhao is the right man she loves, so she tells Lin that she already has a lover in her heart, which surprises Lin (Eps 25, S 1).

According to Gaetano (2008), there are many obstacles for migrant women in “seeking to find and marry their ideal partner” (p. 638) as it is less likely for them to override the differences in conditions that are “often exacerbated by migration,” (ibid). In the context of Chinese culture, matching socioeconomic status (*mendang hudui*) matters much (Fan, 2000). This practice for marriage that involves the *tiaojian* (conditions) of age, education, income, class, residential status, and family background is “also a function of specific political-economic context” (ibid, p. 441). Due to China’s long-standing rural and urban divisions, urbanities, particularly those in prestigious profession and good economic standing, have developed a sense of superiority over people with rural status. And this kind of superiority will inevitably impact the selection of spouses of those urban *gaofushuai*, rich and handsome talents, who would often select partners with equivalent conditions to match their identity. While Guan’s lack of confidence in pursuing Zhao may be related to her personality and traditional gender norms in “romantic” interactions, in which women should be self-preserved, at least partially, it comes out of her perception of social strata – that as a migrant woman, to love an urban *gaofushuai* is probably beyond her reach.

Guan's Internal Conflicts Represented through Facial Expressions

Guan's mood changes and internal conflicts for her unrequited love can be located through her facial expressions in *Ode to Joy*. In Eps 25 of S 1, Guan meets Zhao at a CD shop where they both want to buy the album of *From the New World* by the well-known Czech composer Antonín Dvořák. As there is only one left, Zhao gives the chance to Guan. Then, he explains to Guan the features of the symphony. His extraordinary talk and artistic temperament make Guan's eyes shine at once with admiration and appreciation (See Figure 28), she falls in love with Zhao at once. Shortly after that, while taking a ride in Andy's car to work, Guan cannot help telling Andy about her "little secret," – that she falls in love with a handsome man. Andy encourages her to bravely pursue her love. In this moment, she is filled with joy looking forward to the happy days to come. Her face presents the expressions of both happiness and shyness as a young woman (See Figure 29). Lamentably, at this stage she has not realized that she will lose in the love "competition" to a local woman, her rich neighbour, Qu.



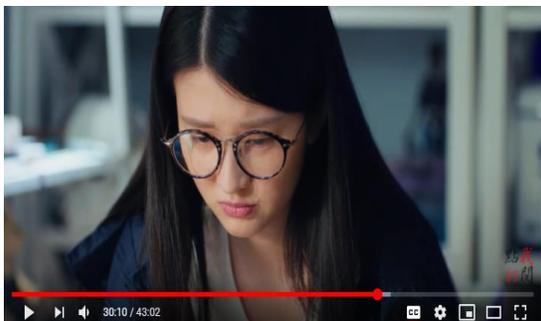
28. Guan Appreciates Zhao



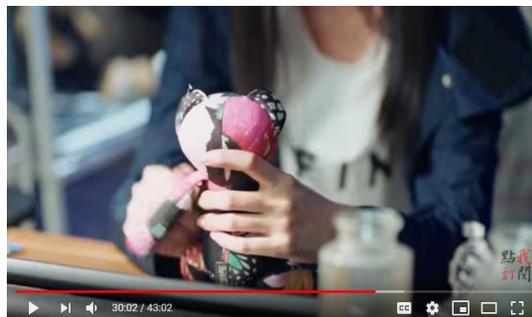
29. Guan Happily Dreams of Dating Zhao

The next two images from Eps 28 of S 1 present a very different tone to the former two. Figure 30 shows that Guan is extremely sad and depressed after she learns that Zhao has become the boyfriend of Qu. Flashbacks are employed to show the happy moments in which Guan met Zhao, and the more she thinks of him the more saddened she is. To present her extreme sadness,

a small plush doll is used to express her mood - Guan tears the doll forcefully and repeatedly (See Figure 31).



30. Guan's Depression in Losing Zhao



31. Guan Is Saddened for her Failure

This silent action serves as an effective extension of Guan's painful facial expression to express her inner pains and helplessness. It represents the unspeakable protest of the migrant women towards the "superiority" of women from the local elite class. While both women, Qu and Guan, fall in love at the first sight with Zhao, the former can "capture" her lover without any barriers inwardly and outwardly, yet the latter is blocked with many visible and invisible obstacles. The Chinese saying, "it is important to have self-awareness" (*ren guiyou zizhi zhiming*), or "knowing yourself," is deeply imbedded in Guan, who knows that she is from different social strata with Zhao. This is evidenced by Guan's talk with Andy in Eps 23, S 1, when Guan expresses, "There should be equality; however, social classes do exist in society. If you ignore that, you can only 'hit the wall', just like Sister (a respectful way to call a female older than oneself in China) Fan, who is trying hard to climb to a higher class. So, what's the point?"

While Qu boldly pursues Zhao after she meets him as his patient, Guan is hesitant to express her affection for her "hero", and then feels painful for her "incompetence." Though her shyness and lack of confidence are at least partly attributed to the deeply embedded and highly

gendered cultural norms about romantic interactions in China, her migrant identity and its link to the wider social status plays a role. The representation of Guan's internal conflicts well dovetails with the representational notion of intersectionality that "demands the knowing... privileges naming, visibility, epistemology, representation, and meaning" (Puar 2005, p. 128). Guan's facial changes reflecting her inner world in relation to her romantic "failure" make sense in speaking to the impact of differences in social strata through visibility and representation and mirror the intersections of gender, place of origin, social stratification, culture, urban/rural dichotomy, and regional disparities.

5.3 WCMW's Agency and Resilience Represented through the Theme Song

Thus far, this study has examined the ways in which WCMW characters' experiences are impacted by the intersections of age, class, gender, place of origin, social stratification, as well as mainstream discourses. While the predicaments of WCMW characters are sufficiently represented and emphasized by employing contrasts/comparisons, facial expressions of characters, and voiceover, the audio representation of songs in *Ode to Joy* is also an effective way to portray the agency and resilience of WCMW characters facing challenges and in redefining their migrant women identity. To the WCMW characters, life is hard with many anticipated or unanticipated hardships. For example, Fan is pressured with the fear of being a "leftover woman" at an "advanced age" but never succeeds in blind dates, Qiu encounters setbacks in sexual relations, and Guan always fears losing job opportunities in her company.

However, they never lose heart, nor give themselves up to fate. In *Ode to Joy*, one can see that the three WCMW characters are very often upset facing difficulties or being treated unfairly in one instance, then, the next minute they wipe out tears and dress up freshly again to face new challenges as they are aware that since they do not have anyone to count on in the city

as migrants, they need to be self-empowered. And life needs to move on whatever happens. These characters use their wits and strengths to deal with challenges and are resilient to redefine their migrant women identity in the megacity. The theme song which is named “Ode to Joy” well represents the resilience and optimistic spirit of the WCMW characters facing challenges.

Introduction of the Theme Song “Ode to Joy”

There are over ten songs throughout the series, including *Ode to Joy*, *Cinderella* and *There Is Always Happiness Waiting for You*, to name a few. These songs reflect the hardships, personal aspirations, and struggles, as well as optimism of the characters, among which, “Ode to Joy” is the most representative of agency and resilience of the main characters, particularly the WCMW characters. Composed and sung by Zhang Jiang, this song conveys a positive tone that encourages migrant women professionals to stay happy living in the city. This study focuses on the words rather than its music for interpretation. The lyrics of the theme song read:

*Walking with a fast pace among people on the street,
Can't catch up with the first payment of house price.
Ideal is stuck in the evening peak,
Emotions intertwine with twinkling neon lights,
Just be crazily happy.*

*A little onion to instant noodles, creativity makes me moved,
There's a hole in the pocket, such a joke is for relaxation.
Happiness deserves respect,
Poor yet happy, no use crying over troubles,
Sadness is not worth adding on - let it go like my salary.*

*Still believe that the future is in my hands,
Good luck favours those who love to laugh.
Go forward listening to the breeze at your ears,
The beating of the heart resonates with the ode to joy.
Still believe that the future is in my hands,
Good luck won't be indifferent to persistence.*

(Theme Song of *Ode to Joy*, 2020)

The first stanza well reflects the realities of those WCMW characters “fighting” in a megacity: busy going to work every day. But no matter how hard they work, what they earn can never be enough for a housing down payment as house prices far exceed their affordability. Their frustrations emerge from the modern urban landscape – no one cares for them. Walking out of the modern office buildings wearing elegant apparel and with proper makeup, they are not easily recognizable as migrant women. Like their local counterparts, they also have pursuits in their personal life and careers. However, when it comes to practical issues such as housing and romantic relationship, they become less glittering lacking the necessary resources in the city, as geographically determined distinctions differentiate individual Chinese (Rowe, 1984).

Nonetheless, they still need to be happy because they have the right for happiness. Besides, it is useless crying over sufferings. The two sentences, “*A little onion to instant noodles, creativity makes me moved*” and “*There’s a hole in the pocket, such a joke is for relaxation*” present their humorous outlook and open mindset towards life. The last two sentences, “*Sadness is not worth adding on – let it go like my salary,*” give this passage a sense of pathos and a touch of tragic aesthetics alluding to a sort of helplessness though with open-mindedness. The tone of the second section shifts from realism to idealism. It tells the optimistic spirit of the protagonists and perseverance in their beliefs. Though life is hard full of challenges, they still believe that they can have control over their future as long as they do not lose heart in striving for their dreams. The two sentences: “*Go forward listening to the breeze in your ears,*” and “*The beating of the heart resonates with the ode to joy*” exhibit the optimistic outlook of the characters, who embrace life positively no matter what happens, and who feel dignified for happiness.

Qiu's Experiences Are Representative of What Is Expressed by the Theme Song

Qiu's experiences in *Ode to Joy* resonate with what is expressed in this theme song. She gets herself back and establishes her confidence resiliently facing setbacks both in romance and employment. Qiu comes from a rural family and is the first one in her family to migrate to a megacity. She works at a low-ranking position in a small company in Shanghai. Although she is only 23 years old, she feels pressured for being a "leftover woman" like Fan, her roommate, who tells her, "People who were born well are different from us. So, while you are young, get hold of someone tightly, otherwise it becomes harder and harder to find a good man" (referring to her own case, Eps 25, S 1). So, Qiu is eager to find a boyfriend. Qiu experiences two romantic relationships in the series. Her first boyfriend is her colleague, Bai, who attracts Qiu quickly, taking advantage of her naivety. She quickly falls in love with Bai and moves into his rental room following his advice to save money on her rent. But soon afterwards, she finds out lots of nasty things about him such as having affairs with rich women, and gaining benefits from the company through improper means, so she breaks up with him without hesitation. As Bai is chief of the financial section, he takes revenge on her at work. As a result, Qiu is severely criticized due to her "negligence". To challenge him, she exposes Bai's deceptive deeds in front of all the employees (Eps 8, S 1, See Figure 32). She is unjustifiably fired by the company, and experiences a dark moment in her life.

However, she is not defeated by all the mishaps fallen to her. Instead, she stops crying and starts over again. One day, she goes to a job fair to seek a new job. Coincidentally, she finds that Bai is also there. Out of resentment and justice, she exposes his immoral deeds in public for which she is slapped by him (Eps 12, S 1, See Figure 33). Her honest and courage impresses the employer of a coffee store in the fair – she is recruited by him consequently. She works very

hard and establishes an online shop, for which she is appreciated by the manager. Then she gets the affection of a young male customer, Ying. As she is to embrace her new romance, a dinner becomes a turning point of their relations, where Ying breaks up with her abruptly after learning that she is not a virgin (Eps 16, S 2). Once again, she is heavily struck by misfortune.

Nonetheless, Qiu does not yield to failure. As she is so in love with Ying, she cannot forget him. So, when Ying comes later to invite her to dinner showing that he still likes her, she does not refuse him, for which she even bears the brunt of being seriously beaten by Ying's fiancée and her friends (Eps 38, S 2). Qiu then negotiates bravely with Ying's mother, who despises Qiu and would not like her son to have a relationship with her since they have broken up. While clarifying to Ying's mother that she is not a bad woman as imagined, Qiu insists that she should be treated fairly by her. She even asks the mother to apologize for her insulting words (Eps 47, S 2, See Figure 34). Qiu convinces her that as they love each other, they will have a happy future together until Ying's mother agrees to their relationship.



32. Qiu Exposes Bai



33. Qiu is Slapped by Bai



34. Qiu Negotiates with Ying's Mom

The representation of Qiu's subjectivity in striving for her own rights well displays that the "disadvantaged" women do not always just endure or keep silence facing injustice and challenge. They can stand up and speak out for themselves and those like them. Qiu wins the "battle" against Ying's mother with dignity. She gets over from her depression out of losing her job and boyfriend – she gains happiness by empowering herself. She is the first woman on the

twenty-second floor in Building 19 of the apartment building “Ode to Joy”, who is ready to get married soon (Eps 55, S 2). She regains her job and her lover through courage, perseverance, and resilience, though she sometimes seems naïve and stubborn. The viewer, Cui (2016), of *Ode to Joy*, has commented that “Qiu makes the greatest progress and she grows the fastest among the five women characters in *Ode to Joy*.” With an optimistic spirit, “*I still believe the future is in my hands, good luck won't be indifferent to persistence,*” the theme song serves as an effective way in representing WCMW characters’ agency and resilience in *Ode to Joy*.

When faced with systematic structures of inequality, it seems there is less space for individual action to challenge. However, Qiu in *Ode to Joy* is not merely a passive victim of domination that result from the intersecting multiple axes of social categories. She redefines her migrant woman identity by negotiating for her rights with her wits and resilience in order to make a change in life. The representation of the character Qiu’s development is compelling as it well reveals her transition from a vulnerable and simple-minded *shabaitian* to a firm and matured woman. Qiu can be representative of the positive spirits of WCMW characters in large cities. Nonetheless, the optimistic spirits and resilience cannot help them resolve their essential issues as being marginalized in the city lack of an urban status. In fact, the “happy ending” of Qiu’s story does not involve WCMW characters’ core issues, such as *hukou* and equal employment, and the “high spirits” can do little to the issues of these women. As she still carries a rural status and works in an informal private enterprise, Qiu anticipates many challenges. It also implicates that the show does not fully represent the real-life situation of the WCMW cohort, or there are distinctions between cultural representation and real life.

5.4 Summary of Extra Findings

In conformity with the objective of this study to examine the experiences of WCMW in *Ode to Joy*, this chapter discussed WCMW characters' issue of employment represented by Guan and Qiu. It also traced the social strata in *Ode to Joy* and the background against which the TV drama series is set, and analyzed the impacts of social stratification on the WCMW characters through the example of Guan's internal conflicts for her "incompetence" in romance represented by her facial expressions. This chapter also interpreted WCMW characters' agency and resilience through the narratives of Qiu's self-empowerment in striving for her own rights and happiness represented by the theme song of this TV series. This song not only reflects the challenges of the WCMW characters in the megacity – their hardships and helplessness, it also embodies their optimism and perseverance in pursuing their dreams. The case of Qiu's character illustrates the essential values reflected in the song – bravely facing challenges and never losing heart, which will inspire more migrants like Qiu to strive for a better life in large cities in China. The visual and audio presentation on the experiences of WCMW characters not only present an overall picture of such women, they shed lights on understanding the status and experiences of professional WCMW in a Chinese megacity. At the same time, they have revealed the facts that place of origin, gender, social stratification, rural-urban disparities, and other related factors, which are "deeply rooted in the very structure of our systems" (Frasure and Williams, 2009, p. 224), interrelate and reinforce each other to exert impact on the wellbeing of well-educated migrant women in megacities. More importantly, they illuminate that to redress the intersectional issues around WCMW, it involves efforts not only from the individuals, but also the society, and particularly the policymakers.

Chapter 6 Discussion and Conclusion

Chapter Four and Chapter Five demonstrated the ways in which WCMW's experiences are represented in *Ode to Joy* with themes that include WCMW characters as “outsiders” in a megacity, gender inequality, and differential representations of WCMW characters as well as impacts of social strata on their wellbeing. This chapter explores the reasons behind the popularity of this TV series, discusses the realistic significance of the issues raised in *Ode to Joy* and the “joys” for the WCMW characters in *Ode to Joy*, and summarizes the theoretical contribution of this study. The thesis will conclude by reflecting on the limitations of this study and providing recommendations for further study.

6.1 Realistic Significance of the Issues Reflected in *Ode to Joy*

In the reform era, owing to the disparities in socio-economic development between Chinese regions/provinces, a great number of farmers have poured into coastal cities since the late 1970s. During this process, women migrants have evolved from primarily less-educated blue-collar workers in the export-oriented factory to more and better educated white-collar workers in the tertiary industry. Compared to the earlier *dagongmei*, WCMW have been less well represented and studied, and this study aims to examine the experiences of WCMW through the representation of the TV series *Ode to Joy* by addressing the following questions: In what way does *Ode to Joy* represent the experiences of WCMW in a Chinese megacity? Why has this TV melodrama been popular? What are the main issues the WCMW characters face living in an unfamiliar megacity without urban status, and what are the “joys” for the migrant women characters depicted on *Ode to Joy*? To what extent do these issues impact the wellbeing of WCMW characters in *Ode to Joy*?

Why Has the TV Drama Series Ode to Joy Been So Popular?

According to Rofel (2008), TV dramas have become “embedded in people’s quotidian lives because the producers and consumers of the program themselves were situated in and produced the cultural and discursive practices” (p. 41). It is true of *Ode to Joy*, which aroused resonance with audiences because it has reflected their feelings and lived experiences. As evidenced previously that the TV series *Ode to Joy* became extremely popular after it was released with extraordinarily high rating among both Chinese and overseas viewers. The high rating reflects audience’s preferences. And its popularity may relate to its quality production, fashionable elements, and the excellent performance of the actors. More importantly, what it has expressed to the audience is also attributed to its popularity. As *Ode to Joy* reflects the realities of urban professional women, and particularly as it touches the topics of wealth, value, and social stratification, it has attracted more audiences (Sima, 2018). This is echoed by Hou Hongliang, Producer of *Ode to Joy*:

Responses from viewers to this series came so fast far beyond what we expected as it touched a socially sensitive nerve. What I wanted to express was just reality – peeling the core of life “with blood”, though it might be cruel. However, it can help us see through ourselves and the world around us. Regarding the so-called elite strata and the second rich generation, we neither amplified nor evaded. Ultimately, we return to that theme: no matter what kind of past experiences you have, you can’t lose your faith in your life, you need to have kind intentions towards life.

Source: Hou Hongliang, Producer of *Ode to Joy*. (“Hou Hongliang: *Ode to Joy*,” *China Daily*, 2016)

In *Ode to Joy*, emotion and career are two major narrative lines. Although parallel in structure, they are not entirely isolated but rather intersect with and complement each other. In a similar vein, the five women characters are portrayed in parallel stories, but they are interconnected. It is also true of the issues raised in this series, which interrelate and influence each other, and which result from the intersections of varied factors in gender, cultural, and

economic dimensions. With full representation and characterization, as well as subtle entanglements of emotion, the show's multidimensionality reflects the survival patterns of professional women in urban life, through which different audiences can find something in common within themselves. *Ode to Joy* exposes some universal values, such as “romance tips” and “career rules”, in which the emotional confusion and workplace cruelty encountered by the heroines mirror the issues in realities that countless ordinary people have experienced in their lives. And the “sourness”, “sweetness”, and “bitterness” of the characters represented in the series well resonate with the feelings of viewers (Yan, 2016). In *Ode to Joy*, either the representations of Fan's suffering as a “leftover woman” and being unequally treated by her family, or Guan's pressure working in a foreign company, or Qiu's “failure” in sexual relations, as well as her consciousness in the rights for a happy life, all reflect women's realities to some extent in contemporary China. Needless to say, the realistic representation of *Ode to Joy* is crucial to its popularity.

6.2 Main Issues Raised in *Ode to Joy* and Their Impact on WCMW Characters

As is informed by theories of intersectionality with identity as a marker of varied dimensions of difference, this study has confirmed that the various issues faced by WCMW characters in the megacity are associated to a certain extent with their migrant women status. This is due to the fact that although they come to live and work in the city as educated migrants, they cannot enjoy the same social welfare as those local citizens without local *hukou* status. So, it is not surprising that in many scenes of *Ode to Joy*, one of the migrant women characters, Fan, is pre-occupied with her migrant status, as she emphasizes to her roommate, Qiu, in Eps 25, S 1, “those who are born well are really different from us.” To many WCMW characters, they no longer regards themselves as peasants but at the same time they have no urban identity, they are

actually “caught in an awkward middle ground... neither urban nor rural; living in the city, with ‘roots’ in the countryside; reluctant to leave the city but unable to genuinely partake in city life” (Bai, 2007, p. 59). *Ode to Joy* accurately captures the issues and tensions that inevitably arise.

WCMW’s Tensions with Their Families in Relation to Gender Inequality

The representation of Fan provides a good example of gender inequality in her family in *Ode to Joy*. It seems that Fan can live a better life moving to Shanghai after graduation doing a HR management job in a foreign company. Indeed, she tries hard to adapt herself to the colourful modern life in Shanghai and is determined to find a local husband to change her status. However, her prospect for a better life is interrupted again and again by the endless desires of her family, particularly in dealing with the problem of her elder brother. As her parents favour her brother, they have taken it for granted that Fan should help her brother. In *Ode to Joy* Fan is portrayed as a filial daughter. Ever since she has got a job in Shanghai, she has supported the family – paying mortgage for her brother, raising her nephew etc., so that her own life is fragmented. In many sequences, she is portrayed to please rich men for profits in order to support her brother. So, in more scenes she is seen crying over her sufferings linking to gender inequality of her family.

People would say that Fan can break up with the family like the female protagonist, Su Mingyu of the Chinese TV drama series, *All is Well*, released last year. But in effect, how many women who are unequally treated by their families would cut the ties with them? In many cases the ill-treated women would “lick their wounds” and continue their lives. After all, in the family there are their loved ones, especially the birth parents. No matter how wrong the parents have done to them, they would still hold on to love the parents and the family. This is particularly true in the Chinese cultural context where traditional values and customs rendered women into a subordinated role in the family. Admittedly, Fan has received higher education and is employed

in Shanghai. It seems that Fan's position is higher in the family. However, to her family, just as she is both a daughter and has migrated to Shanghai who earns more money due to regional disparities, she is more "obliged" to contribute to the family. Therefore, it leaves Fan with little "space" for her own life. As the most highly valued practice in traditional Chinese family culture is "obedience, interdependence, self-sacrifice" (Wong, 2016, p. 55), in a certain sense, Fan is bound by filial piety, the most important virtue in Chinese society in terms of the parent-child relationship. Thus, it is not hard to infer that the lower economic status and the Confucian ethics in gender that is deeply imbedded in Fan's natal family together with her migrant identity and disparities of regions in China intertwine to exert influences on her wellbeing, which makes the representation of Fan very impressive.

Another representative character regarding gender inequality in relation to family is Qiu, who comes from a rural family. She works in a small private company in Shanghai, earning a low income and struggling with the higher living cost in Shanghai. In the first episode, Qiu wonders whether she should continue to stay in Shanghai or go back to her hometown as she sees little hope there. However, whenever she talks to her father about her thought of returning home, her father stresses that he is the first one in the family to come to town, and she is the first to enter into a megacity. He asks his daughter whether she is going to retreat by living a dull life in a small town like them who never have a chance to see the outside world. He convinces her that only by staying in a large city she can have a better future, and that prospects for those who return home are not promising.

Unwilling to defy her father, Qiu has to continue her stay in Shanghai. *Ode to Joy* is filled with such examples of how the characters actually shoulder two kinds of burdens. One from themselves to survive in an unfamiliar megacity with limited resources, and one from the

family to gain *mianzi* (“face”) for family members, or to support their family. Qiu is a daughter, who has little say in her family following the traditional gender norms though she is the only child in her family, she must be a filial daughter to go with her father’s will. She cannot control her own life facing the dominant father, or the patriarchal family. Qiu’s father seems right to consider the “brighter future” for his daughter as he tells Qiu that “People go upward, water flows downward, staying in a large city means you go upward” (Eps 10, S 1). He does not want his daughter to miss “the civilised modern urban life in the economically prosperous regions” like themselves (Chang, 2015, p. 218). Here, the structural disparities of region and identity play a big role in the tensions between the father and daughter. Though with good will, this presentation displays gender inequality in her family and the tension arises thereafter. And Qiu’s painful situation can be understood as the concerted efforts of structural inequalities in gender, place of origin, and regional disparity.

Issue of Housing, a Highlight in Representing WCMW in Ode to Joy

As housing is an important issue directly linking to the wellbeing of WCMW in a megacity, it is sufficiently represented in *Ode to Joy*. While the two local women live in the spacious suites in one of the buildings in the “Ode to Joy” property development, the three migrant women characters are cramped in a small rental apartment on the same floor of the building against the background of modern urban landscape of Shanghai. Ignoring the housing policy that restricts them from home buying in Shanghai and other large cities, even if they are allowed, they cannot afford given the high price of housing. Unlike those early *dagongmei*, who were provided food and accommodations by their factories or by the hosts of the households as domestic workers, WCMW have to find a solution by themselves for housing. If they cannot buy

a house, they have to rent one. This is not to say that renting is something bad. In the West, it is quite normal for young people to rent.

However in the context of Chinese megacities where most of the locals have their own houses, and where the idea of “having a peaceful life only with a house” (*anju leye*) has been deeply imbedded, to rent a house not only involves the problems of facing the “evil” landlord, moving often, and inconvenient to buy large furniture and home appliances physically, it can also bring a feeling of being belittled as “outsiders” when they are surrounded by house owners. One can imagine the feelings of the three migrant women characters who everyday can see the two local women characters living in their own spacious apartments next to them – admire or envy, or both? In addition to inconvenience and psychological pressure that these women encounter by renting a place, more importantly, if they do not own a house, they can neither acquire the local *hukou* status, nor enjoy the social welfare entitled to local citizens. To the WCMW characters, housing is an indicator of security and happiness.

Therefore, it is not surprising for the WCMW characters to strive for a house in their host city. Even if it is not practical for them to achieve the dream of house ownership in Shanghai, they never give up the dream. Intersectionality stresses that inequalities, which are derived from race, place of origin, class, gender, and their intersections, put specific groups in a privileged position while place other groups and individuals in low social and economic positions based on identity classification (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). The prevalent housing problem of WCMW characters further explains that to address this issue, structural inequalities must be addressed. Needless to say, the way in which housing issue is represented in *Ode to Joy* sheds lights on understanding the status of WCMW in Shanghai vis-à-vis the “privileged” local women. And

representation of housing sufficiently strengthens the argument of WCMW characters as “outsiders” in the megacity.

WCMW’s Employment Issue Mirrors Gender and Structural Inequality

As WCMW are professional women, representation on the issue of their employment is likewise indispensable in *Ode to Joy*. Evidence of Chapter 5 has indicated that Qiu, who works in a small private firm, is fired arbitrarily by her employer because she exposes the misconducts of Bai, who takes advantage of his position to gain his own interests. And, Guan, who is an intern in a prestigious foreign company, is working extremely hard in competing with those from elite universities for fear of not being recruited after internship. Then, Fan changes her job from a senior HR officer in a foreign company to an advisor of a financial service provider, “to seek further upward mobility,” in her own words. The above scenarios speak to the fact that neither character has secured fixed, stable or satisfactory employment.

The portrayal of Qiu, in particular, is most representative of the status of WCMW characters in employment. Qiu is fired not because she violates the labour law, nor because her work term terminates, but because she exposes her colleague’s misdeeds in front of other employees. It may have produced an “unharmonious” or unpleasant atmosphere in the workplace and/or impaired the “rules” of office politics. However, if the same thing happens to someone, especially a local male employee, he might be praised otherwise for his justice and courageous behaviour. But, when it concerns with a migrant worker, a female migrant in particular, the labour protection law would probably disappear. In China, this kind of randomly laying off a worker often occurs in the informal sector where unequal pay, gender discrimination, lack of social security, and identity segregation can be seen, and where victims are more often migrant women.

Juxtaposed with the employment discrimination of the WCMW characters in *Ode to Joy* are experiences of the informants of this study. Take Wang Ying, who works as a civil servant in Tianjin, for example. Wang is from a small city in Southwest China. She has undergone a long journey in her employment pursuit after graduation from a university in the early 2000s. She went to Zhejiang first to seek development where the non-public economy developed faster than in the interior regions. Her first job was a chief officer in a private hotel in Wenzhou, where she was “frightened” by the various dealings in the hotel – prostitution and gambling, in addition to trading of industrial goods. As she did not feel secure as a migrant woman in that kind of environment, she quit the job and went to Beijing, where she intended to apply for a stable job in a state company. However, as a Beijing *hukou* was a key requirement of many state-run enterprises for recruitment, she was blocked from working for this type of employer.

As her dream for a stable job was broken, Wang applied for a job in a children’s English training school as both an English teacher and a market developer, responsible for the task of recruiting a few hundred children annually. With no other way out, she worked extremely hard in fulfilling the task and was well acknowledged by her manager. For the first time, she had a sense of accomplishment for herself. However, she was not paid as much as her male colleagues doing the same kind of work at the end of the year, for which she felt unfair and discriminated (Interview notes). On the one hand, she was assigned the same task as her male peers, on the other hand, she was paid less than them. Wang’s case reveals that women, migrant women in particular, are not equally treated in the male-dominant society. According to Qin et al (2016), “88 percent of the gender gap in wages is attributed to different treatment of female migrants in the Chinese job market” (p. 194). And the big wage difference between males and females implied gender discrimination, suggesting that the status of migrant women is lower, “regardless

of any education difference” (ibid). In large cities especially, there is an unspoken rule of order in employment recruitment – local male, non-local male, local female, and non-local female. It is not unusual that many trades and positions require only or prioritize men in recruitment.

It may seem lucky that Wang became a civil servant at length after years of setbacks in employment. However, her experience in job discrimination continues in the public sector. As she works very hard and performs well in various projects, she has been awarded as an excellent employee. But she was not promoted as expected, for which she felt unequally treated (Interview notes). Normally, once WCMW’s rights in employment are impaired, the best they can do is to quit and select tolerance as there are no direct and relevant bodies to protect them. For the WCMW, if they could have ideal jobs like those in the stable and lucrative SOEs, or at least if they could be fairly treated in private companies, they would live a more meaningful and dignified life like their urban counterparts. Their experiences further enrich the concept of intersectionality, which focuses that the oppressions of American women of color are due to their “intersectional identity as *both* women and *of* color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244). In the Chinese cultural context, WCMW are marginalized as both women and migrants that are intersected and influence one another.

Issue of Romance, the Most Highlighted Representation about WCMW

Romance as a key element to attract audience is a major part of representation in *Ode to Joy* to examine the issue of WCMW. In the series, Fan, Qiu, and Guan, all go through lots of hardships and tough times in their romantic relationships. Take the presentation of Qiu, who regards herself as a “loser” after two unsuccessful romantic relationships. Like many professional women in Chinese megacities, particularly WCMW, who lack social capital in smoothly finding a “good” husband in large cities, Qiu is pressured by the fear of being a

“leftover woman.” Overwhelmed by the mass media of *shengnü* in China that pushes the unmarried professional women of 27 and above to go all out to find a partner, and particularly influenced by her roommate Fan, who fails in finding a “good” husband, Qiu is anxious to meet a boyfriend though she is only 23. So, when her colleague Bai shows interest in her, she is over-excited and cannot help “falling in love” with him. After it turns out that Bai is a bad guy, Qiu is seriously hurt and hugely depressed.

If Qiu had not been so eager to have a boyfriend for the purpose of marriage like her two local neighbours, she would not have been hurt so badly. But first, Qiu is a traditional woman wishing to marry the man she loves. The Confucian value that women are subordinate to men is well displayed in Qiu – she is aware of what is expected of women in traditional gender norms by noting, “A woman must be self-reserved, otherwise she won’t be respected by her spouse. Only when a woman is respected by her man, then she will be happy in her married life” (Eps 4, S 2). Lamentably, as Qiu puts herself (and is put) in a secondary position in the romantic relations, she cannot hold the man she loves. Migrant women’s autonomy is undermined by constraints including deep-rooted patriarchal traditions, and the rural-urban duality system. As a result, Qiu encounters repeated “bad luck” one after another that hurt her seriously. After ending the relationship with her first boyfriend, Qiu meets Ying, an introverted IT man and a fellow of her hometown. As Qiu is developing the new romance with Ying, what happens at the dinner table one day changes the trajectory of their relationship. That is the scene described at the beginning of this thesis where they have a dinner with friends. After Ying learns that Qiu is not a virgin, he abruptly leaves the table and breaks up with her unexpectedly assuming she lacks self-respect. In the two romances, Qiu has been represented as being extremely serious to maintain a

good relationship with each boyfriend wishing to have a happy ending with the man she loves. Then why is she not successful in the romances?

In addition to the fear of being a “leftover woman”, another interpretation why Qiu is so anxious to find a boyfriend and with a definite aim for marriage is that a sexual relationship, hence a marriage, can be a safety valve for her to reduce the sense of insecurity as a migrant woman living in an unfamiliar megacity with no one to count on, though it might be a remedy unable to solve her “big” problems. Qiu’s sense of insecurity is shown in the sequence where Qiu expresses to her father that many of her classmates have gone back home – she feels pitiful staying in Shanghai by herself (Eps 9, S 1). One can assume that by pitifulness, this might not mean she is lonely physically, as most of the time she has her neighbours and roommates provide ample companionship. What she really means by pitifulness is that she lacks a sense of social belonging, in that she cannot be perceived and/or accepted as a local citizen without a local *hukou* status. The study by Chu, Xiong, and Zou (2014) indicates that five factors affect migrant workers’ social identity, such as local language, income level, and perceived social acceptance. If a migrant woman does not meet those prerequisites, she is less accepted by the host city. Thus, when Qiu feels lonely and helpless in the megacity, it makes sense that she would resort to try and find a sense of security through marriage.

Qiu is not to blame for having sex with the man she loves. On the one hand, she is equal with the man in a sexual relationship; On the other hand, as she desires to have a family and live a more stable life with that man in Shanghai, she might have taken the man as her spouse. However, the legacy of patriarchal family system and gender hierarchy in China has been impacting many Chinese women like Qiu. So, “disadvantaged” women tend to put themselves in the secondary position and often have little say in gender relations. Thus, it is not rare that a

woman's life is determined by a man, either her father or husband (boyfriend), not by her own efforts. Lamentably, some women have internalized this kind of gender inequality like Qiu, who blames herself for losing her virginity before marriage. She, in effect, "participate[s] in producing [her] own identit[y] in the context of the power relations" (Silvey, 2004, p. 498). This process is seen as a consequence of the intersections of multiple inequalities such as gender, class, and place of origin. More acutely, Qiu has very little choice in the megacity in finding a husband, although she is anxious to find one.

In other words, if she does not want a migrant man as her partner, it is hard for her to meet a local man. This is partly related to her migrant women identity, as rural-urban intermarriages are not common because "marrying a rural-*hukou* holder is regarded as unwise due to the large rural-urban social and economic gap" (Zhang et al, 2010, p. 378). Not to mention the practice of *mendang hudui* in marriage market in the Chinese cultural context, which is associated with the intersections of multiple social and cultural factors. Therefore, it is not hard to understand the phenomenon that some migrant women are married to some "imperfect" local men in order to acquire urban status and the related benefits bestowed to urban citizens. Those marginalized men, who are either disabled, older in age, or unemployed, are difficult to find "normal" wives locally. They often seek to marry younger migrant women, as in China, marriage is always associated with pragmatic, economic and social factors that resemble a transaction (Zhang et al, 2010). The representation of setbacks in the romance of Qiu shows that identities cannot be understood as a singular dimension but relating to other dimensions of specific contexts, culturally, or socially.

In sharp contrast to the propensity of Qiu associating a man with a happy life, local women have different perceptions on romance and marriage. For example, when Qu and the

three migrant women discuss about which man, Wei and Bao (both are businessmen), is more suitable for Andy in Eps 37, S 1, the three WCMW characters all think that Wei is more suitable as he looks more focused, stable and accountable. Then Qu rebuts them strongly holding that Andy, who is super intelligent and possesses all sorts of resources herself, has no need for accountability from others. Rather, others might be worried about being looked down by her. Qu even ridicules them to imagine Andy's aspiration with their own conditions. She uses a metaphor to mock their short sightedness, "What is a limitation of vision? It's like a wood-cutting person thinking that the emperor uses a gold shoulder pole. Bao is a *gaofushuai* surrounded by many women suiters while Wei is not so good looking and with less fortune compared to Bao, so you think Wei is safer." What Qu says involves a two-fold meaning: one, it is hard for people from a lower class to understand those of a higher social class due to limit in perception; two, only women of lower-status aspire to a safe and stable life through marriage. If a woman is confident, she won't be impacted by external factors for her happiness, and instead, different resources can determine a woman's life and wellbeing.

Local women characters, Andy and Qu, do not need to rely on a man or a marriage with sufficient social resources for a stable life; they can enjoy the pleasure of a romance without the burden of marriage. Whereas WCMW characters like Qiu cannot afford to enjoy the pleasure of "pure love" in a romance – they desperately need a marriage as symbolic and material protection for their vulnerability living in a megacity without local status. However, their desire for a better life through marriage can be hardly achieved due to the impacts of the factors such as class, gender, stereotypes, and place of origin, which interplay and reinforce each other to influence their lives in a megacity. These findings are consistent with the concept of intersectionality whereby different dimensions of inequality are interwoven in various ways, and the social

position of disadvantaged women is defined by the intersections of context-specific structural differences (Bürkner, 2012). The representations of WCMW characters' romantic relationships have exposed the complexity of gender issues that involve multiple social differences of identities. Indeed, the emotional journeys of these women over two seasons of the series are compelling.

Therefore, issues facing WCMW characters in the megacity as they are reflected in *Ode to Joy* in housing, employment, and romance are representative of the intersections of political, economic, social, and cultural, as well as sexual and gender factors, all of which are mutually interdependent. The experiences of characters in *Ode to Joy* also highlights how female migrants' identity is constructed based on the "conspiracy" of gender, class, place of origin, and the rural-urban duality system. The complex intersecting dimensions of WCMW in the megacity so well portrayed in *Ode to Joy* effectively reveal the multidimensional discrimination that impacts their wellbeing.

6.3 What Are the "Joys" for WCMW Characters in *Ode to Joy*?

In the TV series, viewers can find many uses of the expression "Ode to Joy" – from the title of the TV series, to the name of the residential area where the series is set, and the theme song that represents the optimistic spirit and strong will of WCMW, not to mention the music of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The frequent use of "Ode to Joy" appears to have confused some viewers, and thus raises an interesting question about why the producers seem to be so obsessed with this usage. As introduced previously, the objective of the producers for this series is to display the reality of urban women professionals and look to the future without losing faith. For the former, this study has discussed widely in terms of WCMW as "outsiders" in the megacity, gender inequality in the family and in gendered relations, and impacts of social stratification on

WCMW characters and so on. For the latter, this thesis has touched on optimism and future prospects of the characters through the theme song. The “joy” for ode are something joyful, happy, and/or positive rather than something sad and depressing. Then, by exploring things joyful in this TV series, this study affirms that in addition to the positive traits of characters such as optimism, hardworking, and never losing heart for a brighter future, there are other things represented in the series that are also worth highlighting, such as friendship, mutual support, and living in harmony.

On friendship, Yuan Zidan, screenwriter of *Ode to Joy*, stated that one of the main themes of the series is friendship (“There can be friendship between women,” *Xinhuanet*, 2017). She has two considerations on this. One is the drama’s parallel narration of five characters; two is out of her own viewing feelings as an audience. She feels that in recent years, when Chinese TV series exhibit relations between women, it seems that apart from “tearing” each other in the palace-type dramas, there is only the resentment between the in-laws. But there can be friendships between women, too. Yuan intended to create a women’s friendship collection in *Ode to Joy*. She asserts that unlike male friendship, which is more straightforward, the friendship between women is a spiral with ups and downs, but as long as they are frank enough with each other, friendship can also be elevated. In a sense, women’s friendships are more precious than those between men – they deserve to be represented even more (ibid). Women’s friendships that evolve from suspicion to trust and honesty are well represented between Qu and Andy. In the opening episode, Andy reports to the police about the noisy party of Qu and her friends and warns them by reciting the detailed laws. Qu, who feels embarrassed, cannot figure out what background Andy has with such a high-profile temperament. She suspects that Andy is a mistress of her boss. Then in the next two episodes from being stuck in an elevator together to

getting Andy's help in obtaining agency for the GI brand, Qu gradually resolves the tensions with Andy and establishes friendship with her. In addition, there are the friendships between Andy and Guan, Qu and Qiu, not to mention those among the three migrants.

The other joys in the series worth mentioning are mutual support and living harmoniously (peacefully without conflicts) as neighbours. These are portrayed in many scenes in *Ode to Joy*. For example, Fan takes revenge for Qiu on her boyfriend, Bai, the man who cheats Qiu, at the cost of being detained by the police as Fan feels responsible to protect Qiu as a roommate and an elder sister. Qu, with her rich social networks, finds where Fan is detained quickly and goes to "rescue" her. And Qu, the seemingly carefree but righteous woman, punishes the "creditors" of Fan's brother in Fan's home with the help of Bao, Andy's boyfriend, who sends some strong men to escort Qu. Using her wits and courage, Qu scares away the hooligans. In association with the support the five women giving to each other, there are more clues that speak to the harmonious atmosphere on the 22nd floor of Building No. 19 of the residential block *Ode to Joy*. The harmony not only lies in how these women befriend and support each other, but also in the way in which the friendships and the warmth giving to one another "override" the barriers and differences between each other that seem difficult to overcome, such as family background, place of origin, and social strata. As noted earlier, Andy is an overseas returnee with higher IQ in charge of key business in a prestigious financial group. But due to her peculiar family background (as an orphan she was adopted by an American couple) and the genetic element of her insane mother, she worries to commit mental illness someday, and feels isolated deep in her heart. It is hard for her to build an intimate relationship with anyone else.

Whereas Qu is very smart with great capacity in creating rapport, but she is not highly educated nor very intelligent. She lacks the knowledge and experience in developing her

business. However, she manages to get Andy's help to resolve the crisis in making a business plan, then negotiates with the foreign clients for the exclusive right of agent. On the other hand, Guan is an intern in a famous foreign company. As she is competing with those from elite universities for employment position, she is working extremely hard, often working overtime at night and does not have enough time for sleep. Therefore, Andy provides Guan a free ride every day in order to save her more time. Andy and Qu also buy coffee products generously from Qiu to support her business. Ignoring other differences, these women support and complement each other. Thus, a seemingly harmonious atmosphere is created. One thing worth noting here is that the representations of these interactions not only represent the harmonious relations between the neighbours, they have indicated that many of the supportive actions are conducted by local women as they have sufficient resources to help the "weak", and that they are "higher" in social strata. So, representation in *Ode to Joy* reveals the position of the producers.

However, in reality, it is unlikely that people from different social classes can be good friends in China. Just as viewer Cai (2016) wondered, "How can an elite like Andy be a friend with someone from a lower social class like Qiu in real life?" considering the apparent social stratification in China. To this kind of question, Yuan, screenwriter of *Ode to Joy*, expressed that one's position in friendship should not be determined by his/her social status nor by his/her economic conditions. Yuan stressed, "To make friends, the simpler, the better. Human feelings including affection, love, and friendship have nothing to do with social strata" ("There can be friendship between women," *Xinhuanet*, 2017). Yuan's expressions implicitly downplayed the barriers between social strata, and her description of friendship, in effect, is an ideal state to current China where social mobility is more and more weakening and friendships between different strata are getting harder. Except for making friends, in terms of career development and

marriage etc., it is even harder to override one's social strata, as what Lu Xueyi, a sociologists, defined, "'strata' is not just in terms of income levels but also in terms of differential access to power, money and status" (as cited in Anangost, 2008, p. 504).

For "access to status," Lu means that rural citizens can become urban citizens, which requires to override not only regional blocks, but also the structural rural-urban duality system (ibid). China has become the second largest economy in the world with its rapid development in trade volume, industrial advancements, and higher gross domestic production over the past four decades since the 1980s. However, the issue of rural-urban duality has not been fundamentally addressed although *hukou* restrictions have been largely loosened in small and medium-sized cities. And the *hukou* status is still playing a key role in megacities to impact the lives of huge amounts of rural *hukou* holders, mostly rural-urban migrants, including the WCMW cohort. Guan, the hard-working intern in *Ode to Joy*, feels the difficulties in crossing social classes, as she says to Andy that although everyone is equal, society has class divisions. Ignoring this, one can only fall flat. She wonders how much courage one needs in order to climb to a higher social ladder. In effect, Guan might have overlooked the fact that only courage and personal qualities can do little to help a person at a lower social stratum to achieve social mobility in the context of Chinese megacities.

Indeed, in *Ode to Joy*, we see that Andy by virtue of her extraordinary talent has become the CFO of a financial group as an orphan step by step, crossing many classes. And Andy's first boyfriend Wei Wei, who becomes a "successful" businessman from a "nobody" in the wave of China's market reform during the 1990s and 2000s. However, in reality, can a rural migrant woman overcome the systematic blocks without sufficient power and resources? It involves multilayered and intersecting factors that influence her access to the required resources, in which

the unequal *hukou* system plays a big role. Studies by Stanford professors Khor and Pencavel on China's social mobilities indicate that the possibility of social mobility in China has been declining over the past decades, which makes it harder for offspring of rural families to achieve upward mobility while the second generation of the rich and higher officials can easily access to the social resources they desire (as cited in Yan, 2016). This study has shown through the representations of WCMW in *Ode to Joy* that for an educated migrant woman who faces intersecting social barriers, achieving equal opportunities in a megacity is difficult and challenges related to housing, for example, cannot simply be overcome by their own efforts amid the solidified social strata.

Then why do the producers, such as Yuan, the screenwriter of *Ode to Joy*, insist on creating a harmonious atmosphere among the five women from different backgrounds, and minimizing the conflicts between characters of different social strata albeit gradually? There are several interpretations for this. First, *Ode to Joy* is the first modern urban-theme work adapted by Yuan. Her previous TV dramas were all about key revolutionary and historical events, such as, *National Anthem (Guoge)* (2010), which tells the story of the thrilling process in creating the Chinese anthem during the anti-Japanese War by some revolutionary intellectuals, and *The Sun Rises from East Mountain (Richu Dongshan)* (2010), which reflects the growth of Mao Zedong's in his youth, not to mention *There Appeared a Mao Zedong in China (Zhongguo Chulege Maozedon)* (2010) in praise of Mao ("Special interview with Yuan Zidan," *Sohu*, 2016). So, as she has long been a screenwriter for the "main melody" dramas – official propaganda works, which are "in line with current CCP ideology" (Schneider, 2012, p. 2), *Ode to Joy* can be a continuity of her style in positive representation.

Second, a good TV series not only presents entertaining stories, it has also “the function of directing the viewers’ attention to the values and behaviours” (Puppin, 2018, p. 81). Just as the representation of “chopsticks” in Chinese 2014 CCTV gala’s public service advertisement that directed people to imagine chopsticks as a symbol to lead to happiness, the representation of a harmonious atmosphere between people of different social strata in *Ode to Joy* connotes some social standards, or to “propose models of good citizenship,” and embody the ideology of the party-state for a harmonious society (*hexie shehui*). In terms of culture governance in China, it means that cultural artefacts are expected to be both “popular and politically correct” (Schneider, 2012, p. 19) and to “communicate exactly what the leadership wants its population to see” (ibid, p. 3) in order to get approved for censorship by the state authorities. In effect, the “joys” represented in *Ode to Joy*, such as friendship and the harmonious atmosphere between neighbours of different social strata, are like “icing on the cake” to the two rich local women, who do not have issues of housing, employment, and urban status. Those issues that embody the intersections of regional disparity, class, gender, place of origin, and stereotypes are vital to the survival of WCMW living in an unfamiliar megacity. In fact, the above-mentioned “joys” cannot resolve their actual difficulties in life though they may bring some face values to these migrant women.

WCMW comprise a dynamic group of professionals in China’s megacities. Their issues should be well addressed. In addition to the visible things that can be measured materially, such as housing, medical insurance, and personal income, what they really need for a meaningful life also involve the invisible and/or unmeasurable things that are inseparable to one’s happiness in life, such as, respect, dignity, confidence, and sense of belonging. Lack of urban status under the duality system, all those appeals can be hardly achieved. If good traits and personalities of

WCMW are positive things, such as, hard work, perseverance, resilience, and optimistic spirits that can help them deal with some of the challenges in the megacity, needless to say, they are the joyful things worth being applauded. However, no matter what good qualities they have, their struggles for a better life are merely the strength of individuals, which seem weak facing the structural constraints. Rather than cheerful joys for WCMW characters, those “joys” represented in this series, such as friendship and harmonious relationships can be interpreted as pale and bitter “joys” for those women. Needless to say, the representation on the “joy” of WCMW in *Ode to Joy* helps illuminate the status of such women in a Chinese megacity.

6.4 Significance of the Research

The experiences of earlier generations of migrant women have been well represented in popular culture and widely studied by academics as introduced in the early part of this thesis. Similarly, those earlier migrant women also received greater attention from society. Take the example of the *Dagongmei Zhijia* (Migrant Women’s Club) for example. It was established in Beijing in 1996 affiliated to the magazine of *Rural Women (Nongjianü)*, which was created in 1993. It is China’s first NGO dedicated to serving rural migrant women. With the funding from charitable organizations and by way of legal service, skill and gender awareness trainings, micro finance support, and psychological consultation, it has helped thousands of rural migrant women to resolve their difficulties in large cities (“Migrant Women’s Club,” *China Development Brief*, 2018). In addition, other bodies such as Beijing Maple Women’s Psychological Counselling Centre and ACWF operate at different levels to provide services to rural migrant women. Although those services might have incorporated the group of WCMW, there has not been any institution in China’s large cities specially set up and providing services to WCMW so far. This

has been represented in the portrayals of the WCMW characters, who never resort to any government or NGOs in times of difficulty and crisis.

Informed by the concept of intersectionality that focuses on multiple axes of social differences, this study has examined the representations of the issues and experiences of WCMW characters in *Ode to Joy* from an intersectional perspective. Like the parallel structure of the TV series which weaves the narratives of the protagonists in different storylines in organically connected ways, the issues of WCMW characters in *Ode to Joy*, be it housing, tensions with families, romance, or employment, are all interrelated with one another. These issues are, to a great extent, related to the intersections of structurally differentiated factors, such as gender, class, place of origin, culture and the *hukou* system. According to Wu (2011), who studied the issue of migrant women from the perspective of government responsibility, the essential cause of migrant women's issues lies in the government, which has not taken effective measures in improving *hukou* and social security systems concerning migrant women. She claims that it is the government that should be accountable for the wellbeing of migrant women. This is where the significance of this study lies – to raise public awareness and inform policymakers to take active steps and make policies to deal with the issues of well-educated migrant women and guarantee their rights in the megacities. Only when the issues of such women are addressed by the government can society be developed harmoniously in line with official pronouncements. Popular culture representation is a potentially powerful and widespread platform for influencing public perception. With close examination and critical analysis of the representation of WCMW's experiences in a megacity through the popular TV series *Ode to Joy*, this thesis has provided insights on understanding the status of those women in a contemporary Chinese urban setting and has contributed to the research scholarship in this field.

As far as theoretical contribution is concerned, this research has extended the key concepts of intersectionality and identity. Intersectionality, as a feminist theory, unpacks the relationship between the dominant and the subordinated in which multi-layered identities work to interact with each other. While providing a nuanced conceptualization of identity, as it focused primarily on race and gender to analyze the oppression and subordination of black American women, intersectionality does not fully accommodate an analysis of the multiple dimensions of social life in Chinese cities. This research has expanded the categories of analysis to incorporate age, place of origin, traditional norms, and unequal systems in addition to differences of gender and race based on the experiences of well-educated migrant women in the context of a Chinese megacity. It explored the relationships between social status and institutional arrangements highlighting their effects in differential identities, such as between migrant women identity and the various discriminations these women encountered in association with the *hukou* system. In particular, it examined the issue of gender inequality relating to the mass-media campaign of “leftover women” and its impacts on the wellbeing of WCMW in different dimensions. Professional women who remain unmarried at the age of 27 are often criticized and pressured into marriage through naming, visualizing, and categorizing. Analysis of this social issue of gender has pointed to the intersectional forces of gender norms, stereotypes, official discourse, and national interests to enrich the breadth and depth of the concept of intersectionality.

Intersectionality as an inclusive analytical tool is also criticized in terms of scale in emphasizing only “disadvantaged” groups to interpret identity. The research undertaken for this study has included other more “privileged” groups in analyzing the issues raised in *Ode to Joy* concerning WCMW. For example, Qiu, one of the three WCMW characters, and Qu, one of the two local women, have different values and perceptions on romantic relationships and marriage.

The former insists that the objective of romance is marriage, while Qu holds that romance is romance, and that if romance just aims at marriage, it is utilitarian. Qu stresses that it is more important to enjoy the “pure pleasure” of the romantic relationship itself without being bound by marriage. Why do the two female characters have such different views on the same matter? From an intersectional perspective, it is possible to interpret the difference at least partially. Qiu, who is not entitled to the rights of social welfare as a migrant woman in the megacity, takes a romantic relationship, hence marriage, as a safe haven and a protection symbolically and materially. Whereas the rich local woman, Qu, who does not need to attach her romance to marriage for the same protection or security, can afford to “play” in a romantic relationship. Comparisons between the “privileged” and the “disadvantaged” highlight the multilayered distinctions between the two women of different backgrounds which involve social status, place of origin, and identity disparities that interact with each other to produce a more nuanced conception of identity.

Moreover, the concepts of identity formation have indicated that one’s identity is related to his/her sense of self, based on place, i.e., where he/she comes from and where he/she lives. This thesis has made further reflections on this theoretical parameter based on the experiences of WCMW characters in relation to their “outsider” perceptions as migrant women vis-à-vis the megacity in which they live. The narrations of a place make little sense without taking into consideration the relationship between the place and the body that inhabits it (Sun, 2005). WCMW characters’ identity is constructed in the processes of social comparison and categorization when they “appeal to [the] differences” in comparison to those who differ from themselves in terms of place, status, and resources within that classification system (Ludvig, 2006, p. 249). Notwithstanding, WCMW characters in *Ode to Joy* do not yield to fate. They

challenge what has been imposed upon their identity by using their own lived experiences. As gradually becomes clear and is so eloquently portrayed in *Ode to Joy*, they have renegotiated their lives to be part of the city and redefined their identities with their wits, resilience and perseverance despite their structural disadvantages. Applying modified concepts of intersectionality and identity to examine the experiences of WCMW in *Ode to Joy* has revealed representations of groups and individuals in popular culture that create and reinforce images of those being portrayed, and has also helped to convey a more nuanced understanding of the complex circumstances of such women in a Chinese megacity.

6.5 Limitations of the Study

Ode to Joy is a long TV series with 97 episodes over two seasons so far. It covers a wide array of issues representing many themes, such as, WCMW characters as “outsiders”, gender inequality, social stratification, and differential representations between different women characters. By selecting some episodes, the study might have overlooked others in representing WCMW’s experiences and the key themes. Moreover, a major challenge has been about how to report on key findings in a way that informs the key research questions without describing too much detail from the TV series. Additionally, informants for this study provided valuable insights with their first-hand accounts of experiences in a big city. However, as only a few WCMW were interviewed, their perceptions on the portrayals of WCMW in *Ode to Joy* and beyond may not have fully reflected the views of such women. In recent years, some megacities have carried out policies relating to educated migrants, such as affordable talent apartments and acquisition of a local *hukou* by accumulating certain points with social insurance contribution etc., to improve the status of such migrants that include the group of WCMW. This study planned to conduct follow-up interviews with informants from government, who work(ed) as

government officials, in the summer of 2020, aiming to explore how audiences' response to *Ode to Joy* on social media and the public domain may have informed policies and measures by the government in talent introduction and support. Due to the unexpected circumstances brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, this is an issue that must be left for future studies in this field.

6.6 Recommendations for Future Research

As “there should be no single unified interpretation of a popular sitcom or drama series” (Schneider, 2012, p. 10), for future research, first, I would suggest incorporating more perspectives such as consumerism and material pursuits of the characters. Some commentators described the series as *Ode to Advertising*, or *Ode to Richness* based on perceptions of blatant commercialism. As pop culture can impact viewers' values, studies from those perspectives are worth doing. Second, a comparison with the other work of the Producer, Hou Hongliang, *All is Well*, as mentioned earlier in the thesis, might provide more insights for interpretation of gender issue. Although these two series both focus on the issue of gender inequality and tell the stories of women who were mistreated by their son-privileged families, as they are narrated from different perspectives, the two protagonists have very different results in life outcomes. In addition, further detailed research on audience responses to *Ode to Joy* would also be worthwhile. It would be interesting to explore how public perceptions of the key issues that affect migrant women in China's big cities, as they are revealed, confirmed, or reinforced through the TV series, may have played a role in shaping the conversations in policy circles about talent development initiatives and city planning. This study may inspire further research to explore how audience responses have informed efforts and discussions in the public domain to address the issues of migrant women in large cities. Finally, as the first two seasons of *Ode to Joy* have been so popular and generated so much interest that there are many millions of viewers

eagerly anticipating the imminent release of season 3. The series will no doubt continue to provide varied possibilities for the development of plots and characters, which are worthy of further research as a pop culture phenomenon.

Bibliography

All about shanghai: A standard guidebook (1983). Oxford; Hongkong;: Oxford University Press.

Anagnost, A. (2008). From ‘class’ to ‘social strata’: Grasping the social totality in reform-era China. *Third World Quarterly*, 29(3), 497-519. doi:10.1080/01436590801931488

Anthias, F. (2002). Beyond feminism and multiculturalism: Locating difference and the politics of location. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, (25), 275–86.

Atkinson, P., Coffey, A., & Delamont, S. (2001). A debate about our canon. *Qualitative Research*, 1(1), 5–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410100100101>

Average Monthly Salary of Shanghai in 2018 was 7832 RMB Yuan (trans. 2018年上海市平均工资7832元) 2016. *51sourcing*. Retrieved June 30, 2020 from: <https://www.51sourcing.com/post/47.html>

Bai, Y. (2007). A summary of research on the psychological situation of migrant workers in the city. *Rural Economics, Science and Technology*, (6), 59–60.

Barr, H. (2019). “You should be worrying about the Woman Shortage”. *Human Rights Watch*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/essay/you-should-be-worrying-about-the-woman-shortage>.

Bastia, T. (2014). Intersectionality, migration and development. *Progress in Development Studies*, 14(3), 237-248. doi:10.1177/1464993414521330

Beijing: number of graduates about same with that of last year with employment rate at 96.51%. (trans. 北京：今年高校毕业生人数与去年持平 就业率96.51%) (2018). *Ict.edu.cn*. Retrieved May 26, 2020 from: http://www.ict.edu.cn/news/gddt/jydt/n20181229_55118.shtml.

Beijing Drifter. (2020). (trans. 北漂). *Chazidian*. Retrieved April 21, 2020 from: https://www.chazidian.com/r_ci_522abc3e651ef4780b939fb92ac65bf4/

Beijing Tap Water Group New Graduates Recruitment Announcement for the Year 2020. (2020). (trans. 2020北京市自来水集团应届毕业生招聘公告). *Offcn.com*. Retrieved May 9, 2020, from: <http://www.offcn.com/gqzp/2020/0326/88673.html>

Brah, A. and Phoenix, A. (2004). Ain’t I a woman? Revisiting intersectionality. *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 5(3), 75–86.

Burke, P. J. (1980). The Self: Measurement Implications from a Symbolic Interactionist Perspective. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, (43), 18-29.

- Burke, P. J. and Reitzes, D. C. (1981). The Link Between Identity and Role Performance. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, (44), 83-92.
- Bürkner, H. J. (2012). Intersectionality: How gender studies might inspire the analysis of social inequality among migrants. *Population, Space and Place*, (18), 181–95.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: NY, Routledge Ltd.
- Cai, N. (2016). What worries us most is the stable social stratification and disparity between the rich and the poor in *Ode to Joy*. (2016). (trans. 欢乐颂中的阶层固化和贫富差距才真让人担心). *Sohu*. Retrieved March 10, 2020 from: https://www.sohu.com/a/73689411_181776
- Chang, B. (2015). The re-socialisation of migrants in a local community in Shanghai, China. *International Review of Education*, 61(2), 211-233. doi:10.1007/s11159-015-9489-6
- Chang, L. T. (2008). *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China*. Conde Nast Publications, Inc.
- Chen, L. (2008). *Gender and Chinese Development: Towards an Equitable Society*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Chen, R. (2013). Reform and opening-up from top to bottom and the migrant female workers transient from bottom to top (trans. 自上而下的改革开放与自下而上流动的女性农民) *Social Sciences Journal of Universities of Shanxi*, 25(12), 36-38.
- Cheng, H. (1991). *Girls from the Outside* (trans. 外来妹). TV series produced by CCTV and Guangdong TV Station. *Baike*. Retrieved July 13, 2020 from: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%A4%96%E6%9D%A5%E5%A6%B9/15749>
- China's Mobile Population Development Report 2016* was released (trans. 《中国流动人口发展报告 2016》发布) (2016). *Nhc.gov.cn*. Retrieved from: <http://www.nhc.gov.cn/rkjcyjtfzs/pgzdt/201610/57cf8a2bbafe4b4d9a7be10d10ae5ecf.shtml>
- China ranks the first in TV drama production: TV dramas are comparable to the Chinese poems of Tang and Song Dynasties (trans. 中国跃居电视剧第一生产大国, “电视剧可以和唐诗宋词相媲美”). (2018). *New.qq.com*. Retrieved from: <https://new.qq.com/omn/20181227/20181227A0R2BQ.html>
- China Women's Development Outline (2011-2020) Statistical Monitoring Report (trans. 《中国妇女发展纲要 (2011—2020年) 》统计监测报告). (2018). *Stats.gov.cn*. Retrieved April 06, 2020 from http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201912/t20191206_1715998.html

- Chu, X., Xiong, Y., and Zou, Y. (2014). Study on Determinants of Migrants' Social Identity: based on the case study in Shanghai. (trans. 农民工社会认同的决定因素研究:基于上海的实证分析.) *Society*, 34(4), 25-48.
- Collins, H. P. (1998). *Fighting words: Black women and the search for justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- — —. (2000; 2002). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (Rev. 10th anniversary ed.). New York: Routledge.
doi:10.4324/9780203900055
- — —. (2015). Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41(1), 1-20. doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112142
- Collins, H. P., & Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality*. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA; Polity Press.
- Cornell, S., and Hartmann, D. (1998). *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*. Thousand Oaks [Calif.]; London: Pine Forge Press.
- Crenshaw, K. W (1989). *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*. University of Chicago Legal Forum.
- — —. (1991). Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-99.
- Cui, Y. (2016). How to assess the persona of Qiu Yingying in *Ode to Joy*? (trans. 如何评价《欢乐颂》中邱莹莹这个角色?). *Zhihu*. Retrieved February 15, 2020 from:
<https://www.zhihu.com/question/43719551/answer/98020566>
- Davis, K. (2008; 2008a). Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful. *Feminist Theory*, 9(1), 67-85.
doi:10.1177/1464700108086364
- Dela. (2019). Fan Shengmei vs Su Mingyu: one is sympathetic, the other is admirable. That's where the differences lie. (trans. 樊胜美和苏明玉, 一个值得同情, 一个却让人佩服, 差别在于这两点). *Baijiahua*. Retrieved October 10, 2019 from:
<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1628071878115178455&wfr=spider&for=pc>
- Deweever, J. A., Dill, B. T., & Schram, S. (2009). Racial, ethnic, and gender disparities in the workforce, education, and training under welfare reform. In Dill, B.T. and Zambara, R. E. *Emerging Intersections*. 150-179. Rutgers University Press.
- Dill, B. T., and Zambrana, R. E. (2009). *Emerging intersections: Race, class, and gender in theory, policy and practice*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

- Ding, J., Zhu, T., Zhu, B., Fa, H., Sun, X., & Lin, K. (1999). Growth, Characteristics and Policy Implications of the Marriages with Two-Place Household Registration: The Case of Shanghai (trans. 论城市两地户口婚姻的增长、特征及其社会政策寓意—以上海市为例). *Population Study*, (5), 1-8.
- Du, H., Li, S., & Hao, P. (2018). ‘Anyway, you are an outsider’: Temporary migrants in urban China. *Urban Studies*, 55(14). 3185-3201. doi:10.1177/0042098017691464
- Fan, C. (2000). Migration and Gender in China. *China Review*. 423-454. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/23453378>
- — —. (2008; 2007). *China on the Move: Migration, the State, and the Household*. London; New York: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9780203937372
- Feldshuh, H. (2018). Gender, media, and mythmaking: Constructing China’s leftover women. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 28(1), 38-54. doi:10.1080/01292986.2017.1339721
- Fincher, H. L. (2014). *Leftover women: The resurgence of gender inequality in china*. London: Zed Books.
- Frasure, L. A. and Williams L. F. (2009). “Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Disparities in Political Participation and Civic Engagement” In Dill T. and Zambrana R. *Emerging Intersections: Race, Class, and Gender in Theory, Policy, and Practice*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Gaetano, A. (2008). Sexuality in diasporic space: Rural-to-urban migrant women negotiating gender and marriage in contemporary china. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 15(6), 629-645. doi:10.1080/09663690802518545
- Green, A. (2018). Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” Lyrics, Translation, and History. *Live* Retrieved August 15, 2019 from: <https://www.liveabout.com/beethovens-ode-to-joy-lyrics-history-724410>
- Higher education expansion in 1999, a great event in the history of Chinese education (trans. 1999年高校扩招堪称中国教育史上一件大事) (2008). *China.com.cn*. Retrieved from http://www.china.com.cn/economic/zhuanti/ggkf30/2008-12/16/content_16956359.htm
- Honig, E. (1986). *Sisters and strangers: Women in the shanghai cotton mills, 1919-1949*. [Shanghai Shachang Nügong]. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- — —. (1992). *Creating Chinese ethnicity: Subei people in Shanghai, 1850-1980* New Haven: Yale University Press.
- hooks, b. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, Mass: South End Press.

- Hou Hongliang: *Ode to Joy* in the bloody realities (2016). (trans. 侯鸿亮: 《欢乐颂》“鲜血淋漓”的现实里). (2016). *China Daily*. Retrieved from: http://cnews.chinadaily.com.cn/2016-05/11/content_25208860.htm
- In 2017 TV ratings of *Ode to Joy* ranked first during the week of May 08 to 14. (2017). *Askci*. Retrieved from <http://www.askci.com/news/chanye/20170522/10071398634.shtml>
- Introduction of plots of *Ode to Joy* (trans. 欢乐颂剧情介绍) (2016). *tvmao.com*. Retrieved September 28, 2019 from <https://www.tvmao.com/drama/ZyopIzQ=>
- Jacka, T. (2005). Finding a place: Negotiations of modernization and globalization among rural women in Beijing. *Critical Asian Studies*. 37(1). 51-74. doi:10.1080/1467271052000305269
- . (2014). *Rural women in urban China: Gender, migration, and social change*. Taylor and Francis. doi:10.4324/9781315701028
- Jane. (2016). *Ode to Joy*: What kind of friends we should make. (trans. 《欢乐颂》: 我们应该与什么样的人交朋友). *Jianshu*. Retrieved October 28, 2019 from: <https://www.jianshu.com/p/2ccc91da45f8>
- Jia, C., & Zhang, J. (2017). Confucian values, negative life events, and rural young suicide with major depression in china. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, 76(1), 3-14. doi:10.1177/0030222815575014
- Jiang. (2017). An Analysis of the Ideology of the TV Drama *Ode to Joy*. (trans. 浅析电视剧《欢乐颂》的意识形态). *People*. Retrieved from: <http://media.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0301/c4111112-29116185.html>
- Kipnis, A. (2006). *Suzhi*: A keyword approach. *The China Quarterly*, 186, 295-313. doi:10.1017/S0305741006000166.
- Lei G. (2001). Reconstituting the Rural-Urban Divide: Peasant Migration and the Rise of “Orderly Migration” in Contemporary China. *The Journal of contemporary China*, 10(28), 471-493.
- Lethbridge, H. J. (1983) “Introduction” In *All about shanghai: A standard guidebook*. Oxford; Hong Kong: Oxford University Press. List of Countries by Sex Ratio. (2019). *Statistics times*. Retrieved from [http:// statisticstimes.com/demographics/countries-by-sex-ratio.php](http://statisticstimes.com/demographics/countries-by-sex-ratio.php)
- Liu, J. (2017; 2016). *Gender, sexuality and power in Chinese companies: Beauties at work*. London, England: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1057/978-1-137-50575-0
- Ludvig, A. (2006). Differences between women? Intersecting voices in a female narrative. *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, (13), 245–58.

- Lu, J. & Guo, Q. (2013). “The Group of Drifters: Hesitant Young people in Beijing”. (Trans. “北漂一族：在北京彷徨的年轻人”). *You tube*. Retrieved June 09, 2020 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTwILqEhD7k>.
- Lu, Y., & Tao, R. (2015). Female migration, cultural context, and son preference in rural China. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 34(5), 665-686. doi:10.1007/s11113-015-9357-x
- Ma, L. J. C., & Cartier, C. L. (2003). *The Chinese diaspora: Space, place mobility, and identity*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Mainland Drama *Ode to Joy* Captures the Hearts of Overseas Viewers. (2016). *Global times*. Retrieved from <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/984696.shtml>.
- Map of China showing Shanghai. (2017). *NZ China Society*. Retrieved from: <http://nzchinasociety.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Location-map-Shanghai.jpeg>
- Marton, A., & McGee, T. (2017). Mega-urbanization in china: Rural-urban synthesis as a foundation for sustainability. *The Global Studies Journal*, 10(2), 1-19. doi:10.18848/1835-4432/CGP/v10i02/1-19
- Matheson, D. (2005). *Media discourses: Analyzing media texts*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Maynard, M. (1994). ‘Race’, gender and the concept of ‘difference’ in feminist thought. In Afshar, H. and Maynard, M., editors, *The dynamics of ‘race’ and gender*. Taylor and Francis. 9–25.
- McCall, L. (2005). The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs*, 30(3), 1771–1800.
- McKee, A. (2003). *Textual analysis: A beginner's guide*. London; Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Migrant Women’s Club (trans. 打工妹之家). (2018). *China Development Brief*. Retrieved May, 10, 2020, from <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.org.cn/org469/>
- Mohajan, H. K. (2018). Qualitative research methodology in social sciences and related subjects. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 7(1), 23-48. doi:10.26458/jedep.v7i1.571
- Murphy, R., Tao, R., & Lu, X. (2011). Son preference in rural china: Patrilineal families and socioeconomic change. *Population and Development Review*, 37(4), 665-690. doi:10.1111/j.1728-4457.2011.00452.x

- Myerson, R., Hou, Y., Tang, H., Cheng, Y., Wang, Y., & Ye, Z. (2010). Home and away: Chinese migrant workers between two worlds. *The Sociological Review*, 58(1), 26-44. doi:10.1111/j.1467-954X.2009.01878.x
- Nash, J. (2008). Re-thinking intersectionality. *Feminist Review*, (89), 1–15.
- Online viewing volume exceeded 5 billion! Data analysis on who love to watch *Ode to Joy* (trans. 网络播放量超50亿! 数据分析哪些人喜欢看《欢乐颂》). (2019). *Sohu*. Retrieved March 05, 2020 from https://www.sohu.com/a/75200182_354986
- Pan et al. (2019). The changing texture of the city-size wage differential in Chinese cities – effects of skill and identity. *China Economic Review*, (53), 191-210. doi:10.1016/j.chieco.
- Pawson, R. (1996). Theorizing the interview. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 47(2), 295–314. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/591728>
- Per capita disposable income of Chinese residents by region 2016 (2017). *Stats.gov.cn*. Retrieved November 28, 2019 from: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2017/indexch.htm>
- Per Capita GDP of Guizhou Province in 2015 (trans. 贵州省2015年人均GDP) (2016). *Stats.gov.cn*. Retrieved January 20, 2020 from: <http://data.stats.gov.cn/search.htm?s=2015%E8%B4%B5%E5%B7%9E%E7%9C%81%E4%BA%BA%E5%9D%87GDP>
- Per Capita GDP of Shanghai in 2015 (trans. 上海2015年人均GDP) (2016). *Stats.gov.cn*. Retrieved January 20, 2020 from: <http://data.stats.gov.cn/search.htm?s=2015%E4%B8%8A%E6%B5%B7%E4%BA%BA%E5%9D%87GDP>
- Piotrowski, M., Tong, Y., Zhang, Y., & Chao, L. (2016). The Transition to first marriage in China, 1966–2008: an examination of gender differences in education and *hukou* status. *European Journal of Population*, 32(1), 29-154. doi:10.1007/s10680-015-9364-y
- Poole, A. (2010). “Identity of meaning” In Walker, G., & Leedham-Green, E. S. (2010). *identity*. New York; Cambridge, Cambs, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Pratt, G. 1999: From registered nurse to registered nanny: Discursive geographies of Filipina domestic workers in Vancouver, BC. *Economic Geography*, (75), 215–36. doi:10.1111/j.1944-8287.1999.tb00077.x
- Puar, J. K. (2005). Queer times, queer assemblages. *Social Text*, 23(3-4), 121-139. doi:10.1215/01642472-23-3-4_84-85-121

- Pun, N. (1999). "Becoming *Dagongmei* (Working Girls): The Politics of Identity and Difference in Reform China." *China Journal*, (42), 1–18.
- — —. (2005). *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace*. Durham/London: Duke University Press.
- Puppin, G. (2018). Happiness "with a Chinese taste": An Interpretive Analysis of CCTV's 2014 Spring Festival Gala's Public Service announcement (PSA) "Chopsticks" (*Kuaizipian*). 64-86. In Wielander, G., & Hird, D. (2018). *Chinese discourses on happiness*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Qin, M., Brown, J. J., Padmadas, S. S., Li, B., Qi, J., & Falkingham, J. (2016). Gender inequalities in employment and wage-earning among internal labour migrants in Chinese cities. *Demographic Research*, 34, 175-202. doi:10.4054/DemRes.2016.34.6
- Rofel, L. (2008). *Desiring China: Experiments in neoliberalism, sexuality, and public culture*. Durham/London: Duke University Press.
- Ross, K. (2002). *Women, politics, media: Uneasy relations in comparative perspective*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Rowe, W. T. (1984). *Hankow: Commerce and society in a Chinese city, 1796-1889*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Schneider, F. (2012). *Visual political communication in popular Chinese television series: China Studies*. 22 Brill.
- Sen, A. (2006). *Identity and violence: The illusion of destiny*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Sen, G. and Grown, C. (1987). *Development, crises and alternative visions: Third world women's perspectives*. Earthscan.
- Sex ratio at birth (male birth versus female birth). (2020). UN Data. Retrieved from <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=PopDiv&f=variableID%3a52>
- Shanghai GDP Per capita exceeding US\$ 20,000 (trans. 上海人均GDP突破2万美元). *Shanghai gov.* (2019). Retrieved April 02, 2020 from: <http://www.shanghai.gov.cn/nw2/nw2314/nw2315/nw4411/u21aw1373508.html>
- Shanghai house purchase restrictions and mortgage policy (trans. 2020年上海限购政策及贷款政策). (2020). *The paper.cn*. Retrieved June 29, 2020 from: https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_7747710

- Shanghai per capita 36 Square Meters in 2018: Do you lag behind the newly released 10 grand standards? (trans. 上海2018年人均住房36平10大标准出炉你拖后腿了吗?). (2018). *Leju*. Retrieved from: <https://sh.leju.com/news/2018-04-07/16006384581263898229535.shtml>
- Sheng, K. (2004). *Northern Girls*. (trans. 北妹). Wuhan, China: Changjiang Wenyi Press.
- Sima, W. (2018). “Ode to Joy” In Golley, *Prosperity*. J. S. I: ANU Press. 38-41.
- Silvey, R. (2004). Power, difference and mobility: Feminist advances in migration studies. *Progress in Human Geography*, (28), 490–506.
- Special interview with Yuan Zidan, the screenwriter of *Ode to Joy* (trans. 《欢乐颂》编剧袁子弹专访). (2016). *Suhu.com*. Retrieved December 16, 2019 from: https://www.sohu.com/a/81751595_154166
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(3), 224-237. doi:10.2307/2695870
- Survey Report on A Thousand Migrant Women by ACWF Research Group (trans. 全国妇联调研组《千名进城务工妇女问卷调查报告》). (2007). *China Women's Movement*, (1).
- Sun, W. (2005) Anhui Baomu in Shanghai: Gender, Class, and a Sense of Place. In Wang, J. (Ed.) *Locating China: Space, Place and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge. 171-189.
- Theme Song of *Ode to Joy* (trans. 欢乐颂主题曲). (2020). *Manmankan*. Retrieved May 9, 2020 from http://g.manmankan.com/dy2013/201508/2919_gequ.shtml
- There can be friendship between women, not just “palace fights”: interview with Yuan Zidan, screenwriter of *Ode to Joy*. (2017). (trans. 女性间可以有友谊,不能只有“宫斗”:专访电视剧《欢乐颂》编剧袁子弹). *Xinhuanet*. Retrieved from: http://www.xinhuanet.com/mrdx/2017-05/19/c_136296607.htm
- Valentine, G. (2007). Theorizing and researching intersectionality: A challenge for feminist geography. *The Professional Geographer*, (59), 10–21.
- Walby, S., Armstrong, J., & Strid, S. (2012). Intersectionality: Multiple inequalities in social theory. *Sociology*, 46(2), 224-240. doi:10.1177/0038038511416164
- Wang, L. (2019). Women: the greater beneficiaries of the rapid development of higher education in China (trans. “女性：中国教育发展的更大受益者”). *China women*. Retrieved from: <http://paper.cnwomen.com.cn/content/2019-01/08/055833.html>
- Wang, Y. (2000). Housing reform and its impacts on the urban poor in China. *Housing Studies*, 15(6), 845–864.

- What strata is each person at in *Ode to Joy*? (trans. 欢乐颂里每个人处在什么社会阶层?) (2016). *Zhihu*. Retrieved April 18, 2020 from <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/20842208>
- What's the meaning of Shabaitian (trans. 傻白甜是什么意思?). (2016). *360doc*. Retrieved February 2, 2020 from: http://www.360doc.com/content/16/1128/23/22968547_610316896.shtml
- Where do graduates like to go after graduation? – Report on the employment flow of college students in eight cities released (trans. 大学生喜欢去哪儿工作? 《八城市大学生就业流向报告》发布). (2017). *QNSB*. Retrieved from: http://www.qnsb.com/fzepaper/site1/qnsb/html/2017-10/19/content_625666.htm
- Why is Shanghai called a “magic city”? (trans. 为什么上海被称为“魔都”?). (2017). *Zhihu*. Retrieved January 27, 2020 from <https://www.zhihu.com/question/63282342>
- Wolf, M. (1985). *Revolution postponed: Women in contemporary China*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Wong, O. (2016). The changing relationship of women with their natal families. *Journal of Sociology*, 52(1), 53-67. doi:10.1177/1440783315587797
- Wu, L. (2011). Studies on Migrant Women Born in the 1980s with A Vision of Government Responsibility (trans. from “政府责任视野中80后进城务工女性群体研究”). Master's Theses. *Nanjing Normal University*. doi: 10.7666/d.y1922620. Retrieved March 8, 2020 from <http://new.oversea.cnki.net.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/index/>
- Wu, L. (2013). Decentralization and hukou reforms in China. *Policy and Society*, 32(1), 33-42. doi:10.1016/j.polsoc.2013.01.002
- Xu, F. (2000). *Women Migrant Workers in China's Economic Reform*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Xu, J. (2016). Fan Shengmei: Chinese style Shengnü. (trans. 樊胜美：中国式剩女). *360doc*. Retrieved from: http://www.360doc.com/content/16/0510/20/2284742_558039900.shtml
- Yan, S. (2016). How serious is the Chinese solidified social stratification? (trans. 中国社会阶层固化有多严重?). *aisixiang.com*. Retrieved January 28, 2020 from: <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/97653.html>.
- Yan, W. (2016). *Ode to Joy*, a pioneer for urban-theme TV dramas. (trans. 《欢乐颂》为都市剧的创新探路). *People*. Retrieved from: http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb/html/2016-05/09/content_1677453.htm

- Yang, W (2016). Interviewing Director Hou Hongliang: Not expected that *Ode to Joy* would have received such huge responses. (trans. 专访侯鸿亮：没料到《欢乐颂》会有这么大反响). *Xinhua News Net*. Retrieved from http://www.bj.xinhuanet.com/bjyw/2016-05/11/c_1118848180_2.htm
- Youyi. (2018). Series of commentaries on *Ode to Joy* I: Five beauties and their families (trans. 《欢乐颂1》影评系列之一:五美与她们的原生家庭). (2018). *Jingkan*. Retrieved October 20, 2019 from <http://jingkan.net/getarticle/5ba48b74e18ba051ea8995af>
- Yuan, W. (2017). On the modern urban-theme TV drama *Ode to Joy*: in women's perspective. (trans. 女性主义视角下的现代都市剧——电视剧《欢乐颂》评析). *House of Play*, (20), 99-100.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Intersectionality and feminist politics. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3), 193-209. doi:10.1177/1350506806065752
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2006) Belonging and the Politics of Belonging. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40(3), 196–213.
- Zhang, L. (2002). Urban Experiences and Social Belonging among Chinese Migrants. In Madsen, R., Pickowicz, P., & Link, P. *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Zhang, L., and Li, Y. (2009). Research on the sources of employees' pressures and solutions in foreign companies. (trans. 外企员工工作压力源和压力应对方式研究). *China HR Development*, (7), 68-71.
- Zhang, M., Nyland, C., & Zhu, C. J. (2010). Hukou-based HRM in Contemporary China: The case of Jiangsu and Shanghai. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 16(3), 377-393. doi:10.1080/13602380902944009
- Zhang, X. (2017). Virginity issue reflected in TV drama. *China Daily*. Retrieved from: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/life/2017-06/06/content_29634150_3.htm.
- Zhang, X., and Gao, Y. (2014). Change trend and characters analysis on “marriage between two large cities – the case of Beijing” (trans. 大城市“两地婚姻”的变动趋势及特征分析——以北京为例). *Southern Population*, 29(2), 1-10.
- Zhang, Y. & Yu, Y. (1984). Girl from Mt. Huangshan (trans. 黄山来的姑娘). Produced by Changchun Film Studio. *Baike*. Retrieved August 18, 2019 from: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%BB%84%E5%B1%B1%E6%9D%A5%E7%9A%84%E5%A7%91%E5%A8%98>

Appendix A

Approval for Human Participant Research



**University
of Victoria**

Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	Andrew Marton (Supervisor)	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER	19-0539
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT	Linda Yang Master's student	Expedited review - delegated	
UVIC DEPARTMENT	Pacific & Asian Studies	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE	10-Jan-2020
		APPROVED ON	10-Jan-2020
		APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE	09-Jan-2021

PROJECT TITLE **Ode to Joy: Pop Culture Representation of White-collar Migrant Women in a Chinese Megacity**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS None

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING
External, SSHRC

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL
APPENDIX D.docx - 10-Jan-2020
APPENDIX C.docx - 10-Jan-2020
APPENDIX A-2, Recruitment Script of the Third Party.pdf - 10-Jan-2020
APPENDIX A-1, Recruitment Script of the Third Party.pdf - 10-Jan-2020
APPENDIX B.pdf - 10-Jan-2020
APPENDIX A.docx - 12-Dec-2019

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Modifications
To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.



Dr. Rachael Scarth
Associate VP Research
Operations

Appendix B

Participants Interview Questions

1. Could you please make a brief introduction of yourself?
2. Have you watched the TV drama series *Ode to Joy*? How many episodes have you watched? Which scenario has impressed you most? Why?
3. If you are familiar with the popular TV series *Ode to Joy*, do you feel empathized with any character(s)? For what?
4. In *Ode to Joy*, the five women characters often have different ideas for certain things. For example, regarding romance and marriage, Qiu expresses that the objective of a romance is for marriage and that any love affair not for marriage is not ethical, while Qu holds that romance is romance and that if love between a man and a woman just aims at marriage, it is utilitarian (Episode 4, Season II.). Which one do you agree, or not agree, why?
5. In Episode 17, Season I, Fan Shengmei says to Andy, “To us ordinary people, it’s really hard to live in Shanghai” after she finds that her boyfriend’s BMW 3 series car is rented rather than his own as a small boss of a start-up. What do you think she means by this? Why?
6. If you were the director of the TV drama, would you like to make some changes to the representations of a character or some characters? How?
7. By the end of Season II, Qiu is going to marry Ying, the guy who separated with her before when learning she is not a virgin; Fan breaks up with her boyfriend as she finds that she has no share of ownership in their house for marriage; and Guan suspenses the relationship with her boyfriend, which has not been blessed by her parents as he has no formal job, while Qu and Andy, each has established a stable relationship with someone they love - Qu goes steady with a physician, and Andy falls in love with Bao, a rich businessman.

Do you like this kind of ending? Why? or Why not? What would you expect in terms of development in the plots of Season III of *Ode to Joy*, which might be released soon?
8. To what extent do you think this TV drama has reflected the experiences of these women in reality? Please give your rating from 1 to 10.
9. Do you have anything to share for living in the city? Would you have any suggestions as to how to live better and easier in a big city?

Appendix C

Email Script to Personal Contacts for Recruitment

(This email is delivered in Chinese)

Dear [NAME],

I'm Linyi Yang, a graduate student in the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies at the University of Victoria. I'm going to start my research on popular culture representations of migrant women in Chinese megacities. I'm writing to you to ask for your support and assistance with the recruitment of potential participants for my research project. I believe that your expertise and knowledge in this regard will largely facilitate the fulfilment of my research study.

The context of this study is that over the past few decades, accompanying China's rapid economic development and urbanization, the number of women migrants to large cities has been growing. While the earlier female migrants of the reform era have been widely represented by popular culture and studied in academia, the new generation migrant women have been less well represented in both popular culture and scholarship.

The investigation seeks to understand experiences of the new-generation women migrants in the city and their perceptions about how these may or may not be portrayed in the popular TV series *Ode to Joy*. I plan to interview about 20 people. Each interview will take approximately 45 minutes to a maximum of one hour, at a convenient time and location for the participants.

I would like to assure you that the study has received ethics approval through the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board. Their participation in this project is entirely voluntary and they may withdraw at any time. Their name will not be shown on the transcribed data, in the final report of the research, or any published materials. Their identity will be protected by using a pseudonym and all data collected related to this research will be stored confidentially for the benefits of the participants.

It will be highly appreciated if you could aid with this undertaking. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by telephone: 250-885-2186, or by email: linyiyang1@uvic.ca.

Please find attached a copy of the Consent Form which shows that participants' participation in the research is completely voluntary and how their confidentiality will be protected by the researcher.

Sincerely,

Linyi Yang

Appendix C-1

Email Recruitment Script of Researcher's Personal Contact

(This email is delivered in Chinese)

Dear [NAME],

I'm G. H. Li. Entrusted by the researcher, Linyi Yang, I'm contacting you regarding her upcoming research study entitled *Ode to Joy: Pop Culture Representation of White-Collar Migrant Women in a Chinese Megacity*. Linyi Yang is my former college. She is a graduate student in the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies at the University of Victoria.

The purpose of the study is to understand how experiences of the new-generation women migrants are represented in pop culture through the popular TV drama *Ode to Joy* as this subject has been less studied in previous scholarship. This investigation seeks to use some first-hand information to help understand the experiences of those women migrants that may or may not be represented in that TV drama. It is my belief that your personal experience and knowledge in this regard will be of great value to the study.

Linyi plans to interview about 15 people individually. Each interview will take approximately 45 minutes to a maximum of one hour, at your convenient time and location.

This study has received ethics approval through the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board. Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Your name will not be shown on the transcribed data, in the final report of the research or any published materials. Your identity will be protected by using a pseudonym and all data collected related to this research will be stored confidentially for the benefits of the participants.

It will be highly appreciated if you could attend this investigation. If you are interested in participating, please contact me by the email I'm using, or by WeChat _____, or by telephone _____. And if you have any questions to ask her, please feel free to contact her by email: linyiyang1@uvic.ca.

Sincerely,

G. H. Li