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From “Floating Population” to “Guest Beijinger”: Identity Formation of Migrant Workers in Beijing

Wei LI

Introduction

Over the last two decades, a new demographic phenomenon in China has attracted increasing attention in academic journals, newspapers, and magazines. The “floating population,”¹ refers to the large and increasing number of migrants without local household registration status (“hukou”). The growth of this population group reflects fundamental social and demographic changes in Chinese society since the early 1980s. Specifically, the floating population has resulted from both the widening regional differences and the changing household registration system since the 1980s. On the one hand, the widening economic gaps between different regions have inevitably encouraged some people to migrate from poorer to more prosperous regions. On the other hand, China’s household registration system, which once strictly prevented unauthorized migration before the 1980s, has been gradually relaxed, and undermined by economic development and reform, making it possible for people to migrate to more economically developed regions. However, because the household registration system is still in place, and most rural migrants are still not allowed to be registered as urban dwellers, they are registered as temporary residents and are not entitled to some of the benefits that local people can enjoy. Thus, the special migrant category, the ‘floating population’ or temporary residents, has emerged and developed in China against this background (Yu Zhu, 2003).

In 2005, the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) estimated that 130 million people comprised the so-called floating population in cities, whereas the potential rural workforce was close to 600 million.²

According to the 2000 Chinese Population Census, the five coastal provinces of Guangdong, Beijing,

Shanghai, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu experienced substantial net immigration from other provinces in the late 1990s.³ Among them, Beijing had the second largest immigration in China between 1995 and 2000; roughly 199 million people moved from other Chinese provinces to Beijing, which is a center of modernization and industrialization. Additionally, nearly one out of three people in Beijing belongs to the floating population according to the capital’s population and family planning commission.

The last few years have seen a growing number of migration studies published by Chinese and overseas authors. These have provided valuable insight on, for instance, the patterns and characteristics of population movements, their spatial distribution, migrant characteristics, causes, theories, problems, and other issues relating to migration (Du, 1997; Gu, 1994; Huang, 1997; Lu, 1991; Lu et al., 1994; Wang, 1996; Wirth, 1938; Yuan, 1994). Such internal rural labor migration issues, especially identity issues, have become one of the most significant research and policy concerns in China in recent years. This topic tries to capture the fluid and complex cultural outcomes that result from migration. Migrants leave ‘home’, but with what consequences? They could abandon their roots consciously, lose them through gradual assimilation, or seek to reaffirm them. Sometimes this is a ‘survival’ or ‘retention’ of an old identity, but more often a new identity gets created in the receiving society. In the literature, the issue of identity has been addressed in several dimensions. Most of the work has emphasized single dimensions of social identities, such as ethnic identities and community identities. Blommaert and Dong (2007), for example, investigate the complexity and micro-variation of the Chinese language in the context of mass internal migration, and the way in which sociolinguistic process shed light on the

construction of migrant identities. This study aims to link the existence of place identity on the social context of migrant settlement with the varied factors that contribute to these identities. It examines how social networks function in migrants' identity formation. It also pays special attention to the Chinese "hukou" policy and reveals the institutional restriction of "hukou" status on the identity formation of migrants in the receiving society.

General Concepts and Theoretical Framework

1. Forming Identities

Identities must be negotiated; they are not simply a matter of choice, because identity formation in individuals and groups derives from their interaction with the social and cultural context in which they live (Bentley, 1987; Keyes, 1981; Harrell, 1995; Howard, 2000; Swann, 1987). Nevertheless, identity--a sense of who we are, in terms of how we fit into the world--is derived from how our minds process the world around us. Identities of individuals are socially constructed--formed and negotiated through everyday experiences and social interactions. Individuals understand these lived and social experiences in terms of the cultural meanings of the specific society in which they live (cf. Goffman, 1963; Strauss, 1992b; Strauss and Quinn, 1994)

2. Place Identity

Place, both geographic and virtual, is another recent basis of identities, a direction that attests to the interdisciplinary character of recent research on identities. In general terms, place identity can be defined as an interpretation of self that uses environmental meaning to symbolize or situate identity. Like other forms of identity, place identity answers the question-Who am I?-by countering-Where am I? or Where do I belong? Identification may involve self-conceptions in which people appropriate the meanings of place to articulate a sense of self. Often it includes significant affiliation of self with place, producing a sense of belonging or feeling at home in one place. Such self-interpretation and affiliation frequently incorporates multiple locales, ranging in scale from rooms and dwelling places to neighborhoods, communities, and

even regions (Cuba and Hummon 1993a, 1993b; Proshansky et al. 1983; Weigert 1981).

With regard to place identity as affiliation, scholars have explored how people use places to forge a sense of attachment or home. Such identification with place often involves emotional ties to place, but it may also involve a sense of shared interests and values. This identification with place is often experienced as a sense of being "at home"- of being comfortable, familiar, and "really me" here (Relph 1976; Rowles 1983; Seamon 1979).

3. People and Place Experiences

Although places as physical, social, and cultural contexts influence place identity, place identification is also mediated by the characteristics people bring to places and the structure of their experiences with places. The importance of the social mediation of place experience for place identification can be seen in several ways. First, community attachment research indicates that integration into the local area is a prime determinant of attachment to locale. Local social involvements-particularly those with friends, but also those involving kin, organizational memberships, and local shopping-prove to be the most consistent and significant sources of sentimental ties to local places (Gerson et al. 1977; Goudy 1982; Guest and Lee 1983; Hunter 1974; Kasarda and Janowitz 1974; St. John, Austin, and Baba 1986). The significance of local social involvement for place identification also receives support from ethnographic work, whether of urban neighborhoods (Gans 1962; Rivlin 1982; Solomon and Steinitz 1986) or rural enclaves (Coles 1967; Peshkin 1978).

4. Qualitative studies of place identity

Qualitative studies of place identity have focused on people's experience of being "at home" in place and of the diverse meaning such an affiliation with place has to the individual. Tracing the symbolic and emotional ties that bind people to place, researchers have shown that individuals routinely construct place identities-interpretations of self that engender a sense of being at home (Hayward, 1982; Hummon, 1989; Proshansky, et al., 1983; Rapoport, 1982; Rowles, 1983a; Seamon, 1979; Shumaker and Taylor, 1983). By documenting the persistence of place identity, these scholars have also raised significant questions about the relation of

place identity to mobility.

In summation, previous scholarship indicates that place identity uses environmental meaning to display and situate the self and that place identity is a product of both the qualities of places and the characteristics and relations of people to places. These theoretical insights, however, have been generated by disparate studies of place identity across a range of geographic loci, ranging from rooms and dwelling places to communities and regions. As of yet, no systematic research has attempted to link the existence of place identity on the social context of migrant settlement with the varied factors that contribute to these identities. This study explores this new territory, analyzing how migrants construct a sense of home with respect to social networks. Specifically, it focused on migrants to the suburban area of Beijing, analyzing how floating migrant workers come to feel at home in their new locale. Moreover, migrants called themselves “guest Beijinger” which could be considered as their transitory identity in Beijing. Notably, nearly all newcomers do establish a sense of being “at home” and grow strong ambitions for long-term residence. However, their labor is desired, but their presence is not, and, with few exceptions, they are forbidden permanent residency.



Figure 1. The Formation of a transitory identity: “Guest Beijinger”

As showed in Fig. 1, the identity of “guest Beijinger” is formed under the influence of both the “Beijing hukou” restriction and the generation of place identity in the host society. Specifically, migrants’ place identity is influenced by two factors: place affiliation and social networks. On the one hand, dimensions of place affiliation include the dwelling related responses, such as the rented room and house where migrants live; the community related responses refer to attractive lifestyle and sense of community; the organizational related responses encompass participation in work

and formal organizations. On the other hand, Social networks are composed of sets of family, kin and sometimes friends who are always present in migrations, and through which information and other resources are channeled. It’s to be noted that social networks function in stretching the zoning of place affiliation

Research Methods

Setting: Sha Village as the field site

The research site is Sha Village, which is located in the northern suburban outskirts of the city of Beijing. Thirty years ago, it was a truly rural community. Now, it has been incorporated into the fast, urbanized greater Beijing metropolitan area, and it functions as a place that provides cheap and familiar accommodation space for low-end migrant workers and their family members (Li, 2012).

Data Collection

This study is part of a larger research project on *the Mode of Social Intervention and Social Control Strategy Targeted Migrant Population in the Suburban Areas of Beijing, China*.⁴ Data used in this study came from this research project and was gathered between January 2008 and February 2009 over an aggregate total of 10 months in Sha Village. Under the guidance of my supervisor, Prof. Liu Neng, my research partners and I conducted a preliminary investigation in Sha Village between January and February 2008. We collected some background information regarding the following: making a list of the total house numbers in Sha Village; clarifying the number of the total population and households, the composition of the population, the rental situation at the household level, etc.. A formal questionnaire survey was conducted via face-to-face interviews between September and December 2008. We selected 160 households from a list of a total of 366 homes in Sha Village randomly. With the exception of 16 households that refused to accept the questionnaire and 25 households that do not rent out the rooms, the number of the final collected questionnaires for local landlords was 119. Also, we selected 2-3 migrants per-household to do the questionnaires from all the 119 households. Finally, 203 migrant samples were

collected.

As for the collection of the qualitative data, I spent a considerable amount of time in Sha Village from April to July 2008 using participant observation to document the everyday lives of the migrants. Additionally, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 45 carefully selected interviewees, 30 of whom were migrant tenants including ten men and ten women; the remaining 15 were native landlords consisting of 9 men and 6 women. At the time of the interview, the migrants interviewed were between 20 to 60 years of age with most being in their twenties and early thirties. The length of their settlement in Sha Village varied widely, spanning from a few months to 8 years. Most of the migrants accepted the interview were junior high school graduates while 6 of them were high school graduates and 4 had only elementary school. Since many of those interviewed were in their twenties, over half were single; most of them work as physical laborers, such as peddlers, construction workers and domestic workers. As for the native landlords, most of them were in their forties and early fifties. Almost all of them regard renting the rooms as their main job. All the names used below are pseudonyms.

“Hukou” Restrictions: Institutional Barriers of Becoming Future Beijing Citizens

“Hukou”: Chinese household registration policy

“Hukou” is a common name used in China for the household registration policy. It is basically a resident permit given by the government as a kind of internal passport. Until recently, every person in China is registered in a household registration book, which defines the family as either an agricultural household or an urban resident household, with the latter entitled to subsidized housing, social insurance, medical care.

“Floating population”⁴ in Beijing without Beijing “hukou”

To move “hukou” from one place to other is very hard, especially to move “hukou” from rural areas to the city. As the capital city of China, Beijing is famous for its strict Beijing “hukou” restriction. In recent years, large amounts of migrant workers have flocked to Beijing for a better life. They are designated “floating

population” or “temporary residents” because they don’t have Beijing “hukou”. As a result, they are unentitled to subsidized public housing, public education beyond elementary school, public medical insurance and government welfare payments.

Although it’s hard to get a Beijing “hukou”, there are still some ways for getting it (see appendix). However, either way requires high education or a large amount of money, which seems impossible for migrant workers, since most of them are low educated and have low incomes.

Miss Liu, a hotel maid indicates that “I hope to get the Beijing ‘hukou’, but I think this is only a wishful thinking for I have heard that even the college graduates are difficult to get it. I hold little hope for getting the Beijing “hukou”. However, I like the fantastic life in Beijing, so I try to make more money and live a better life. I hope one day I could live a life like the Beijingers’ do.” For most of the migrant workers, there is some kind of conflict between the ambitions for long term residence and the institutional restriction for becoming future Beijing citizens due to the strict Beijing “hukou” restrictions. In the following section, I will discuss how these “floating populations” settle down, strive to gain a better life and construct their transitory identities as “guest Beijinger”.

The Formation of Place Identity in the Social Context of Sha Village

How migrant workers settle in Sha Village

In recent years, large amounts of migrant workers have flocked to Beijing for a better life. With low income and low job security, they cannot afford the high rents of the inner-city area. Thus, the suburban outskirts of Beijing became their first choice for a place to settle. The research site, Sha Village, which is located in the suburban areas of Beijing has become one such place. For the floating population, Sha Village is an attractive location to settle thanks to several characteristics: excellent geographical location and convenient transportation, cheap rent, similar cultural heritage, and a relative friendly host atmosphere. In the following discussion, I will examine how migrants got the message of house for rent and finally settle down in Sha Village.

Table 1. How migrant workers learned of houses for rent in Sha Village (N=203)

	Frequency	Percent
Valid I used to work here/near here	36	17.7
My family/fellow-villager/acquaintance told me	133	65.5
I found it on casual/I got the message from the house rental market	31	15.3
NA	3	1.5
Total	203	100.0

Table 1 is a frequency table that shows the way migrant workers learned of houses for rent in Sha Village. We were able to find that they learn this information through contacts: such as family, fellow villagers and acquaintances is the main way for migrants to find a rental house in Sha Village, which accounts for 65.5% of the total. This indicates that most of the migrants who live in Sha Village used the social networks to find a rental house here. However, there are some migrants who do not use the social networks when finding a rental house. These migrants learned of houses for rent through the work related contacts, which accounts for 17.7%. It’s worth noting that few of them used the traditional house rental market method, which is considered to be a formal channel of acquiring a rental house. Migrants have their own logic when choosing a settlement place.

Ma: the rent should be cheap because you know, my salary is quite low. It’s impossible for me to sustain a high rent. I grew up in the countryside, so I value the interpersonal relations among neighbors. I spend most of my leisure time here and I also care about whether I could get along well with persons around.

This case illustrates that for the migrant workers, low rent is the first element they care about when choosing a settlement place. It should be noted that the social and cultural reasons for migrant settlement is also important. Migrant workers, especially those of rural background are inclined to choose the place with similar cultural heritage and a relative friendly host atmosphere.

Constructing a sense of home: place affiliation in the receiving society

1. Dimensions of place affiliation: descriptive analysis

Place affiliation, as expressed by feeling “at-home”, is mediated by a diverse group of social factors. It

is wide-spread, rich in its attachment to multiple locales, and complex in spacial structure (Cuba and Hummon, 1993a; 1993b). Moreover, in the process of place identity construction people are not just passive receptors, but (both at the individual and collective level) play active roles. People participate in social networks with diverse structures: family, local communities, institutions, etc. These social networks of parents, friends, and colleagues are important agencies for identity construction (Madsen and Naerssen, 2003). This study also examines how place identification is shaped by migrants’ social networks in the receiving place, such as their experiences with place, their social participation with friends and their special patterns of social activity. I attempted to measure the existence of a place identity using open-ended questions: Do you feel at home here; why do you feel at home here? According to migrants’ responses to the question why they feel at home, I separated the place affiliation related with social networks into the following dimensions: (1) Dwelling-related response: the rented room and house; (2) Community-related response: Sha Village; (3) Organization-related response: participation in work and formal organizations (see Fig. 2).

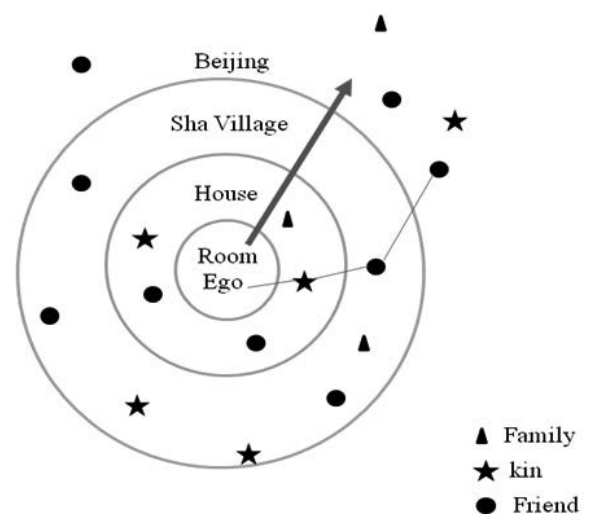


Figure 2. The zoning of place affiliation stretched by social networks

Figure 2 shows the zoning of place affiliation stretched by social networks. In this case, I separate the space into room, house, Sha Village as the community and the Beijing city. Moreover, sets of family, kin and friends composed the social networks functioning in stretching the zoning of place affiliation. I endeavor to explain how networks expand migrants' place affiliation from the rented room to Beijing city.

2. Dwelling related dimension: the rented room

Most of the migrant workers in Sha Village rented a room for living from the native landlord. This rented room is the smallest unit of space for them to develop the sense of being "at home".

(1) Psychological feeling about the room

The general psychological feeling about the room is akin to "feeling comfortable". In the following, I have selected quotes that capture the typical sentiments expressed by the interviewed migrants.

Lin: This room is my only private space in Beijing. I come back here every night except missing the last bus. I would feel upset if I don't go home every day.

Wang: I think this is my home because I have lived here for a long time. I feel at ease sleeping here. I have already paid the rent for one year and this room could be my private space during this time. It's totally different from staying in a hotel.

Both interviewees above attempt to explain the comfortable feeling of living in the rented room. As we know, migrants lack the sense of security due to their unstable jobs and low income. However, their settlement as a fixed residence in the receiving society, in a sense, brings some sense of stability. I was deeply impressed that they frequently use the saying "go home" in the conversation. Migrants consider the settlement in the receiving society as "home" in their subconscious.

(2) Room investment

Room investments includes buying consumer electronics, furniture; embellishing the rooms with rugs, lamps and pictures; changing the indoor space, etc.. I observed that the more migrants invest on the rented room, the living space affiliation increases. When a migrant household decides to invest heavily in their

living space construction, they tend to make it as their permanent residence.

3. Dwelling related dimension: the house

(1) Special living pattern in Sha Village: migrants and native landlords live in the same house

Most of the migrants live in permanent and temporary housing rented from former local peasants, individual citizens of Beijing. Furthermore, there are two kinds of migrant settlements in Beijing. One is migrants from the same origins concentrate in the same village of Beijing, such as the "Zhejiang Village" (Xiang, 1991). Migrants in these kinds of communities live separately from the native people, thus have little direct contacts with people in the local community. The other type are migrants with different origins that swarm into the same Village and live together with the native people, this type has developed rapidly in recent years. My research site, Sha Village, is a typical migrant settlement of this category. In Sha Village, most of the native landlords and their migrant tenants live in the same house (see Fig. 3)

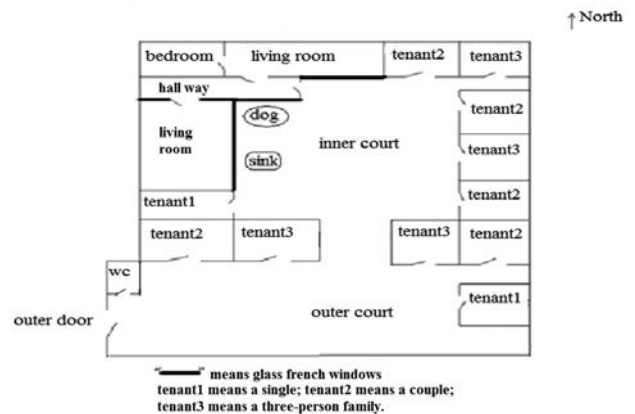


Figure 3. A plan sketch of one co-habitation house in Sha Village⁶

This figure shows a typical co-habitation house in Sha Village: migrants and their native landlords live in the same house. They share one toilet and an outdoor sink. There are not any kitchens in this type of house, as a result, most of the migrants choose to do the cooking in the courtyard. This special living pattern implies the close daily interaction between migrants and native landlords who live in the same house.

(2) Daily interaction in the rental house

The daily interaction between migrants and native landlords is frequent as a result of the special living pattern in Sha Village.

Liu: we usually play cards or mahjong together in the yard. I think it’s a good way for improving the relationship among people living here. We chat about the news and the job while playing cards. Actually, I got my last job through the introduction of my neighbor Xu who is a labor contractor. He told me that he knew well about my personality since we often play cards together.

Lin: people living in this house are quite friendly. I used to run out of the salt when I do the cooking. Ji who live in the next room gave me a packet of salt when she saw it. It’s like a big family so I enjoy living here. My sister also moved here last week through my recommendation. I’m considering about asking my parents to live here with us.

Most of the migrants and native landlords who live in the same house usually enjoy leisure time together, like playing mahjong, going shopping together, exchanging food, helping each other, visiting each other, etc. Moreover, relations such as neighbors, kinship, and family ties play an important role in everyday life and people tend to mutually help and protect each other. They share information about jobs and life experience

in Beijing. Place affiliation strengthened as a result of the frequent daily interaction.

(3) The role of the native landlord as the “Beijinger” in the house

As Miss Han puts it, “our landlord is so nice. She is a native “Beijinger” and of course holds the Beijing ‘hukou’, but she is easy to get along with. She helped me apply for the Temporary Residence Card when I rented a room in her house. She always gives me suggestions of life in Beijing.”

According to the regulations, people who plan to stay in Beijing for more than one month should apply for a Temporary Residence Card (TRC)⁵. Most of the native landlords in Sha Village apply for TRC for their migrant tenants. The TRC is a temporary residence ID card for the migrants, which transforms their ID from floating population to legal temporary residents. Furthermore, frequent interaction with the native landlord is a good chance for migrants to make contact with Beijing people thus lessening the feeling as being an “outsider”.

(4) Satisfactory degree of the renting house

When asking about the question: do you feel “at home” living here? More than half of the migrants gave a good subjective evaluation about the rental houses. 36.0% of the interviewees expressed their strong feeling of “at home” living here (See table 2.).

Table 2. Do you feel like “at home” living here (N=203)

	Frequency	Valid percent	Cumulative Percent
Extremely strong	9	25	12.3
	8	19	21.7
	7	29	36.0
	6	38	54.7
	5	32	70.4
	4	13	76.8
	3	15	84.2
	2	13	90.6
Absolutely not	1	19	100.0
Total	203	100.0	

4. Community related dimension: Sha Village

Community related dimension refers to the attractive lifestyle, sense of Sha Village, consumer activity, family, kin and friend based social networks in Sha Village.

(1) Evaluation of Sha Village

The following will discuss the attraction of Sha Village for migrants through examining their evaluation on this community (see Table 3.), since a good impression about the community is the base for the construction of community affiliation.

Table 3. Evaluation on Sha Village: "I think Sha Village is a friendly community"

	Frequency	Valid percent
Totally agree	55	27.1
Quite agree	98	48.3
No opinion either way	42	20.7
Quite disagree/Totally disagree	8	4.0
Total	203	100.0

Table 3 expresses migrants' evaluation on Sha Village. How migrants responded to the saying "I think Sha Village is a friendly community." We can see most of the migrants approve the saying that Sha Village is a friendly community. Among the 203 samples, persons who choose "totally agree, quite agree" accounts for 75.4% of the all.

(2) Consumption in Sha Village

The following examines the economic links between migrants and the local community through calculating the proportion of local consumption in Sha Village. Among the 203 interviewees, the average overall local consumption accounts for 69.5% of the total consumption. It suggests that the economic ties between migrants and Sha Village are considerably close. As the domestic worker Wu puts it "I'm quite familiar with Sha Village for I go shopping here almost every day. I buy vegetables at the free market and I know almost all the peddlers here." Through shopping in Sha Village, migrants gradually get familiar with this community. As more earnings are spent primarily in the receiving society, their relations with this area gradually strengthen.

5. Organization related dimension: participation in work

Most of the migrants work in the city center areas of Beijing while living in Sha Village. They commute between urban and suburban areas of Beijing every day, which builds their relations with the city of Beijing. Communication with colleagues of local Beijingers is a way to deepen the migrants' understanding of the city life and accumulate some kind of social capital which could be utilized in the future. Moreover, some of the migrants take part in some kinds of vocational skills training courses, such as the computer skills training and other courses.

Family, Kin and Friends Networks in the Receiving Society

For the migrants who live in Sha Village, different living patterns lead to different ways of the construction of social networks in the receiving society. Furthermore, different types of social networks formed in the receiving society lead to varying degrees of place affiliation, and thus influence the formation of place identity. There are two types of social networks built by migrants who settle in Sha Village. One is the open type composed of the family, kin and networks of friends. The other type is the closed type confined to the family and kin networks (see Fig. 4).

Type 1: the open social networks Type 2: the closed social networks

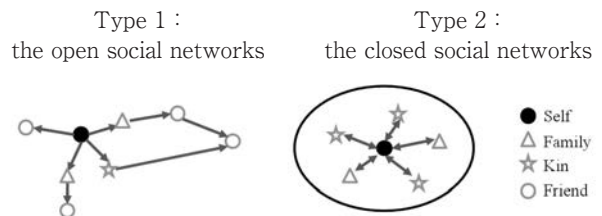


Figure 4. Different types of social networks formed in the receiving society

Type 1 shows the most popular type of social networks migrants built in Sha Village. Most of the migrants have family members, kin and friends living in Sha Village, which functions as a channel for them to make more friends and thus help stretching place affiliation from the rented house to the community and eventually to the Beijing city.

Lu: I get acquaintance with some neighbors after moving to this house. Through my neighbors, I get to know many new friends who are their kins or friends and live in other house. We have good relations though we are of different origins. We usually play cards or do

sports together. Sometimes we share the job messages. As the saying goes "a man depends upon his parents at home and upon his friends away from home." I think it's more and more difficult for me to leave Beijing as I increase my friends here."

Except for building family and kin relationships, migrants tend to enrich their social networks through making new friends and strengthening their contacts with the receiving society, thus contributing to their place affiliation in Beijing, which eventually influence their identity formation. It's to be noted that single migrants seem much more likely to develop the networks of friends outside the family and kin relations.

Type 2 shows the kind of closed social networks that migrants build in Sha Village. In this type, strong linkages and ties with the home country are maintained based on family and kin ties. Specifically, some migrants choose to live with family members and kins in Sha Village. The most typical case is the sublessors in Sha Village: as principal tenants, sublessors sign a wholesale contract with the landlord and then sublet the extra housing spaces to other migrant tenants. When subletting, they are inclined to choose migrant tenants who are their relatives or who come from the same geographical region, thereby creating a cohesive social space. As a result, it brings some sense of stability and more or less contributes to feeling "at home" in the rented house while greatly diminishes the opportunities to interact with the local society, because migrants confine themselves in the family and kin networks. Furthermore, the convenience for staying in touch with family members in the hometown also weakens the identity formation in the receiving society. As a result of the time-space compression, internet, and e-mail have brought 'home' within easy reach wherever one stays. Migrants carry their imagined communities with them to an even greater degree than before and actively use these new communication opportunities in constructing and maintaining their identities despite spatial dispersion. As for this closed type, migrants develop the sense of "being at home" primarily in Sha Village, especially in the rented house, which greatly confine the expansion of their social networks to the Beijing city, thus greatly influence the development of their place identity.

Conclusion

Sha village is an attractive destination for lower-class migrant workers. It serves as an identity-maintenance and identity-preservation site, where the customs and habits imported from traditional migrants are kept alive. It also provides boundaries that isolate these migrants from the larger society and provide them with a certain degree of autonomy.

The rented house is not just a place where migrants live, it is also where they come together, socialize, interact, share feelings and memories, transmit values, and transform identities. Some migrant workers live in Sha Village for some social and cultural reasons. Lin, a construction migrant worker, states: "I prefer to live here because I am used to both cultures." They enjoy the autonomous cultural and social positions they have in these neighborhoods. They enjoy shopping at Sha Village stores, eating at Beijing restaurants, and playing cards at the court of rental houses. One migrant puts it: "as we transform the neighborhood into this space, we take ownership and feel more comfortable being 'Beijinger' in the local place."

On whole, migrants develop the sense of "being at home" primarily in Sha Village, which then extends that sense of being at home in Beijing city. Place identity is most obvious in the community space where migrants live their daily lives. Furthermore, migrants gradually develop the place identity from the life sphere to the working sphere through the expansion of their social networks. It's important to note that migrants who confine themselves in the family and kin based social networks tend to be closely connected with their origins, which seems to be an obstacle to the creation of the place identity in the receiving society. On the contrary, migrants who are inclined to expand their networks of friends to the community or further to the Beijing city develop stronger space identity in the host society.

Different elements of the socio-spatial environment and various social networks appear to be associated with migrants' identity formation. Migrants report some sense of their being at home in Beijing, constructing a sense of belonging through affiliations with a natural, social, and spatial environment. Over time, they bring family members to Beijing, make new friends,

establish institutional connections, and obtain more stable, better jobs. As a result, less money is remitted home, and more is spent in the receiving society. As migrant networks expand and intensify in the receiving society, they gradually come to see themselves as residents of the host society. This experience in the receiving society is accompanied by: (1) an increase in the number and range of interpersonal ties based in Beijing, (2) more connections to Beijing institutions, (3) higher earnings and greater stability of employment, and (4) earnings are spent primarily in the receiving society rather than in the home community. These trends give rise to a steady, cumulative increase in the probability of Beijing settlement.

As migrants accumulate experience in Beijing, social and economic ties are formed which progressively increase the likelihood of a Beijing settlement. If government policies permitted, they were more likely to be permanent settlers. But it seems impossible for migrant workers to gain the Beijing “hukou” and transform into becoming Beijing citizens due to the institutional “hukou” restriction. However, migrants are still struggling for their identity formation through the expansion and intensification of social networks in the receiving society, thereby creating a new transitory identity as “guest Beijinger”. Moreover, as migrants develop different types of social networks in the receiving society, this transitory identity as “guest Beijinger” also tends to develop into two kinds of different trends. One is to get closer to being a “Beijinger” through the expansion of the social networks in the receiving society. The other is to confine their identity as “guest Beijinger”, and thus make a clear distinction between “Beijinger” and themselves. It’s to be noted that most of the migrants we interviewed belong to the former type.

Notes

1 The “floating population,” refers to the large and increasing number of migrants without local household registration status (hukou). It is well known that China has a large number of temporary migrants who leave rural areas to work in the booming cities, such as Beijing. This “floating population” does not have official permission to

establish permanent residence in the towns or cities where they work.

- 2 It is important to understand the relevance of these statistics. They merely indicate the official inter-provincial migration within a five-year period, which is low compared with the actual movement of the population. It is known that China has a large number of temporary migrants who leave rural areas to work in the booming cities. This “floating population” does not have official permission to establish permanent residence in the towns or cities where they work. It is estimated that Beijing and Shanghai each have a floating population of 2–3 million people. Furthermore, there is an unknown number of illegal rural-urban migrants who have permanently moved to large cities and towns. They have found housing and work in a growing informal sector.
- 3 These results are from the interprovincial migration matrix of China, based on retrospective questions (migration between provinces based on place of usual residence in 1995 and 2000) in the 2000 Chinese Population Census, which is the most authoritative source of Chinese data.
- 4 This research project is supported by the Beijing Social Science Fund. (No. 06AaSH001, 2007) I was a main research assistant in this research project, which was guided by Prof. Liu Neng of Peking University.
- 5 Though the accuracy of the total size of the floating population was still in question, the Beijing municipal government and its planning bodies felt great pressure as a result of the influx of the floating population into its administrative territory. Since the early 1990s, the municipal government has attempted to regulate and control the influx of migrant labor by various administrative measurements, including setting up the Beijing Municipal Leading Group of Management for Migrant Laborers. This group consisted of representatives of the labor administration, industry and trade, urban planning, construction, finance, family planning, tax, planning, housing and legal offices. They formulated ten regulations that came into effect on July 15, 1995. Within each regulation there are specific rules to be

adhered to. For example, under Regulation 1, people coming to Beijing for work should apply for temporary residence within three days, and if they plan to stay for more than one month they should apply for a Temporary Residence Card (TRC) at the same time. The regulations were designed to try to gain control of the temporary migrant population.

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Appendix

The way to get a Beijing “hukou”

Category	Details	Comments: is it feasible for migrant workers?
University graduates	Three types of way: 1. get pass the civil service examination to be a public servant; 2. enter into a public institution; 3. apply for a job to a company who can offer you a Beijing “Hukou” quota.	This is the easiest way to get a Beijing “Hukou” for the University graduates. However, this way is totally impossible for migrant workers, since most of them are less educated.
Investment	Persons in charge of a private enterprise in Beijing; Affair Executor of a partnership firm in Beijing; Legal Representative of a limited corporation and any other form private enterprises. Requirements: Consecutive Three-year in charge of the enterprise; has a property in Beijing; the taxes paid consecutively above RMB800,000 or total amount of taxes paid above RMB3,000,000 in recent three years; there are more than 300 Beijing residents in consecutive three years or above 90% of employees are Beijing residents.	This policy is very strict which a little bit hard to make it for many entrepreneurs.
Marriages	Marry to a Beijing resident. However the timeline depends on the work/education/health status of your spouse and yourself.	It’s quite difficult for migrant workers.
Grey Area	To buy a Beijing Hukou quota from the companies who have it. The price of a Beijing “hukou” on the black market is about 270,000 yuan.	Migrant worker could not afford such a high price.

From “Floating Population” to “Guest Beijinger”: Identity Formation of Migrant Workers in Beijing

Wei LI

This study analyzes how floating migrant workers settle in the suburban area of Beijing and pays special attention to factors affecting their identity formation as “guest Beijingers”. Firstly, it examines the Chinese “hukou” policy and reveals the institutional restrictions on gaining the Beijing “hukou”. Secondly, it attempts to show how migrant workers settle down and strive to construct the place identity through the place affiliation and social networks. Specifically, it links the existence of place identities in the social context of migrant settlement with the varied factors that contribute to these identities. In other words, how migrants construct a sense of being *at home* through place affiliations and social networks. Moreover, this study shows that place identity and “hukou” status are not independent of one another, for they function in an interrelated manner to preserve migrants’ identity formation. On the one hand, migrants are not granted urban citizenship, since “hukou” restrictions largely prevent them from becoming future Beijing citizens. On the other hand, place identity grows with regard to the expansion and intensification of migrant networks in the receiving society, some of the migrants are not floating anymore and grow strong ambitions for permanent residence in Beijing. As a result, the conflict of “hukou” restriction and place identity leads to the formation of a transitory identity as a “guest Beijinger”.

Key words : “hukou” policy, place identity, social networks