Stuck in the suburbs? Socio-spatial exclusion of migrants in Shanghai

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ABSTRACT

Migrants' residential location plays a critical role in their social integration process. In China, large numbers of migrants are coming to the major cities due to the opportunities offered, and most of them have to be settled in the disadvantaged urban periphery. By examining the place effects of suburban residence on the incorporation of migrants into cities, this paper contributes to the literature on understanding the socio-spatial exclusion of migrants. Drawing on a survey undertaken in Shanghai, it is found that, after controlling for the effects of individual characteristics, migrants living in the suburbs not only earn less than their counterparts in the central city, but are also less likely to construct inter-group and diverse social ties to aid future prospects. To make matters worse, they have little chance of moving to the central locations where there are more resources, and instead are likely to be trapped in the suburbs.

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1. Introduction

China has experienced rapid urbanization for the past three decades. The influx of rural-to-urban migrants into Chinese cities had reached more than 270 million persons by 2014 (NBSC, 2015). This group, however, is known as the floating population (*liudong renkou*), because they are not entitled to the same legal rights as permanent urban residents and are treated as "internal aliens" in the cities (Zhang, 2001:23). With regard to their residence, they tend to concentrate at the urban periphery, particularly in urban villages, construction sites, or industrial factory dormitories (Wang, Wang, & Wu, 2010; Wu, 2008).

While there is a large body of literature on rural-to-urban migrants in China concerning the effects of the *hukou* system, labour market segmentation, migration strategies, and their marginalization in the cities etc. (Chan, 2009; Fan, 2002; Fan, Sun, & Zheng, 2011; Solinger, 1999), only recently have scholars turned to examine migrants' housing experiences and social-spatial exclusion in cities (Huang & Tao, 2014; Wang et al., 2010; Wu, 2008). Many studies have focused on the neighbourhood effects of migrants' enclaves and the implications for their incorporation into the host society (Liu, Li, Liu, & Chen, 2014; Ma & Xiang, 1998; Zhang, 2001). However, little has been done to investigate the role of migrants' residential location in their integration into the cities. The latter issue, however, is becoming increasingly important, because the recent massive demolition of urban villages in the inner suburban area has pushed migrants farther away. Consequently, as recently noted by Wu, Zhang, and Webster (2013), migrants in remote

suburban neighbourhoods might suffer from not having access to jobs and public services, thus making it even more difficult for the migrants to survive.

In the West, understanding immigrants' residential location is an important element in understanding their assimilation process. Among other issues, there has long been widespread concern over the social implication of the suburbs being their residential location. Earlier spatial assimilation models based on immigrants' experiences in the US considered immigrants' relocation to the suburbs as an indication of their structural assimilation (Massey, 1985; Waren, 2013). However, recent evidence has indicated that immigrants' spatial proximity to the majority group does not necessarily lead to integration, and residents of the suburban ghettoes face more barriers to much needed services than to those in central cities (Logan & Alba, 1993; Murphy, 2007; Murphy & Wallace, 2010).

Drawing on a survey undertaken in Shanghai, this study aims to explore whether migrants' marginal positions in the host society are further reinforced by the constraints of life in the urban periphery. While not denying the positive role of suburbs in the supply of low-cost housing, it is argued that peripheral locations may further reinforce migrants' marginal position in the city in the long run.

The paper is organized as follows. Based on urban experiences from both Western and developing countries, the next section reviews the literature in the field of (im)migrants and suburbanization. Then, the residential settlement patterns of migrants in urban China are summarized, and the explanatory framework is developed. Next, the data collection and analysis methods are introduced. The empirical findings from the Shanghai survey are discussed in the following section. Finally,

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the main findings are concluded, and policy recommendations are proposed.

2. Literature review: (im)migrants and the suburbs

There has been extensive research on (im)migrants' settlement patterns in the field of urban studies. Ecologists from the Chicago School claimed that, while newly arrived immigrants usually concentrate in neighbourhoods in the central city, later generations would relocate and disperse to the suburbs (Burgess, 1925:56). These observations were later theorized by Massey (1985) as the spatial assimilation model. There is also empirical evidence that suburbanization was a key step in the assimilation of immigrants who arrived in the US in the early twentieth century (e.g. Alba, Logan, & Crowder, 1997; Iceland & Nelson, 2008; Massey & Denton, 1987).

The spatial-assimilation model, however, has been widely challenged since the 1990s. Logan and Alba (1993) proposed an alternative model, known as the place stratification model, to depict the different impacts of suburbanization on different races. It is argued that, because the mechanisms of structural discrimination persist, minority groups might not be able to translate their individual-level characteristics, such as income, education, etc., into upward residential mobility. As a result, when they move to the suburbs, they only sort themselves into suburban communities with a low status.

In the US, for example, the barrier to suburban residence was significantly reduced, and many immigrants began to settle in suburban communities immediately upon arriving in the US (Alba, Logan, Stults, et al., 1999). However, instead of dispersing into white native-born communities, immigrants living in the suburbs have continued to concentrate in ethnic neighbourhoods (Logan, Stults, & Farley, 2004). Li (1998, 2009) proposed a new model of ethnic settlement, the "ethnoburb", to capture the emerging suburban ethnic clusters of residential areas and business districts. Moreover, recent studies have indicated that minority immigrants are even more spatially segregated in their new suburban destinations (Lichter, Parisi, Taquino, & Grice, 2010). Suburban residence does not necessarily lead to improvements in the quality of life and could even make the immigrant groups more disadvantaged than those in the central city (Murphy, 2007; Murphy & Wallace, 2010).

The housing experiences of migrants in the Global South do not follow the uniform pattern found in the Global North. In many developing countries, cities are experiencing the process of urbanization. Rapid urban expansion reveals a different suburban landscape with high population densities and mixed urban and rural activities. While searching for job opportunities in the cities, rural-to-urban and stepwise migrants concentrate at the urban fringe, which often leads to massive squatter settlements (Davis, 2006; Gilbert & Crankshaw, 1999). Turner (1968) suggested that, in fact, there are two stages of settlement for these migrants. New migrants usually live in rented accommodation in central locations near their jobs. However, later, they tend to move to the urban edge and build informal shanties of their own, a relocation process which indicates their permanent settlement in the destination city.

Recently, high-profile projects, such as gated communities, industrial parks, and shopping malls, have begun to emerge in the urban peripheral areas in these countries. However, most of them are built as private realms and scarcely contribute to improve the overall local economy and to soften social inequality. For instance, by examining the widespread development of gated communities in one suburban municipality in Argentina, Roitman and Phelps (2011) illustrated a typical dualistic process of suburbanization in contemporary developing countries: poverty and exclusion in the suburbs actually increase when wealthy people arrive.

Therefore, in both developed and developing countries, (im)migrants living in the suburbs might face more barriers to integration. Then how might peripheral locations influence the incorporation of newcomers into their destination city? There are several potential mechanisms that may give rise to the disadvantages experienced by suburban migrants. The most common explanation rests on the lack of good job opportunities near (im)migrants' residences. In the US, the decentralization of low-skill jobs in manufacturing, construction, and services is prominent, and low-wage and often dead-end jobs dominate the labour market of fast-growing suburban nodes (Kneebone, 2009; Raphael & Stoll, 2010). This provides few routes for immigrants to become upwardly mobile (Lichter et al., 2010).

The second explanation concerns (im)migrants' constrained mobility and accessibility on the urban edge. Empirical evidence shows that (im)migrants' economic opportunities and social participation are reduced due to their lack of access to public facilities and services (Bose, 2014; Foth, Manaugh, & El-Geneidy, 2013). Poor suburban communities have far less access to social service resources due to a lack of adequate provision (Allard, 2004). As the private provision of public services is increasingly dominant in the suburbs, this problem can become more severe (McKenzie, 1994, 2005). Moreover, because (im)migrants rely heavily on public transport, an inadequate public transportation infrastructure and a lack of car ownership could impose greater restrictions on them in the automobile-dependent suburbs.

Finally, spatial segregation can be worse in the suburbs. To date, no consensus has been reached on the effects of spatial segregation on (im)migrants' integration. Some studies have stressed the social capital and cultural capital (im)migrants could acquire in their neighbourhoods (Portes & Jensen, 1987, 1989). Others, however, have found that persistent segregation actually delays the long-term assimilation of immigrants and hence is a threat to social cohesion (Nee, Sanders, & Sernau, 1994; Xie & Gough, 2011). Empirical studies have shown that limited opportunities for exposure to members of the majority ethnic groups in the neighbourhoods are associated with higher risks of poverty and unemployment (Feng, Flowerdew, & Feng, 2014; Galster, Metzger, & Waite, 1999). Such neighbourhoods' poor social networks and bad reputation are also important factors leading to negative outcomes for their residents (Musterd & Andersson, 2005; Permentier, van Ham, & Bolt, 2007). These problems can be more apparent in isolated and low-density suburbs as residents will be less frequently exposed to each other compared to those living in densely populated central areas.

3. The spatial entrapment of migrants in Chinese cities

Migrants' residential spatial patterns in China are more similar to those found in other developing countries. Migrants tend to concentrate in the urban periphery instead of central areas (Wu, 2008). They now constitute a major source of rapid population growth in the suburbs (Shen & Wu, 2013). Moreover, they are often spatially clustered through their place of origin in certain types of neighbourhoods, creating migrant enclaves on the urban edge (Ma & Xiang, 1998; Zhang, 2001). However, in contrast to their counterparts who live in self-help housing on the urban edge in many other developing countries (Turner, 1976), suburban migrants in China are mostly living in employer-provided dormitories and private rental housing (Huang & Tao, 2014).

On the supply side, in contrast to Western "suburbia", the term "*jiaoqu* (literally, suburb)" in the Chinese context refers to the periphery of the city proper or built-up area mainly in a geographical sense rather than a distinctive type of residence. Before the early 1980s, the suburbs were underdeveloped and by no means attractive residential locations, being largely dominated by rural areas and few small-scale industrial satellite towns. After the economic reform, Chinese cities immediately experienced rapid suburbanization due to the establishment of a land market and consequent changes to land use (Zhou & Ma, 2000). However, central areas have remained prosperous and are preferred as a place to live and work for (Wang & Li, 2004). Due to the lack of public services and facilities, housing prices in the suburbs are relatively low when compared to those in central areas.

More importantly, there are usually large numbers of low-cost private rental houses on the outskirts of the city. Both formal and informal