Urban China in Transition

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Introduction

Internal migrants in China arrive in cities in search of better employment, higher earnings, and, for some, better opportunities for social mobility opened up by market reform. While a lucky few have squeezed into the emerging urban middle class, a great majority have been trapped in a marginalized outsider status, simultaneously treated as much needed labor for the fast-growing urban economy and an indispensable scapegoat to be blamed for crime, disorder, over-crowdedness, squatter living or itinerant homelessness, traffic congestion, and other urban ills, as well as job competition and wage depression (Xiang 1999; Zhang 2001).

Migrants’ experiences in China may be shared by migrant workers in other post-socialist countries or other newly industrialized countries in Asia and Latin America, but present a unique case of new mechanisms of stratification emerging from the processes of market transition and the developmental state (Castells 2000; Chen and Parish 1996; Evans 1995; Murray and Szélényi 1984; Nee 1989; Walton 1976). In this chapter, we aim to document new mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion that have emerged from urban transformation. Specifically, we examine how migrants’ residential patterns are structured by non-market forces, which in turn constrain their adjustment to the new urban environment. While long-term effects of migrant vulnerability in China have yet to be identified, existing research has shown that internal
migrants tend to fall victim to their initial disadvantages as non-citizen outsiders (Chan 1994; Solinger 1999; Xiang 1999). We argue that internal migrants are not only culturally but also institutionally blocked from incorporation into urban life. To illustrate our argument, we first describe the prevailing residential patterns of migrant workers in a state-designated industrial development zone.\(^1\) We then offer an analysis of how residential patterns are associated with social marginalization. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and policy implications of our case study to speculate on whether migrant workers will remain apart from, or become part of, the city in which they work.

**Migrant Workers in the Guangzhou Economic and Technological Development District**

In China, as in many other developing countries, economic development tends to rely on export-oriented production as firms from advanced industrialized countries seek outsourcing and subcontracting to reduce production costs at home and maximize profit (Castells 2000). Prime examples are special economic zones (SEZ), such as Shenzhen and Zhuhai initially created by the state in the early 1980s. SEZs are designated by the central or local governments. Located mostly on the fringes of urban centers and equipped with state-built infrastructure – roads, power supply, water, and sewer systems – these SEZs aim to attract foreign and domestic capital investment. A latent purpose is for the state to control effectively, or “manage,” the anticipated influx of migrant labor.

In the early 1980s, the municipal government of Guangzhou set aside a large plot of farmland to the eastern edge of the city (some 50 kilometers away from the urban core) and zoned it for use as an economic development district, named Guangzhou Economic and Technological Development District (GETDD). The GETDD is an administrative district directly under the jurisdiction of the municipal government.\(^2\) By the end of the 1990s, the GETDD had become home to a variety of manufacturing establishments, mostly in export-oriented, labor-intensive industries such as electronics and electric devices, automobile and auto parts, steel, chemicals, wrapping material, and packaged foods and drinks, but also mixed with some high-tech industries such as telecommunications and pharmaceuticals. As of 2003, the GETDD had about 600 foreign or joint-venture companies, employing more than 100,000 workers, 85 percent of whom are migrant workers without Guangzhou hukou.

Like those in other major metropolises such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen, the migrants in the GETDD have come from rural areas of inland provinces of Guangxi, Hunan, Sichuan, and Anhui, as well as from poor counties in Guangdong Province beyond the Pearl River Delta region
(Fan 1996; Lang and Smart 2002). Our 2003 survey data show that migrants working in the GETDD share several characteristics with other internal migrants elsewhere in China: they are predominantly youthful and of rural backgrounds. Of the 85,000 migrant workers, 90 percent were under 35 years of age, close to 70 percent of the migrants were female, and the majority from rural areas or small townships outside Guangzhou Province. Although most of these migrants lacked industrial skills, they were relatively better-educated compared to their counterparts in their places of origin. Most had middle school or high school diplomas, a level of educational attainment considered quite extraordinary in rural China. There were also a small number of migrants who held urban hukou from smaller cities or county towns outside Guangzhou. This less noticeable group of urban migrants was better-educated, more goal-oriented, and more aggressively seeking out opportunities for upward social mobility than their rural counterparts. Diverse backgrounds aside, working in the GETDD was the first industrial wage job for the majority of migrant workers.

Migrants in the GETDD were primarily sojourners. They left behind their native places to seek better means of livelihood for themselves and their families with a clear intention to return. Predictably, most of these migrants came to Guangzhou to work for wages in order to support their families back home. But others intended to acquire new knowledge, modern technologies, and know-how skills that would facilitate their prospects of upward social mobility in their native places in the near future. Still others were simply driven by mere curiosities to see “what’s out there” and “what can one possibly do away from home.” A young woman from an electronic joint-venture company recalled:

I still remember this day – two years ago, I and 30 of my former schoolmates came to Guangzhou with a beautiful dream. We were considered extraordinary students recommended by our school and employed by the company because we were better than others. Now, two years have passed, we have grown to be adults rather than young kids … in our journey to a meaningful career; I began to feel that there are many things one can do in life – things that make you happy and things that make you sad …

Migrant workers in the GETDD were often referred to as waidi-ren (meaning migrant from a different place) by bendi-ren (local people with Guangzhou hukou). While their sojourning orientation and accented language might serve as markers of outsiders, their residential patterns reinforced the waidi-bendi divide and constrained their incorporation into the local insider group. In the GETDD, a migrant’s right to decent housing or even to living on the GETDD premise was tied to his or her job. In our study, we found that migrant workers in the GETDD were most concerned about job security among a list of issues
such as wages, benefits, and working conditions, because losing a job meant not only breaking a "rice-bowl" but also breaking a "bed." Whenever their factories or companies made small changes to their duties and schedules of their current jobs, migrant workers would feel extremely anxious. A worker talked about her job change within the company:

Any job change should be regarded as a new challenge, but for me a slight switch of my post would make me look bad and feel depressed. I was an operator before I was switched to be a quality inspector in another department. Many of my co-workers thought I got switched because my performance was not satisfactory. It gave me a sense of shame. I walked to my new post every day with my head low and voice down. No one told me that this was a normal job change ... for a few weeks I was really down, not in the mood for anything but stuck with that boring work. I felt quite depressed and had no self-confidence ...

Market transition and economic development have allowed for unprecedented migrant flows into Chinese cities. However, because of the rigidity of China's *hukou* system, most migrant workers, including those holding urban *hukou*, were unable to transfer their *waidi hukou* to *bendi* (Guangzhou) *hukou*. This institutional constraint was further reinforced by managed housing arrangements in the GETDD.

**Residential Patterns of Migrant Workers in the GETDD**

In the GETDD, the majority (more than 85 percent) of the workers were *waidi-ren* as opposed to *bendi-ren*. *Bendi* workers are mostly native Cantonese. Almost all of them lived in the city and commuted to the GETDD daily by bus or car. Their computing time would take up to two hours each way on a daily basis. Aside from the very long and tiresome commuting time spent off work, *bendi* workers were rarely seen hanging out and socializing with coworkers in the residential areas of the GETDD in the evenings or during weekends. In contrast, almost all *waidi* workers lived in the GETDD, within walking distance of their place of work, with a small number living within a short bike ride nearby.

The difference in residential patterns between *bendi* and *waidi* workers were mainly due to the government's biased policies that favored economic development over community development. Land in the GETDD was almost entirely zoned for industrial use and little for residential use. Residential development in the district did little to attract *bendi* workers to relocate out of the city proper, but focused instead on the management and control of *waidi* workers. In the GETDD, *waidi* workers basically spent all their waking hours in the
same place as they work. Three main residential patterns were readily observable from our 2003 study: factory/company dormitories, union housing compounds, and rental housing owned by local peasants whose land has given way to urban development.

*Factory/company dormitories (zhigong sushe)*

In pre-reform China, housing was treated as a welfare provision to which everybody was entitled, but in reality such entitlement was not granted to everyone as ideally intended. Nonetheless, many large state-owned factories and work units (*danwei*) in the productive sector with high administrative ranking cultivated a long-standing tradition of providing housing to their employees as an important part of socialist work management and welfare provision (Bian et al. 1997; Zhou and Logan 1996).

As housing became increasingly commercialized and state enterprises privatized, social housing gradually declined. Interestingly, large foreign or joint-venture factories and companies (new forms of *danwei*) that were located in industrial development districts seemed to continue this “socialist” tradition by building dormitories, or offering housing stipends, for their workers. From the perspective of management, housing provision was an effective means to cut cost, to control or manage workers, and to make them more productive. From a practical standpoint, housing provision was also a necessity, because most of the industrial development districts were newly built from farmlands on the fringes of a city quite far from the urban core with little access to public transportation.

In the GETDD, approximately two-thirds of *waidi* workers lived in factory/company dormitories (see Figure 10.1a). From the outside, newer factory/company dormitories were much like regular apartment buildings. Some of these buildings were owned by the factories/companies while others were leased from the market by the factories/companies for their workers. The quality of factory dorms varied but dorm rooms were almost always barely furnished with nothing more than just a few bunk-beds and desks. There was neither a telephone nor a bathroom within each room. Public bathrooms (with 4–6 toilets and showers) were situated on each floor, often shared by more than 60 dorm inhabitants. Each building had a custodian and was equipped with one public phone. Rooms vary in size, but the density is similar regardless of size. Smaller rooms house six to eight people in four two-story bunk-beds while bigger rooms can house as many as 14–16 in eight bunk-beds (see Figure 10.1b). There is little accommodation for married couples. All workers, single or married, are treated as single and packed into single-sex dormitories.
Figure 10.1a  GETDD housing compound building

Figure 10.1b  Inside a bedroom of GETDD union housing compound
Union housing compounds (yuangong lou)

Union housing compounds are quasi-governmental housing projects sponsored, built, and managed by the Labor Union Federation of the GETDD. Labor unions in China are independent non-governmental agencies, same as the Women's Federation, and the Youth League, but are functionally incorporated into the administrative body of the government. Almost all state-owned factories, companies, and non-profit institutions such as schools have unions. Private companies can establish labor unions depending on management and the organization of the work force; once established, these unions are under the jurisdiction and leadership of the Labor Union Federation of the local or municipal government. Since the GETDD is an administrative district of Guangzhou, the Labor Union Federation of the GETDD is a quasi-government umbrella agency with jurisdiction over all labor unions in the district.

The GETDD's Labor Union Confederation conducted a survey about wadi workers in 1993 and found that their living conditions were extremely problematic. First, the environment in and around their living places, including factory/company dormitories, was dirty. Some workers rented abandoned factory buildings or warehouses and made them into temporary living quarters while others built makeshift sheds right beside stinky sewage. Inside some of those makeshift factory buildings, more than 100 young men and women would be packed together with only clapboard partitions. Second, the living places were hazardous. Usually there were no fire extinguishers and no fire-proof measures - an obvious threat to personal safety. Third, the living places were cramped. A small room would be shared by 10 to 14 people. Inside the room the two-story bunk beds would be turned into three-story ones, and one bed would be shared by two people who worked in different shifts. Fourth, the workers themselves had little access to leisure and popular entertainment. The only way for them to kill time was to play card games, which easily led them to illegal gambling. Last but not least, those who lived in rental housing faced frequent break-ins and often fell victim to crime.

Designed to improve the housing conditions of migrant workers and to help migrants adjust to urban life, the governing board of the GETDD raised funds in 1994 to build two identical 9-story housing compounds (Figure 10.2). Together, they accommodated 10,000 workers. Recently, the GETDD added another compound to the east side, housing about 5,000 more workers. These three housing compounds were financed by the district's government and managed by the Labor Union Confederation and were referred in the GETDD to as union housing compounds.

Rooms in union housing compounds were much like those in factory/company housing illustrated in Figure 10.1b, furnished with bunk-beds and desks. There was no accommodation for married couples. But housing was of much better quality. The most marked improvement in union housing was that every
room in the union housing compounds had its own bathroom and was equipped with a telephone. There were 4-6 double bunk-beds that accommodate 8-12 people in each room along with a desk and a luggage rack for each person. There were other public facilities inside the compound, too, for the daily-life convenience of the workers. Each floor of the union housing compound had at least one commons room with a television set and couches. There was a cafeteria, a barbershop, guest rooms for short visits of families and relatives, hot water dispensers, and indoor bicycle stands. There were also entertainment and recreational facilities.

However, only 15 percent of วันิ workers in the GETDD were able to secure a space at union housing compounds. In general, room spaces were allocated to participating factories and companies in the GETDD, who supposedly paid for room rental and all related expenses, including utilities, commons room usage, activities fees, and management fees (around 2,000 yuan per room). Then the factory or company assigned the rooms to its workers based on seniority and merit. Some companies might charge their workers a nominal housing fee (around 50 yuan), but the fee cannot exceed 10 percent of their wages according the union rule.
Peasant-owned rental housing (nongmin wu)

The GETDD is located on the urban fringe areas of what used to be largely farmland and villages. Government-sponsored development of industrial zones and districts in rural areas surrounding urban centers has created a new phenomenon referred to as chengzhongcun, or villages encircled by an expanded city (Li et al. 2003). A chengzhongcun retains the physical structure of the original village with old housing inhabited by original owners who have become landless peasants as well as by newly arrived renters who are primarily waidi-ren. As more and more rural farmland is converted for industrial use or residential housing development, many peasants have either moved into the city or in newer housing built to compensate for their lost farmland. As a result, there has existed a transitional zone between the fast-encroaching urbanized land and rural land, in which local peasants share space with migrant workers. Because of the stigma attached to bendi peasants and waidi workers, these new urban pockets are socially isolated and are often perceived by the government and the public as problematic neighborhoods plagued with concentrated poverty, crime, and social vice such as drugs, gambling, prostitution, and other urban ills.

Chengzhongcuns exist in the transitional areas in and surrounding the GETDD. In and around these transitional neighborhoods, a rental housing market owned and managed by bendi (native) peasants has emerged and taken shape to meet the growing demand of migrant workers. This new phenomenon is often referred to as geng-wu (figuratively, to “farm” housing, which means to live on rental incomes) as opposed to geng-tian (to “farm” land). The peasant-owned rental housing market has evolved in several notable stages. The first stage refers to a budding rental market that contains original houses vacated by peasants. When villagers moved into the city or simply left for better housing, they usually rented out their old houses. These vacant houses were typically rundown with few utilities, little furnishing, and no amenities.

The second stage refers to the rebuilding original houses with add-ons on top or by the side to create more housing space for rental use. In the beginning, local peasants tore down their original one- or two-storied houses and rebuilt them into three- or four-storied houses with multiple rental units to maximize incomes. As demand grows, some owners even add on temporary structures by the side or on the top of their buildings to create more housing space for rent (see Figure 10.3a). Renters may be individuals or couples who may in turn sublet to more people. This type of housing, though owner-occupied, also lacked basic utilities and proper maintenance for renters.

The more recent stage involves housing cooperatives that build larger apartment structures (see Figure 10.3b). Most of these new apartment buildings consist of two-, three-, or four-bedroom units with a bathroom and a kitchen as well as single rooms with no private kitchens or bathrooms, just like factory/companies dormitories. The first floor of some apartment buildings
Figure 10.3a  Structure added to the top of building to increase rental value

Figure 10.3b  Housing co-op building
consists of space for commercial use for retail or storage. Viewed from the outside, these peasant-cooperative apartment buildings appear no different from other high density urban housing development elsewhere in the city, except that apartment buildings are usually built irregularly and haphazardly with no coordinated urban planning.

Initially, peasant-owned housing was mostly rented out to wàndì entrepreneurs who came to Guangzhou for business and were used either for temporary accommodation or for storage of goods. When the GETDD was established there, rental housing in this transitional zone became an important source of housing for migrant workers. About 20 percent of the migrant workers in the GETDD lived in peasant-owned rental housing.

Rents were not particularly high, averaging about 600–700 yuan per two- or three-bedroom unit in 2003. Since many migrants worked all day in the district, they often found themselves crowding into these apartments for the sake of saving money. It was not uncommon to see eight or nine people cram in a small room of just 30 m² or in a two-bedroom unit. Most peasant-owned rental housing was overcrowded and lacked utilities.

Peasant owners generally provided little maintenance to their rental properties. Local authorities also showed little interest in establishing or reinforce codes to monitor the conditions of rental housing. As a result, areas where rental housing was concentrated showed a steady trend of deterioration and decline over time and would rapidly turn into socially identifiable and stigmatized chéngzhòngcùn. However, in recent years, peasant housing cooperatives have also begun to build luxurious apartments to cater to the growing needs of upwardly-mobile migrants working in the GETDD who are now in managerial and professional occupations and have higher earnings.

**Analysis: Adaptation or Marginalization**

Migrants’ residential patterns in the GETDD reinforce the běndì-wàndì division. The three prevailing housing patterns in the GETDD, which we have just described, have varied effects on how well these workers adapt to urban life and how well they feel about themselves and about the city in which they strive to make it – whatever “it” means. From our own observations and interviews, we find some clear association between housing patterns and discernible outcomes regarding migrant workers’ quality of life, social relations, and group formation.

**After-work life**

Most workers in the GETDD work six days a week. Few běndì workers live in the district and commute some 50 km back to “town” (Guangzhou) after work.
Although their place of work is separated by some geographical distances from their place of residence, their urban life remains relatively intact. *Waidi* workers, in contrast, have little contact with *bendi* workers and their social life is largely isolated from that of *bendi* workers. What do *waidi* workers do after they get off work during the week and on Sundays? “Nothing much” is perhaps the modal answer. Adjectives such as “boring,” “monotonous,” “tasteless,” and “pointless” were used repeatedly from our interviewees to describe their after-work life in the district. Regardless of where they live, the feeling of “*kuan nizi*” (killing time) appears quite prevalent. Many stay where they are on Sundays and rarely go into “town” since downtown Guangzhou is far away and public transportation is not convenient and not easily accessible. Their after-work life appears characteristically repetitive and lacks cosmopolitan color and flavor. However, there are some notable variations among workers living in different types of housing.

The workers who live in factory/company dormitories and those in peasant-owned rental apartments do not spend much time in them except for sleeping. Living in factory/companies dormitories means a worker must share his or her room with many others. Living in peasant-owned rental housing isn’t much better because many workers have to share their apartments also with many others in order to save money. In such crowded conditions, many workers take up overtime work in their factories or companies, or part-time work in or nearby the district. When they are back “home” (to their dormitories), they lead a typical bachelor’s life because they are all treated as singles regardless of their marital status. Some would gather together to watch TV or videos or play cards, while others would do their own chores or just simply sleep. Mr Zhang, a young man who works in a small shop as a part-time job when he gets off his full-time regular job from an electronics factory, said:

I would feel restless and bored if I am sitting here [in his rental apartment shared with 10 other people] doing nothing, because I have no friends, relatives, or *laowang* here. I like to find extra work to do so that I can kill time and make more money. Recently, our factory’s business is not going too well. Fortunately, I found another part-time job through a *laowang*; the salary is 300 yuan per month ... enough to pay for two months’ rent. But I have no time to rest and play.

In contrast, after-work life in the union housing compounds is more colorful. Even though residents there share their rooms with many others, and their living space is just as limited as those in dorm rooms or rental apartments, the public space within each housing compound is much more available and better resourced. Workers living in these compounds have been able to conduct and organize their social life after work. They have formed various social clubs. The GETDD’s Labor Union Confederation and union housing compound management have also routinely offered classes and seminars for job training and general knowledge enrichment. The union also publishes a newsletter and
has a radio station to cover life and work issues concerning migrant workers. Indeed, these three housing compounds have become the center of a migrant community. A migrant worker who has lived in the compound for more than two years told us in an interview:

I have to work 8 hours every day on the assembly line. It's just too dead boring. It's only when I return to the dorm that I feel being myself again. Here I can take part in activities organized by the union and the Youth League and have lots of fun with roommates and other friends.

The quality of life affects productivity. According to our survey result, foreign companies are more willing than local companies to place their workers in union housing compounds, even when such an arrangement is more costly, especially when they have their own dormitories. For example, Mitsubishi once decided to place more than 200 workers in a union housing compound, which is a 15-minute bus ride away. Rent and transportation cost combined are twice as much as what it costs to put up workers in the company's dorms. But the company did it anyway because, as the general manager pointed out, it actually helped in reducing the cost of worker training.

Apparently absent is family life among workers in the GETDD. Neither factory/company housing nor union housing is designed and built for married couples. Like many migrant workers in other cities, most of the waidi workers in the GETDD are young and single. Among the “single” workers, some may be married leaving their spouses and children in their native villages and towns while others may be dating with the intention of getting married. In fact, some of the organized leisure activities in union housing compounds, such as dance and karaoke, encourage workers to make friends and get to know one another. But there is no tangible institutional support for workers to establish families and have children and no public policy intention to encourage workers to settle permanently.

Social interaction and networking

The process of moving to a new urban environment often results in social disruption. Original social networks are disrupted and new ones are built or rebuilt. Often times, waidi workers migrate into the city by themselves or in small groups. While some may have friends and families who have arrived there earlier to receive them and help them get settled, many others arrive on their own without knowing anybody initially. Facing unfamiliar people, things, and the environment, they naturally seek out the obviously familiar lot – those laoxiang from the same village, township, or region, who come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, speak the same dialects, and share similar beliefs,
values, behaviors, and food ways. In order to survive the strange land, they have to form social groupings and rebuild social relations for self-help. The newly built or rebuilt networks are predominantly based on laoxiang connections, or connections to the common place of origin. These laoxiang-center networks or social groups are usually formed in a relative short time upon arrival and they function as an important, and sometimes the single most important, source of social support, since the migrants have very little formal institutional support and informal social support from the host city. Mr Du, an assistant to a small shop keeper told us in an interview: “When you are in a new place like this, you need the help from your own friends and laoxiang. We can trust them and find true friendship in them because we are from the same place and on the same boat.”

In the GETDD, the social life of most migrant workers is rather narrow and isolated. But particular living arrangements give rise to different patterns of interpersonal interaction and social networking, which has implications for migrant adaptation to urban life. In general, factory/company dormitories are an extension of the workplace. Dorm occupants tend to socialize among themselves working in the same factory or company and thus know one another very well both at and off work. Since their work and social life after work are intertwined, they tend to develop tightly knit social networks that may cut across places of origin and occupations but are largely confined to the same workplace. Also, when co-workers had a small fight at work, their bitter feelings would likely get worse and intensified after work. Likewise, roommates having disputes over even the smallest things can carry those unpleasant feelings into the workplace, thus disrupting cooperative work on the assembly line. While these workplace-based networks are strong and intense, they can easily be broken once a worker is detached from the workplace.

Workers living in union housing compounds tend to have broader circles of friends and develop social groupings that cut across place of origin, occupation, and workplace. Even though roommates may be from the same factory or company, they do not have to be bound by the same type of workplace-based relations as their counterparts living in factory/company dormitories. Moreover, social networks built among residents tend to be more loosely knit and more stable than workplace-based ones. Over time, these residents tend to become more sophisticated, cosmopolitan, sociable, open-minded, collectively oriented, and socially attached. They display a visibly stronger sense of self and community than other migrant workers.

Residents living in peasant-owned rental housing are generally as diverse as those in union housing compounds in terms of place of origin, occupation, and workplace. Unlike those living in factory and union housing that are collectively organized, though to a varying degree, residents living in rental housing tend to be less social, less collectively oriented, more individualistic, and more “on their own.” After-work life there has no observable structures; rather,
it is largely organized haphazardly and arbitrarily. Interpersonal relations that have developed from overcrowding living are more depersonalized, anonymous, and transient than they are personal, familiar, and permanent. It is interesting to note that these areas where peasant-owned housing is concentrated resemble some of the most typical characteristics of urbanism – heterogeneity, density, and social disorganization – as described by Wirth (1938). However, unlike rural-to-urban migration in which peasants gradually become urbanized and cosmopolitan as they make contacts with urbanites, learn new ways, shed old habits, and become acculturated into the city, what we find here is something abnormal. Since the areas are originally rural villages, \textit{waidi} workers are actually transplanted from remote villages to \textit{chengzhongcun} and their contacts are either among themselves or with natives who are peasants. So the rural way of life gets reproduced and reinforced here among migrant workers who lead bachelors' lives rather than family lives. Nonetheless, social networks do get formed, more on the basis of \textit{laoxiang} relations than on workplace-based relations, and these networks would facilitate the flow of information about job and housing opportunities. As a result, renters move in and out of their rental housing a lot more frequently than residents in other forms of housing and they also tend to change jobs more frequently (mostly within the district or in nearby towns). Their changes in housing or job appear to be horizontal without any significant improvement.

However, the emerging luxurious housing market in the GETDD allows a migrant middle class to take shape. Renters there tend to be a more selective lot. Many of them are professionals, managers, and skilled workers working in the district. They usually do not socialized with other migrant workers living in crowded rental housing. The rise of this luxurious housing market for the emergent white-collar middle-class among \textit{waidi} workers presents a paradox that requires further investigation.

\textit{Social group formation}

As discussed earlier, segregated living in the GETDD exacerbates the social divide between \textit{waidi} and \textit{bendi} workers. \textit{Waidi} workers are looked down upon by local residents as a backward, narrow-minded, unsophisticated, and unassimilable lot, and their group distinction is often heightened by their obvious ways of speech, dress, and mannerism. \textit{Waidi} workers have little contact with \textit{bendi} workers after work and have little chance of incorporating into close friendship networks of \textit{bendi} workers. They are stigmatized and thus prejudiced and excluded by local residents while being also ignored by various levels of government, public social services agencies, and non-governmental organizations. As a result, they are increasingly marginalized into a disadvantaged
“non-citizen outsider” group, being blamed for urban pains and ills – social disorganization, disruption of routine rhythms of urban life, traffic jams, and crime – that are more associated with rapid growth and market transition than with their being there.

In the GETDD, even though union housing appears to serve best the adaptational needs of migrant workers compared to the other two prevailing housing modes, it still leads to a similar outcome – social isolation. As the emerging stereotype dictates, waidi-ren live in the GETDD and bendi-ren in the city.

The GETDD creates a strong impression among locals that people living inside are a homogenous waidi group who just want to make money in Guangzhou, and the district is a stigmatized waidi-ren’s enclave or village. One bendi worker remarked in an interview: “No matter how long they [migrants without Guangzhou hukou] have been in Guangzhou and no matter what they do, they are waidi-ren, and we can tell that they are …”

Some migrant workers grow resentful while others feel depressed. One of the migrant workers said:

After all, who can tell how many waidi workers have left their sweat and youth with Guangzhou? Who can tell how much hardship we have gone through and how many tears we have shed behind all the splendid lights of night-time Guangzhou? If it were not for our work, Guangzhou would never be what it is now.

The structured and controlled lives in the industrial development district are very different from migrants’ former lives in the rural area. Having to face many laws and regulations, they had to change their own living styles, which resulted in them being in a city but not part of it. Mr Zhong, worked in Guangzhou for three years, told us in an interview:

When living in the midst of this metropolitan city which is full of energy, excitement, and competition, you would develop some kind of inferiority complex. Here, you are just an average worker giving out your labor. You see city folks live different lives and act differently toward you. They surely have different values. Sometimes I would make mistakes, get upset about things, and get annoyed with a colleague, and I would be scolded or criticized for things I didn’t quite understand. Before, we were used to the comfortable life at home. It is difficult to adapt to the new life here … Everything is so new and uncertain.

Another worker at an electronic company talked about his feelings at work: “Work occupies all my life here; I feel bored when I am working on these electronic boards piece by piece and following the same routine like a robot day in and day out here.”
Also because of the nature of work that does not allow for much interpersonal interaction, coworkers feel like strangers. Ms Fan, an office secretary, who works in a soft drink company, said:

I don’t feel this city is welcoming me. I don’t feel I can find a place in such a big city. It has been so difficult for me to stick to one job. I first worked for a food packing company, but I couldn’t adapt to the boring work there. So I quit and found another one; but same thing happened, and I changed again. So what I can do is to change jobs frequently, but when I go to another company, I would feel people in management are unkind, always wear a scornful look at us and consider us unworthy, which would make us feel a chill deep in our hearts.

Waidi workers’ outsider status in turn effectively reinforces their sojourning orientation. Most of the workers whom we have interviewed express a clear intention to “return” to their native places in the near future. However, their notion of “return” suggests the resettlement in towns or cities close to their native villages rather than the return to the villages per se. They would aim to develop new careers rather than to go back to farming, and most would want to open up their own businesses. An antithetical couplet at the gate of a company’s dormitory building has the following Chinese phrases written on it:

Guangzhou’s builders today,
Hometown’s entrepreneurs tomorrow.

Discussion: Reflection on Theory

Migrant workers in the GETDD have remained residentially segregated and socially isolated. As a distinguishable social group with little social contact with bendi-ren (except with bendi peasants), they are treated by the state, the industries, and the public as necessary labor, but not as blood-and-flesh human beings, and are pushed into the corners of the booming metropolis as non-citizen outsiders. Some of the causes of their residential segregation may arguably be voluntary and self-selective. For example, many migrant workers arrived in the GETDD as sojourners, and they came to find work and had no intention to settle in Guangzhou permanently. However, if the host city were more receptive and welcoming, they would possibly shift their sojourning orientation to settlement.

Social marginality associated with internal migration in China shows certain uniqueness in comparison with that associated with urbanization in developing countries as well as with international migration to developed countries. In the Latin American urbanization literature, the marginality perspective posits that the isolation of the poor is not simply a matter of individual incomes; but more importantly, it is part of the spatial and physical organizations of cities where economic growth and housing construction as well as the
provision of public services are severely mismatched. The lack of adequate housing and social services leads to squatter settlements, or the formation of shanty towns, which in turn exacerbates the social marginality of the poor as evident in many fast-growing Latin American cities (Cornelius 1973; Morse 1971a, 1971b; Roberts 1973). In the case of the GETDD, however, a large proportion of migrant workers' housing need is met by industries as mandated by the state with a smaller proportion provided directly by the state or by the emerging market. Although state-intervention effectively prevents squatter or slum settlements and shanty towns, it intentionally and unintentionally reinforces social separation and marginality.

However, there are different ways marginality is viewed by the public and acted upon by the government. Some treat marginality as a social problem intrinsic to rapid urban growth and economic development and the marginalized as an unfortunate lot (Perlman 1976). Others see marginality as the poor's own making as illustrated by the culture of poverty thesis. The culture of poverty thesis predicts that the lifestyle of the poor, arising from low-income jobs, poor living conditions, and lack of education, perpetuates fatalistic orientation and the passing of disadvantages from one generation to the next (Lewis 1961). These two views of marginality are criticized as elitist in conception, regarding the poor as victims either of structural circumstances or of their own cultural deficiency (Roberts 1978).

Another long-standing theoretical paradigm explaining social marginality has been that of internal colonialism in the development literature (Blauner 1969; Hechter 1976; Walton 1976). Internal colonialism is defined as “a process that produces certain intranational forms of patterned socioeconomic inequality directly traceable to the exploitative policies through which national and international institutions are linked in the interests of surplus extraction of capital accumulation” (Walton 1976, p. 58). Underprivileged groups, referred to as internally colonized groups, may be differentiated by race and ethnicity, religion, language or some other cultural characteristics and are excluded from participating in mainstream social, economic, and political institutions based primarily on these group markers. In the US, internal colonialism has been applied primarily to the study of race and ethnicity, where involuntary immigrants are treated as “colonized” minorities and voluntary immigrants, including white ethnic, as “immigrant” minorities (Blauner 1969; Ogbu 1974).

In Latin America, internal colonialism has been applied to the study of socioeconomic inequality among culturally distinct groups (Walton 1976). Scholars from this perspective liken the marginalization of rural-to-urban migrants to foreign colonialism (Gonzales Casanova 1969), suggesting that its causes not only lie in the acute cultural differences between city and the countryside but also in the encroachment of urban-based capitalism on the periphery and with it the emerging machinery of increased political control and economic exploitation (Casanova 1969; Walton 1976). From the perspective
of internal colonialism, the state plays an important role in establishing and reinforcing neocolonial relationships of domination and subordination.

In many newly urbanized Chinese cities, however, the mechanisms of social marginality suggested by existing literature—mismatch, culture of poverty, internal colonialism—do not fully account for the current state of migrant workers. Our contemporary case of the GETDD shows that migrant workers are perceived as waidi-ren by the locals while assumed to be so by the state and social institutions that serve them. Various levels of the government privilege economic development over human development. The concern over migrant workers has been primarily with how to keep them productive at work and how to keep them from becoming bendi-ren who can lay claim on social service and welfare benefits accorded to bendi hukou status. In fact, state and local development policies have never considered facilitating migrant workers’ adaptation to urban life. Of social policies concerning migrant workers in cities, most have targeted “problem”-solving and none resettlement. Residential patterns in the GETDD show a minimum involvement of either the municipal or the district government. Even in union housing where government intervention is substantial, the goal is to manage workers better, to make them more productive on the work front with no consideration about housing for married couples. Industries provide housing for workers for the same purpose and show little interest in doing more than necessary to maximize profit. The emerging peasant housing market, with little intervention from the state, functions to maximize profit and do little for improving worker’s housing conditions and social environment. If that housing market expands and dominates in the near future, it remains an empirical question whether similar problems associated with Latin American urbanization would be reproduced.

Nonetheless, the GETDD case is not entirely unique to China’s transitional economy. It illustrates some of the similar lessons found in the development literature on urbanization in Latin America and immigrant adaptation in the US. First, contemporary migrants arrive in urban centers or host countries where economic restructuring and globalization have created bifurcated labor markets with numerous labor-intensive and low-paying, part-time/temporary jobs on the one end and a growing sector of knowledge-intensive and well-paying jobs on the other (Sassen 2000). This bifurcated labor market renders many migrants, even those with education and skills, underemployed in substandard wages or occupational over qualification, which, in turn, limits their social mobility (Zhou 1993). In China, the kinds of investments attached to the SEZs tend to be labor-intensive industries that absorb a vast surplus labor from the countryside. Migrant workers attracted to fast-growing cities tend to concentrate in the lower end of the labor market with few opportunities for upward social mobility.

Second, contemporary migrants come into contact with the existing systems of stratification in the host society, which are often interacting closely
Trapped in Neglected Corners of a Booming Metropolis

with class, race, and gender hierarchies, but often find it difficult to resist it. In the US, non-white immigrants are often confronted with racism along with racial discrimination in the rigid system of racial hierarchy, and this hierarchy is in many ways intertwined with the system of class stratification (Massey and Denton 1993). In Latin America, however, class is a more prominent determinant than race to structure inequality (Walton 1976). As for internal migrants in China, non-hukou status connotes deprivation of citizenship rights and structural disadvantages that institutionally sort them into an outsider group, despite similarities in racial and cultural characteristics and even in class status.

Third, contemporary migrants, especially the undocumented, are often constrained by the state – regulations restricting entry and settlement (e.g., backlog in visa processing, work permits, driver licenses, residency requirements, language requirement, and citizenship rights) and public policies (e.g., public assistance, public housing, education, healthcare, and government loans) – in their struggle to combat disadvantages associated with migrant status. Even in situations where the state promotes immigrant assimilation and multiculturalism, it may inadvertently reinforce barriers inhibiting the migrants’ chance of mobility. In the Chinese case, the hukou system and state policies, including housing policies, that aim to manage or control internal migration reinforce migrants’ outsider status.

Moreover, some migrants are involuntarily brought to the host country (for example, slaves, indentured labor, and refugees) while others intend to migrate only to sojourn for a given period of time and eventually return home (e.g., seasonal labor migrants and some undocumented immigrants). Typically, migrants who initially intend to work in the labor market of a host city (or host country) for an extended period of time in order to make money to improve and enrich their future lives in their places of origin are referred to as “sojourners.” To sojourn is to work in a place away from home with no intention of eventually settling in that place. As time goes by some of the sojourners may become settlers. However, rigid state policies make it difficult to switch from sojourning to settlement. For example, America’s Chinatowns had continuously been a bachelors’ society until the 1970s because of legal exclusion (Zhou 1992). Internal migrants in China arrive in cities initially to sojourn. Their lived experiences as outsiders uphold their sojourning goals, which simultaneously trap them in their marginalized outsider status.

Conclusion

In China, the causes of social inclusion and exclusion do not merely stem from culture, place of origin, and the rural-urban divide, but also emerge from the processes of market transition that is intimately involved by the state. New mechanisms of migrants’ urban adaptation are being formed in ways that are
market driven on the one hand while being constrained by state policies on the other. As suggested by the theories of market transition and social stratification, market reform has opened up new revenues for social mobility, allowing some from the rank-and-file to capitalize on their human capital and individual motivation to gain privileged social positions, but continued to maintain and even reinforce the advantages of the state elite (Bian 2002; Bian and Logan 1996; Nee 1989; Nee and Matthews 1996; Walder 1989). However, market reform has promoted particular forms of capital investment and development that disproportionately utilize export-oriented production as the means for economic expansion. Consequently, rapid growth of labor-intensive industries has unleashed unusually high volumes of internal migration, which has in turn compelled the state to exert concerted effort to control and manage migrants, a phenomenon that may be better captured by theories of the developmental state.

Research on internal migration and urban transformation in China has highlighted the importance of the state in initiating market reform, maneuvering its directions, and lauding its positive outcomes to the neglect of unintended social consequences. Our case study of the GETDD shows that residential segregation and social marginalization of migrants are not inherently the effect of migration but rather a result of the way migration is being handled by public policies at the state and local levels. The marginalization of migrant workers may be explained by the theories of market transition. Its root causes, however, result from deliberate policies of the developmentalist state which, on the one hand, encourage internal migration to fuel economic growth but, on the other, control it so as to avoid over-urbanization.

The implications of migrants' residential segregation and social marginalization may be far-reaching beyond the GETDD. Witnessing rapid economic development and tremendous wealth that have arisen from it and yet being trapped in the neglected corners of the booming metropolis, aspiring migrants will not passively react to their structural disadvantages. One possibility is that migrant workers are likely to utilize their newly acquired industrial skills and personal savings for their own betterment, but to do so by returning to their places of origin where they have *bendi-ren* privileges and advantages. Indeed, the trend of return migration is already underway, which helps boost economic development in the migrant-sending inland regions, redirects the courses of migrant flows, and causes labor shortages in migrant-receiving coastal regions. Another possibility is that migrant workers would carve out their own economic niches and social space in their host cities, creating urban enclaves much more like *Zhejiangcun* in Beijing than *chongzhongcuns* (or rural villages) within the walls of a metropolis. Still another possibility is that migrant workers in their host cities are likely to become a politically organized social group resisting marginalization, pressing their own issues onto the agenda of public policy and discourse.
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NOTES

1 Our analysis was based on a 2003 qualitative study of migrant workers in an industrial development zone in Guangzhou. The study involved a survey of non-hukou migrant workers and follow-up face-to-face interviews, conducted in the summer of 2003, under the sponsorship of the Labor Union of the Guangzhou Economic and Technological Development District (GETDD). Through face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions, we obtained information about migrants' work and job satisfaction, quality of life, concerns and demands, and views about their current status and others' perceptions of them.

2 Guangzhou is the capital of Guangdong Province. It boasts the most economically potent and prosperous coastal city on the forefront of China's reforms. It has been called the “Hong Kong on the Mainland” or as the “Gold Mountain by the Pearl River.” The Guangzhou metropolitan region grew to more than 10 million in population (from 3 million in 1989) and its total area grew to 5,000 km² (from 55 km² in 1989) as of 2003. The region now encompasses 10 administrative districts, five of which were formerly neighboring counties with an agriculture-based economy.

3 The development of the GETDD has stimulated industrial and urban development in nearby areas. Ample labor-intensive construction work and numerous low-paying service jobs become available as a result. Many migrant workers find jobs in these newly developed areas.

REFERENCES


