Everyday mobility: the normalization of China-Japan migratory flows and their disjunctures

Abstract: Chinese migrants now constitute the largest group of registered "foreigners" in Japan, with over 600,000 documented in 2009. This is the result of an intersection between the Chinese government's drive for educational and economic success, and Japan's flexible student visa cum proxy labour migration system. It is the product of a normalization of mobility amongst young Chinese migrants. Based on 20 months fieldwork in Tokyo, Japan, I explore the ways in which the decision to move is normalized. Rather than stories that fit neoliberal economic clichés emphasising the heroics and hard work of moving to a new place, their move to Japan was discussed as something everyday. This mirrors recent scholarly work on the importance of regimes of mobility within and from China, in shaping contemporary Chinese subjectivity. However, this mobility is not unproblematic; holding disjunctures and uncertainties for some Chinese migrants in Japan.

The experience of migration is a complicated phenomenon which in many ways defines a large part of contemporary human experience. Migration involves both movement between nation-states, and movements within states. It is exemplary of a wider regime of mobility that defines much of human existence. It also involves movements in time, stretched across people's imagined life projects, both as acts of nostalgic longing and as projected aspirations (Salazar 2011). The instance of

migration is not always the most significant moment in people's lives however, and it is not always decided upon through careful calculation. Reflecting on his research on international Lebanese migrants, Ghassan Hage states, "it is a mistake to think that if people move across national borders, this movement is necessarily the most significant and defining element in their lives" (Hage 2005: 459). Critical of migration literature's tendency to overemphasize the importance of "imagined communities" and mobility as the defining aspects of migration, he argues for more careful ethnographic attention to what is symbolically significant in people's actual lives. This paper will explore the dynamics of "embodied practices of mobility and world-shaping meanings of mobility " (Salazar 2011: 594). Noel Salazar and Allen Smart have recently highlighted this dynamic and offer it as a lens to better understand the relationship between mobility and immobility (2011). I would add that it presents an interesting way of understanding the tensions (im)mobile people deal with in their daily lives, showing the relevance of mobility and migration to an existential understanding of the human agent (Salazar 2011). Chinese migration to Japan is a particular case in point due to the disjunctures between a normalized system of mobility and the competing imperatives such an (im)mobile life presents.

Chinese mobility has been one of the most vibrant areas of migration research within Anthropology. Indeed, a great deal of literature has been written about how current Chinese migrants experience a degree of flexibility in the ways they negotiate their identities and lives, becoming recognized assets within China, and creating bridges for international relations and trade, particularly within the East Asia region (Cheng 2003:170). This paper focuses on experiences of Chinese migrants in Japan, with a particular focus on how they understand their own mobility. Based on over 20 months of fieldwork within Tokyo amongst various networks of young (18-35 year old) students, workers and business operators, it

demonstrates the normalization of regimes of mobility between China and its close neighbours.

The all-pervasive nature of mobility in, and from, China has been well documented by several anthropologists. Aihwa Ong's "flexible citizenship" has been particularly seminal within the field of Chinese migration (1999). She shows how the reform period in China (post-1979) saw a "leaving the country fever" (CHN: *chuguore*), where images of overseas affluence created a "powerful magnet" for Mainland Chinese to "launch themselves into the ocean" (CHN: *xiahai*) (Ong 1999). Ong argues that for young Chinese, becoming experienced, cosmopolitan and entrepreneurial is "synonymous with being modern." Exploring the re-establishment of ties between Mainland China and overseas Chinese (CHN: *huaqiao*) since the opening (CHN: *gaigekaifang*) of the PRC, Ong's project is to explore the improvised and creative ways ethnic Chinese people negotiate nation-state and transnational projects. She coins the term "flexible citizenship" to encapsulate the:

> …cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions (Ong 1999: 6).

Through this, Ong provides a wide array of ethnographic vignettes that demonstrate how Chinese agents use "citizenship" and their ethnic ties of "Confucian humanism" to negotiate the complex agendas of nation-states such as China, the United States and various countries in South-East Asia with overseas Chinese populations (such as Malaysia and Singapore). She also demonstrates how governments have encouraged these ties to create "bridges," making a pun on *qiao* in Chinese that refers to both "bridge" and the term for overseas Chinese, *huaqiao*.

Rather than leading to the inevitable decline of the state, this has resulted in new "graduated zones of sovereignty", where the state is actively involved in shaping transnational spheres of influence (1999: 214-239). In this sense, "flexible citizens" are both collaborators and negotiators of this process of establishing distinct forms of capitalist ventures that not only rely on business, but ethnic identification and the renegotiation of the responsibilities of citizenship.

Pal Nyiri's "Mobility and Cultural Authority in Contemporary China" makes an explicit connection between the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) nation-building agenda and the regimes of mobility it encourages (Nyiri 2010). He takes mobility as the focus of his argument, and uses comparisons between tourists and migrants to show the ways in which their position as Chinese nationals is connected to modern subject building projects in contemporary China.

> "I suggest that both kinds of individuals have to negotiate their positions as modern Chinese subjects as they cope with the contradiction between the expectation of mobility and barriers in front of it. While unifying the mobilizing images of Chinese modernity are transmitted to them through a range of media technologies from telephone cars to tourist brochures, they have to make their way through everyday situations and contradictory local discourses that stand in the way of movement and strip them of their enfranchisement…The discourses of the migrant and the tourist communicate that it is essential for the modern Chinese subject to be mobile." (Nyiri 2010: 164-165)

Julie Y. Chu's research in a village in Fuzhou, concurs with Nyiri's argument. In her ethnography of a village with a great degree of out-migration, she explores the dynamics of mobility from one place (2010). In particular, she shows how *immobility* is one of the major sources of anxiety for Fuzhounese people. Immobility is thus as much a concern for Chinese subjects, and demonstrates the close relationship between mobility and self worth created by the regimes outlined by Nyiri. Chu demonstrates how, even when immobile both in terms of bodily movement and citizenship, Fuzhounese people still have a vast array of mobile imaginaries and social practices. She shows that the material, spatial and linguistic imaginaries involved in finding one's place at "home" are as complex and interconnected as the "displacement" experienced in moving. The connections between "home" and "diaspora" are explored through remittance-fueled construction projects at and the refurbishment of the historic Monkey King temple in the village. Chu's ethnography is a description of mobility *par excellence*. It also demonstrates how mobility regimes and the bridges they have created are a crucial part of contemporary Chinese sociality. They even shape the imaginaries of those "immobile." Indeed, the co-formative dialectic between mobility and immobility described by Chu mirrors Salazar and Smart's suggested use of the term "(im)mobility" as part of mobility research (2012b).

These scholars' work offer excellent examples of the central role mobility (or immobility) plays in contemporary Chinese subjectivity. However, they tend to emphasize a sense of novelty in the mobility they describe, whether its Ong's flexible citizens problematizing the nation-state through their transnational movements or Nyiri's shifts in political discourse. Whilst I acknowledge the newness of these regimes of mobility my research shows how they are narrated and experienced in matter of fact ways that emphasize the every day sense of mobility. As much as changes in mobility provide new theoretical possibilities for

social scientists, for Chinese migrants to Japan they merely represent a world which they must negotiate pragmatically. This suggests a yet to be understood relationship between the accelerating networks of discourses and technologies that constitute regimes of mobility, and the ways they are experienced.

Xiaochen and I sat in the kitchen together on small makeshift plastic stools, sharing a pack of cigarettes from China, which she'd tricked her father into sending over to Japan as a gift for her friends. They were in fact for her.

This kitchen was the common space I shared with 9 Chinese students in a small dormitory in Ikebukuro. The dormitory was a cramped space on the fifth floor of an office block that was intended for small businesses rather than residential living. Each room was barely a metre wide and close to 3 metres deep, and although they were advertised as private quarters, gaps in construction and paper thin walls made it private in name alone. Nonetheless, it was not much worse than other forms of student living common in Tokyo, and it was located only five minutes' walk from the heart of the major station in the north-west of Tokyo, Ikebukuro. Xiaochen, like me, had been introduced to it through an informal contact, and only tolerated its cramped living conditions because of the mobilities it afforded.

When I moved into the dorm I made my research intentions clear, explaining that a part of the Anthropological method was to live with the people you want to learn more about. Due to this, my dorm-mates would often share parts of their life with me, without much prompting, and then tell me that I should know this or that, if I hope to do research on this topic.

This moment was one of those. Xiaochen and I slowly enjoyed the aroma of Panda brand cigarettes, discussing the nostalgia that the thick, strong and un-contaminated flavour of Chinese cigarettes brought. Xiaochen commented that though Chinese cigarettes are strong, they're more natural, unlike the chemically stripped and weaker cigarettes popular in Japan. As we discussed this nostalgia however, Xiaochen paused and said:

"You know, I don't really know how I ended up like this."

To which I responded, "Addicted to cigarettes?"

"No. In Japan… I'd never really thought much about it, yet here I am." I quickly asked her to hold that thought and took out an audio recorder, saying "That's really interesting, is it ok if we talk about it and I record it for my research?" She nodded.

I asked, "What do you mean when you say, 'you never thought much about it'?"

"Well, I'd often gone to help friends buy things before leaving the country (CHN: Chuguo) and I'd always thought it was strange actually. Everyone seemed to be doing it but I was pretty happy at home. So I'd never thought that one day I could be like them and go overseas."

"Why's that?"

"I had no interest, no 'motivation' (JPN: yaruki)"

"So tell me the story of how you got here."

"The year before last I finished high school. At that time I'd intended to attempt the entrance examinations at the local technical college (CHN: dazhuan), but my grades weren't that good. I talked to one of the lecturers there and he said that there are more and more people with diplomas (CHN: wenping) now, and that even though they have them they can't find work. So I started to think that maybe I should just work, that diplomas have no use in the end. My mother said to me that they still wanted me to study, and suggested I go to Japan instead. So that year I started at a language school in Fuzhou. Around July…"

"Why do you think they chose Japan?"

"It's closer, the visa's easier and they'd seen a few people go there before, I guess"

"And why'd you agree"

"Hmm, I thought that Japan is still a place for Asians (CHN: yazhouren), that it'd be easier than English because of the writing system, and it just didn't seem as far away."

"So what else did you do then?"

"Well I studied there for half a year and organised the formalities (CHN: banle shouxu)."

"What did you have to do?"

"Some things my parents organised, like getting a passport. But I had to do some of the things to apply for the visa. The pre-college student (CHN: jiuxue) visa is pretty easy though. You get a year in Japan no questions asked (CHN: meiwenti le)."

"You just need a language school?"

"Yeah, yeah (CHN: dui dui dui..)"

The short ethnographic interview I conducted with Xiaochen is illustrative of the complex interwoven phenomenon that is mobility. Unlike the romantic image of migrants seeking a better life elsewhere, it paints a simple picture of the common place movement has in contemporary China. As Xiaochen described the procedures her parents carried out to get her to Japan, she described it with a no-nonsense obviousness, listing the various stages she went through. Yet, the initial trigger for telling this story was a reflexive comment about how "she didn't know how she ended up" in Japan," suggesting a lack of agency in her decision to move.

Agency and Mobility

In stating that mobility, and in particular migration, has become a common feature of everyday life; I do not mean it is solely determined by socio-political contexts or that there is no agency in it. Issues of agency versus structure are a classic conundrum of all social theory whether it's the "practical logics " and *habitus* of Bourdieu (1977), or the discursive production of subjects *a la* Foucault (1977). Both writers have explored how contexts relate to what people do (practices) and both have looked at the ways these practices relate to either, a) in Bourdieu's case a pre-conscious generative *modus operandi* shaped by its context,

or b) in Foucault's case, the 'techniques,' discourses' and 'microphysics of power' that help shape the self as subject.

In his comparison of Foucault and Bourdieu's concepts, De Certeau highlights the similarities and differences between the two (De Certeau 1994). Further arguing that each theorists concepts rely on assumptions posited by the other. In an eloquently simple summation of this De Certeau argues that an agent's interaction with the world is always in a process of "making do" (*bricolent*), and borrowing an analogy from Kant, that this "making do" can be likened to a tightrope walker, constantly re-adjusting in the attempt to create equilibrium. Within classic research on migration, one of the foundational questions has been the issue of "choice" to move, and what "push-pull" factors influence this decision. Whilst this fits the analogy of "making do" it assumes a rational agent able to weigh their options carefully. In more recent literature on migration however, these issues are problematized as the coercive aspects of mobility regimes come to be recognized.

> The parameters of choice and coercion in migration are difficult to define. Is the decision to leave made out of individual aspiration or collective needs? Do migrants go to foreign countries to offer economic assistance to their parents, or to provide their children with educational opportunities? The constraints of the past and the possibilities of the future are carefully weighed in every decision to migrate. From such a perspective the question of personal choice may simply seem like the wrong question. It gives too much attention to the individual's present action, and blurs the complex networks of

responsibilities that link a person to the past and future.

(Papastergiadis 2000: 60)

As in Xiaochen's case, movement is often experienced as a felicitous or accidental occurrence, even though choices were involved in the process. Similar to Xiaochen's experience, other Chinese migrants I spoke to did not describe their choices or desires to migrate but rather stressed being swept along by the current of "leaving fever" (CHN: *chuguore),* as they watched friends and kin go overseas. The term "fever" is commonly used to describe any kind of popular craze in China. For example, David Palmer, in his research on Chinese body cultivation practices known as *Qigong*, has discussed "fever" as a kind of "collective effervescence which occurs when official policies and informal signals sent from above correspond with, open space for, and amplify popular desire" (Palmer 2009: 278). The "leaving fever" described by young Chinese migrants in Japan is an example of the inertia created by the desires they and their parents held for educational and economic success, and the ways in which this was encouraged by political mechanisms within China.

"My parents suggested I apply when I finished high school because my sister had moved over here, but I was rejected by the embassy during the interview for my application. I didn't really want to go in all honesty, but when I was rejected, I felt left out and became determined to come here. I applied three more times before I was accepted. By then I was 28." (32 yr old, male, from Liaoning, Takushita University student)

"Before the moment I sat down on the plane, I'd never thought about coming to Japan. I didn't do well in school, and after spending a year looking for work, my mother said she'd support me. At that time (2002) everyone was leaving the country. I didn't think of where I was going, just

that I had nothing to do in China. It was a coincidental opportunity (CHN: ouran de jihui)." (27yr old, male, from Harbin, electronics dealer)

"I wanted to go to Beijing actually, but it was easier for my father to organise for me to come here. He'd exported some tea here before and knew someone who could help us organise it. I don't know how I got here." (21 yr old, female, from Fujian, language student)

"To make money of course." (26yr old, female, from Shandong, hairdresser's assistant)

"Why wouldn't I? Its only two and a half hours on a plane back home, the language isn't so different, so I can understand the signs, and its better than staying at home all the time. I thought I'd just come and try it out (CHN: shishi kan)." (28 yr old, male, from Shenyang, language student and hotel concierge)

These statements suggest that these migrants experienced the choice to move to Japan as something obvious or coincidental, often framed by a distinct sense that it was what many others they knew were doing, and that it appeased their parents' educational hopes for them. My desire to hear them tell stories about their decisions to move to Japan was met with pragmatic confusion. To them it was rarely a question of "why?" but rather "why-not?" In this sense, for Chinese migrants in Japan, movement is not an aberrational decision to move between nation-states, but a facet of what is an essentially mobile "social world."

Rather than problematizing the nation-state, international travel has featured prominently in discourses around the desirable in contemporary China.

Two popular mantras perhaps best capture the fin de siècle frenzy and anxiety of the market economy and consumerist China: xiahai

> (plunging into the ocean), meaning going into the risky business world, and yu shijie jiegui, which literally means "linking up with the [rail] tracks of the world." The expressions are ubiquitous in both official and popular Chinese discourse. From the popular press to film and television, the media are suffused with tragicomic tales of people who have fared poorly or well in the new enterprises proliferating in China. Linking up with the tracks of the world" is a particularly vivid metaphor that spells out China's desire to catch the last train of global modernity, finally overcoming perceived time-lag between itself and the West. It suggests a sense of running out of time, of urgency, and of great risk taking—a concept that became almost obsolete during China's insulated socialist era, a time when urban dwellers worked low-paying jobs (Zhang 2000: 93)

Although my interlocutors were often relatively unreflexive about their own personal histories of choosing to move to Japan, they maintained a sense of improvisation in the face of options that had a unique history. They were "making do" within the limits and procedures of what was imaginable. This was achieved through choosing to move, and where, within the distinct architectures of the "tightropes" that facilitate migration. The processes described by Ong that established a transnational network of Chinese mobility and capital accumulation, and the "matter of fact" nature of mobile desires as demonstrated by Chu shows how the re-treading of mobile paths has created a continuing imaginable network of connections between places. This in many ways parallels Simmel's analysis of the affect of paths and bridges (1997). He argues that path-building creates

permanent metaphorical connections between places. In particular, he describes how bridges are exemplary, as they "symbolize the extension of our volitional sphere over space" and show humanity's "will to connect" (1997:171). Although he explores this in the literal sense, describing actual historic and architectural structures, we can imagine contemporary paths, "tightropes" and bridges in many ways. In the context of Chinese mobility in the early 21st century it is complex assemblages of administrative structures, visas, the drive for educational desire, networks of capital established by *huaqiao* entrepreneurs, and kinship that underlie why Chinese migrants have come to be the largest group of non-Japanese in Japan.

Student visas as migratory channel

Amongst the body of 250 people that I talked with in my fieldwork in Ikebukuro, 90% had come to Japan on a student visa. This did not mean that they all ended up studying for significantly long periods of time, but rather that the student visa system in Japan is one of the most convenient ways to enter the country. This ease of entry intersected with PRC governmental drives for educational reforms and advancement, making educational travel one of the most reliable means by which to go overseas. Legal overseas migration and cosmopolitan consumption have been encouraged by the CCP in the reform era as part of the developmental imaginaries of the nation (Fong 2004; 2007; Nyiri 2006; Nyiri 2001; Xiang 2003). In particular, overseas study has featured prominently in this promotion, as the CCP attemps to create broad international networks of economic and cultural development (Nyiri 2001). A particularly indicative example of this is found in a 1992 State Council report stating the principles of overseas study policy. These principles were to "support study abroad, promote return, [uphold] freedom of movement," and to "promote overseas individuals to

serve the country," with "serve the county" (CHN: *wei guo fuwu*) becoming the standard slogan for overseas students (Nyiri 2001; Cheng 2003)

Migration has also been encouraged in media representations of successful ex-overseas Chinese students who have either returned or stayed on in their country of migration as an economic beneficiary or cultural intermediary. For instance, Fujianese abroad who were promoted as "successful" donated funds to Project Hope (a school building project for poor areas) and other relief schemes. Similarly, in 2006 a documentary portraying the lives of Chinese students' in Japan (filmed by an ex-student herself) was applauded in China for portraying the humanistic nature of Japanese people's dealings with these students, and the economic hardships that the students themselves stoically overcame (Zhang 2006). The film was screened in both China and Japan as a bilingual edit produced by CCTV and FujiTV, and was praised for not only showing the people of China another side to Japanese people, but also for showing Japanese viewers the hardships Chinese students face.

In her research amongst students of the reform era, and everyday reactions to overseas media events, Vanessa Fong has argued that images of China's place in the world are embedded in a broader notion of "modernising" China that is simultaneously subject to the perceived *need* for China to modernise due to its current lack (Fong 2004; Fong 2007; Fong 2011). The students she interviewed often voiced disappointment with current standards in China, and so felt it necessary to go overseas to develop themselves. At the same time, they framed this desire in terms of filial duty to the nation by cultivating themselves overseas and possibly returning at a later date.

Fong has argued that the images of desirable travel, citizenship and personal development are often subject to the tension-based processes of "cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld 1997; Fong 2004; Fong 2007). A term coined by Herzfeld, "cultural intimacy" is used to describe the flip-flop-like process where state-based

legal and cultural norms are rejected by citizens at one time and accepted at another (Herzfeld 1997). Herzfeld shows how the dynamic tensions and at times contradictions between person, group and nation-state are actually constitutive of the state, culture and in particular notions of patriotism. Hence, patriotism is not a thing dictated by the state but a negotiated and contested process that is often utilized by agents in a way similar to De Certeau's "making do."

This complex process of educational desire and cultural intimacy has accelerated since Deng Xiaoping instructed education departments in June 1978 to expand the scale of people travelling overseas for study. Today, China has become the world's largest exporter of international students. In 2006 there were 343,126 recorded Chinese international students, constituting 14% of the total international student population and surmounting by three times more than the second largest exporter, India (UNESCO 2006). Of this, 89,000 Chinese students went to the USA and 79,000 to Japan. However, due to special vocational (15,000) and pre-college language student (30,000) visa arrangements between China and Japan, Japan arguably constitutes the largest recipient of educationally channelled Chinese migrants. According to Gracia Liu-Farrer's calculations the total number of educationally channelled Chinese migrants in Japan was 120,176 for 2006 (UNESCO 2006; Liu-Farrer 2011).

These figures are supported by several new ethnographies on Chinese student migration. In Fong's recently published research on young Chinese' aspirations to move overseas, she followed a group of participants whom she had previously interviewed at high school age (Fong 2011). Originally from the Chinese city Dalian, Fong follows them to their migrant lives in Ireland, Japan, America, Britain and Australia. Despite voicing a desire to go to America or Britain, the majority of Fong's informants ended up spending a significant period of time in either Ireland or Japan. This was due to the flexible visa and work systems in these countries, and in particular, the relative ease of getting a Japanese student

visa. Fong shows that although migrants have preferences for certain countries, the most significant distinction was whether they were considered "developed." Fong's informants dreamed of going to a "developed country" (CHN: *fadaguojia*), which was envisioned as a general category in their dream rather than referring to a specific country. These countries were referred to as a "paradise" (CHN: *tiantang*), and although it was considered the less prestigious "silver path" (CHN: *yinse*), 42% of her informants had spent at least 6 months in Japan; making it the most significant mediator in the goals of young Chinese goals to move overseas.

From 1984 to 2004, over a quarter of a million Chinese migrants have arrived in Japan on either university or pre-university language student visas (Liu-Farrer 2011). This new wave of migrants, the "New Overseas Chinese" (CHN: *Xinhuaqiao*) have constituted approximately a third of the total registered Chinese population in Japan since the 1990s and make up two-thirds of the total foreign student population (Japanese Statistics Bureau 2008; Zha 2003). By the 1990s, China's new emphasis on overseas study and migration coincided with Japan's own social developments in similar areas. Japan's rapidly developing economy, declining population, labour shortage, and the hesitation of the domestic population to engage in certain kinds of jobs, created a new market for migrants (Liu-Farrer 2011). However, pressure from within Japanese politics prevented the allowance of any form of mass labour migration. The relative ease of attaining one of the several types of student visas, and the part-time work arrangements these permit, have ensured that student visas have become a proxy channel for labour migration. Liu-Farrer has noted that the possible combination of work and education via student visas in Japan has ensured that a variety of different aspirations for social mobility and economic success flow through similar migratory channels (2011).

This variety is reflected in regional differences in migratory paths and channels. During the 1990s, "Snake Head" human traffickers from Fujian (CHN:

Shetou) collaborated with Japanese businesses to establish language schools for labour migration purposes. At the same time, aspiring young Shanghainese used similar visa-arrangements and privately run schools to prepare themselves for entry into Japanese universities. Hence, I argue that migration from China should be seen in more diverse terms than national boundary crossing. Regional differences are marked, as are personal and interpersonal motivations.

The North Eastern regions of China had more historical ties with Japan due to Japan's occupation of Manchuria during the Second World War. Many older people within this region had some Japanese language ability and so, when educational policy promoted foreign language learning in the 1980s, many North Eastern schools utilised this generation's Japanese language ability. Hence, students from the North East were more likely to have learned some Japanese before going to Japan. Non-Han groups from Northern China, such as Inner Mongolians were also more likely to go to Japan, however, this trend was based on perceived linguistic similarities between Mongolian and Japanese. One Inner Mongolian classmate of mine explained it as a reaction to the "Sinification" (CHN: *Hanhua*) occurring in Inner Mongolia. In contrast to the North-East, people from Fujian were known for utilising the historic boating traffic from the area, often migrating illegally or re-establishing networks with previously migrated family members. In Shanghai, during the 1990s, many businesses were set up to work as intermediaries for aspiring migrants, often in cooperation with language schools in Japan. In recent times this industry has come under strict regulation with 300 such registered businesses recorded in Shanghai 2006 (Liu-Farrer 2011).

Regional differences also play out in the spatial distribution of Chinese migrants in Tokyo. Each area of Tokyo tends to have more people from certain areas of China, and inter-regional tensions often shaped much of the daily social lives of my interlocutors. For example, Ikebukuro was predominantly seen as an area for North East Chinese (CHN: *Dongbeiren*), and although other people came

from areas such as Fujian, north-eastern attitudes and identities were performed more publicly in this space. In contrast, the historically established Yokohama Chinatown was discussed by Ikebukuro Chinese as a place for old overseas Chinese (CHN:*lao huaqiao*), Taiwanese and Fujianese. Similarly, Ueno was slowly coming to be seen as a "little Shanghai," in the words of one local restaurant owner.

Regional differences are compounded by personal and family networks. Of the 120 participants Liu-Farrer interviewed, 102 had siblings currently studying in Japan or had previously had a sibling study there (2011). Amongst my interlocutors those figures were lower, but not significantly. For example, amongst the 28 life narratives I collected only 13 people had kin currently or previously in Japan. However, they often had friends or kin with ties to Japan (particularly amongst Fujianese interviewees), even if they did not actually reside there. In short, personal relationships and regional dynamics influence desires to move to Japan.

Whilst these dynamics are significant on a general level of analysis, they vary widely in the way they channel personal life trajectories. An Inner-Mongolian couple's tale of how they came to Japan exemplifies the process of "making do" while engaging with these forces. Despite growing up together as children, the desire to study had drawn them away from each other since they were 17. The wife, Non, had not grown up speaking Mandarin, and had only learnt standardised modern Chinese (CHN: *Putonghua*) when she started her later years in primary school. She said that linguistic difficulties had always made her feel out of place within the urban centres of China due to this, and so, at 17 when an opportunity to study in Japan arose she took it without thinking. She said that Mongolian is grammatically similar to Japanese, and that she thought that she might fit in more in Japan due to a perceived commonality between Mongolians and Japanese

people. Her move as a student would later channel her now-husband's move to Japan. He described his tale as follows:

I asked, "Where did you grow up?"

"Although I was born in Inner-Mongolia, when I graduated, I went to a vocational school in Hubei. So I spent most of my time with other "outsiders" (waidiren), people from Guangdong etc. and some people from Hubei. We spent all our time together studying and playing, so after graduating I went to Guangzhou for a while to find work. But I didn't have much success so I returned to Inner-Mongolia."

"So you moved around a lot before coming to Japan…While moving, did you ever imagine you might come to Japan?"

"No, never. It's just…how to put it… In Inner-Mongolia when you think of going overseas (chuguo) the first thing is always Japan. Because, to Mongolians Japan is seen as not being all that different. It's probably due to the language, much of the grammar and pronunciation etc. is very similar. So if you're a Mongolian and you come to Japan you can get used to here relatively quickly. About half a year is all that's needed and you'll speak Japanese fluently. It's a good existence, and to be frank you can make a lot of money. At the moment Inner-Mongolia is a little backward, you know. In Japan, one year's wages is worth ten years' income in Inner-Mongolia."

"Could you tell me a little more about how you came to Japan?"

"The biggest reason is that I met my wife (CHN: laopo "missus") back where we come from. We got along really well after not having seen each other since we were kids and we started to date (CHN: tanlianai). However, she was going to go to Japan, and I thought 'Not a problem… it could only be around a year right?' But she didn't come back…after that, she got a job and our lives were stable (CHN: wending le). Although we kept in touch over the Internet, the time we got together was really short. In all honesty we didn't really understand each other. And I definitely hadn't gotten to the point where I thought I wanted to marry her. I just thought that I'd find some way to come over to spend more time with her and see how it went. I know you probably want me to give a really sentimental reason like 'I came here just for her, blah blah' but it really wasn't like that. I guess men are fairly selfish, I really just thought 'try studying abroad' (CHN: liuxue bei). See if I can get used to it here, see what it's like you know? I know a lot of people said, 'Nah, you two couldn't get by like that. Although her wages are high, they're not that high for Japan, and your Chinese money won't cut it in Tokyo.' I had no diplomas, no educational experience (CHN: xueli), but I came on the 'pre-college student visa' (CHN: jiuxue) no problem. I've been here for almost three years now, we married last year."

Disjuncture in regimes of mobility

Despite the normalization of mobility amongst Chinese migrants' decisions to move to Japan, the condition of mobility still had many disjunctures. For example, the conditions of Chinese migrant lifestyles in Japan were difficult and they often found themselves working within the less desirable sectors of Tokyo's labour economy. However, beyond the everyday hardships, there was a broader sense of disruption stemming from the difficulties they had in developing a sense of belonging. Many described the difficulties in negotiating the normalized regimes of mobility, which position one as a supposedly aspiring mobile subject and suggest the desire to have the choice not to move. This echoes Virno's

paraphrased use of Heidegger to describe the lack of belonging created by contemporary regimes of capital and mobility.

> Today, all forms of life have the experience of "not feeling at home," which, according to Heidegger, would be the origin of anguish. Thus, there is nothing more shared and more common, and in a certain sense more **public**, than the feeling of "not feeling at home." (Virno 2004: 35)

In the case of Chinese migrants in Tokyo there was often anxiety about their lack of a place in the world. None of my informants aspired to remain in Japan indefinitely, but at the same time those who tried to return to the PRC would soon find themselves drawn back to Japan. They were transnational in terms of physical mobility, but also distinctly diasporic in terms of their sense of where they ought to be. In particular, the obligations and sentiments related to their kin (almost all of whom were still in China, or in another OECD country), were constant sources of guilt.

In his emphasis on the personal and existential aspects of anthropological understanding, Michael Jackson has noted a sense of tension within migrant's lives (Jackson 2007). Discussing the stresses and disjunctures a friend of his who had migrated to London experienced, he likens it to Marx's concept of alienation in that "the more intellectual labour expended on the minatory object," (in this case the migratory project) "the more vulnerable, trapped, worthless, and unreal one feels oneself to be " (2007: 128). His friend, although a legal migrant with employment, was constantly exerting effort into constructing a sense of legitimacy in the place he was, and a sense of coherence in his migratory project. The more effort exerted the less real it felt.

Michael Jackson emphasises the disjuncture of feeling out of place and the alienation which arises from fears about legitimacy. In Japan however, the impossibility of legitimacy often pushed these concerns aside. As one person glibly stated "Japan is for the Japanese of course. I'll never be Japanese." Concerns about the future however, were very common and were often directly connected to concerns about the purpose of moving overseas. In particular, the uncertainties associated with moving abroad to secure a future were often described as a "floating" (CHN: *piao*), and also occasionally "floating/wandering" (CHN: *fuyou*). Vanessa Fong's research on young Chinese abroad has also noted the common use of the term.

> Transnational Chinese students often describe their sojourns in developed countries as conditions of floating (piao), a concept associated with instability, transience, uncertainty, and a lack of rootedness. (Fong 2011: 98)

In general "floating" has a negative connotation, with a lack of agency and sense of indeterminacy being its major constituents. The story of "Laoliu" (a pseudonym I use for one of my friends) demonstrates the personal tensions found within negotiations of place, with its associated diasporic imaginaries and life projects. Laoliu describes his life as "floating" like flotsam in a stream.

> *I first met Laoliu whilst watching a billiards game with a group of my informants. They held a weekly match on Wednesdays to play for small amounts of money and blow off steam from their otherwise hectic work and study lives. I sat on a couch near the tables discussing my research question with a new friend some of my informants had introduced me to when Laoliu approached us. He wore a grey pinstriped suit and had his hair slicked back in a fashion almost reminiscent of pop culture images of Japanese mafia.*

He spoke to me through this whole conversation weaving Japanese nouns and adjectives into otherwise Chinese sentence structures, and occasionally using the Chinese pronunciation of a Japanese Kanji compound. He described Japan as a "benri" (JPN: convenient) place where everyone's "suzhi" (CHN: quality) was high. In particular, he talked of how he wanted to learn the Japanese approach to "service" (CHN: fuwu) as he thought it was decidedly lacking in Northeast China. Amongst the people I had met so far, he was the most enthusiastic about his life in Japan. He also suggested applying for Japanese citizenship.

Over my fieldwork, Laoliu and I became very close, and I discovered things about his life that brought many nuances to his original performance of affluence and enthusiasm. In contrast to his initial display of certainty about his life project in Japan, perhaps a year after our initial meeting he came to a crossroads that made him question many things. I received a phone call from him at around 2am in the morning, which I was used to as his work often took him late into the night and he was always keen for a chat after he closed up. However, this time he was tentative and sounded concerned in asking me general things about where I was and what I was doing.

He then switched and asked me if he could ask me for advice, to which I said "of course" but added that I'm not sure if I'm the best person for this sort of thing. When he explained to me that his boss had offered him a significant promotion, I was relieved and excited, recalling how he had described to me previously how much he wanted to continue living in Japan. However, when he said anxiously "I don't know what to do," I waited to hear his reasons for concern.

Despite Laoliu's excitement about Japan, when faced with the actuality of living there for another five years (the contract for the promotion), he became incredibly distressed. He

discussed with me in length about how he wanted to get married but that he could never marry a Japanese woman; how he wanted to take care of his family but that they could never come to Japan; how the suit that he always wore was the only one he had, and that it was bought for him by his company (he was in fact very poorly paid, despite appearances); how he could make more money elsewhere in China perhaps. Finally he said that "most importantly this isn't my home." I asked if he'd like me to meet him and suggested that we call some of the others from the billiards group, but he declined. Despite repeated phone calls he remained withdrawn for the next month, until he finally got back in touch and told me he had decided not to take the promotion but remain in his current job, waiting to see if he had a change of heart. He'd just float in Japan (CHN: piao zai riben).

The distress experienced by Laoliu due to the tensions between his desires to be a successful cosmopolitan, take care of his family and be in a place he felt he belonged is but one example of the disruptions contemporary regimes of mobility bring for Chinese migrants. Amongst my informants the sense of being unsure was incredibly common. It was the tensions created between places and life projects that created this alienation. Laoliu did not simply wish to belong in Japan, nor did he just wish to return home. It is the movement between places that has left him vulnerable to his sense of simultaneous uncertainty and obligation. In this sense, the normalization of regimes of mobility within and from China, has not produced Chinese subjects that perfectly fit into it. Despite the regime's normalization, there are still disjunctures, disruptions and alternative desires that conflict with these processes.

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