

Lifestyle mobility in China: context, perspective and prospect

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This study attempts to understand individual mobility and the modernity in current China through analyzing two types of lifestyle mobilities observed to be rising recently. The examination of the social phenomenon from the mobility perspective would help to understand Chinese context and the complex interaction between individuals and their social and natural environment. Through analyzing the individual mobility, it is possible to present a dynamic and livable picture of linkage of individuals, with local communities, regions, state and the global (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2011). It is also expected to provide some insights on discussions of the mobility turn in recent academic world.

The Chinese modernity process is closely linked with the mobility, since it is often associated with the individuals' attitude and ability to move away from home, from a long term stable relationship to a stranger's society. From the late 19th centuries toward the 20th centuries, where the modern thoughts were introduced, the rights for individuals to move were promoted. The rising of individual mobility is one of the most important indicators to show the process of a traditional Chinese society, in which individuals are bound up with land and extended families, moving toward a modern society.

From 1980s, Chinese society in the history entered the mobility age, first dominated by massive rural-urban migration and then domestic tourism. Most of the mobility studies therefore focus on these two. However, these two cannot fully reveal the challenges and dynamics of mobility in a "compressed modernity", referred to rapid economic change within short term by Kyung-Sup(2010). The study of the lifestyle migration can meet the gap.

Up to now, there are few studies which address the lifestyle migration in China. The main study in this area is carried out in Sun Yat-sen University. With the support of National Science Foundation, the author together with her Mphil and PhD students have carried out some work mainly in Lijiang, Dali and Sanya since 2010. Together there were 4 MPhil dissertations and two ongoing PhD, one Mphil studies. Some of the

works have been published while many are still in the working process.

Lifestyle migrants

Salt (2003) was the first to identify the new migrants to the seaside, which was termed “seachange”. Later on, it was adopted by other researchers (Burnley, 2005). Currently, in both China and internationally, umbrella concepts such as retirement migration, leisure migration, counter-urbanization, second-home ownership, amenity-seeking and seasonal migration are used to link the mobilities to wider phenomena (Buller and Hoggart, 1994; King et al., 2000; Rodríguez et al., 2005; Casado-Díaz, 2006). Recent theoretical literature on lifestyle migration refers to ‘relative affluent individuals, moving either part-time or full-time, permanently or temporarily, to places which, for various reasons, signify for the migrants something loosely defined as quality of life’ (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009). Lifestyle here is to search for a balance of material and spiritual meaning life, in response to the perceived loss of meaning in their daily life (Chaney, 1996). Anable (2005) suggested understanding mobility from the perspective of lifestyle would contribute to more comprehensive knowledge about social phenomena. Despite the significant and increasing incidence of various privileged forms of migration, they are in general poorly understood and collectively conceptualized in international academy (Amit, 2007).

Retired birders: the case of Sanya

Due to the influence of traditional culture and economic constrain, the Chinese elderly are previously reluctant to move and incline to stay at home. However, in recent years, many coastal cities and some countryside have found out to be crowded by retired birders who bought second homes there (Wu and Xu, 2012).

- Destination pull factors: Hainan is the biggest tropical island in China; High quality environment; Oversupply of tourist real estate.
- Individual push factors: early retirement; staying in health; investment driven; children support.
- Social integration: exclusion of the local residents; gated community; separation from the local communities; reliance on *Laoxiang* (those come from the same place) for support.

Lifestyle entrepreneurs and working tourists: cases in Dali and Lijiang

There is an increasing trend of lifestyle entrepreneurs and working tourists

observed in many small tourism towns. Both lifestyle entrepreneurs and working tourists are young, well-educated and from the coastal regions where the economic development is most advanced in China. Very much influenced by the travel culture, they tend to have a life on the way and search for their own way of life.

- Destination pull factors: good environment; peaceful small town; low cost of living; perception of the low cost of running business.
- Individual push factors: travel; escape from routine life; want to control one's own life; work-life balance.
- Social integration: stick to *quanzi* which is a small group of lifestyle migrants with similar attitude toward life, work and travel.

Discussions: the ending of lifestyle mobility

Little empirical data has pointed to the uni-directional permanent migration of lifestyle migrants or their intention to do so. All these migrants have not expected to move permanently. They have already known that they cannot be there for a long time since the overall infrastructure cannot provide them the quality of life they need in the long term and they need to return to their families and real home. Lifestyle is only for a temporal period.

The most important factor leading to the lifestyle pattern is the family concern. Family often is the reason for moving out and moving back.

- Lifestyle entrepreneur: escape temporally from routine before they have children. Move back for the sake of children's education and growing up.
- Retired birders: with the support of their children, they visit Hainan searching for health and their own lives; back to their children when health deteriorates.

Conclusion

The rapidly changing political, social and cultural background are dictating the special development of mobility in China, whereas the trajectory, pattern, motivation, experience, meanings and impacts are unique compared with other countries. The loss of control of mobility, the widespread of mobility culture, and flexible work and consumption opportunities brought by the market enable a variety of individual mobilities in China. Diverse patterns co-exist. While most rural population are making efforts to the big cities, the ones who settled down in cities want to escape to the small towns or other lower-tier cities. Individuals can be seen to search for their survival and development. Yet, family and home, the relationships developed based on family and home, still serve the most important supports for the individuals, playing dominant role in their mobility process. This may be the outstanding feature

in Chinese mobility and modernity. Yet, more researches are needed.

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