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Neighbourhood Attachment, Social Participation, and Willingness to Stay in China's Low-income Communities

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Fulong Wu¹

Abstract

Previous studies show neighbourhood attachment is an important factor that determines political and civic participation. Strong neighbourhood attachment and active civic participation help to enhance neighbourhood stability. This paper explores this argument in the context of Chinese cities. The paper analyses the households in low-income communities and their neighbourhood attachment, social participation in community activities, and their willingness to stay in these places. Contrary to common perception, although rural migrants do not identify themselves with the place where they live and do not actively participate in community activities, they express a relatively strong willingness to stay in these places. In contrast, the unemployed or retired urban households actively participate in community activities. Nevertheless, they prefer to leave these low-income places if possible. With socioeconomic attributes controlled, those who live in inner or old neighbourhoods demonstrate a low or negative willingness to stay. This paper argues that the relation between neighbourhood attachment and neighbourhood stability is not straightforward, and in this context it is largely determined by the institutional design that excludes migrants' involvement, which turns them into 'economic sojourners'. The stated preference across other social groups to leave old low-income neighbourhoods drives the outward movement of those who are able to seize the opportunities to materialize their preference. These findings have implications for low-income neighbourhood regeneration in China.

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1. Introduction

China is experiencing rapid urbanization and urban development, which has greatly transformed not only the built environment and landscapes but also social relation and urban governance. From the grassroots level, we witness new residential mobility and urban mosaic that are different from what were described three decades ago by Whyte and Parish (1984) and Walder (1986). These changes are manifested as the end of collective consumption epitomized by state housing and work-unit governance (Wu, 2002; Read, 2003; Bray, 2005, Shieh and Friedmann, 2008), increasing diversity of the residential design and standard (Wang and Murie 2000; Huang, 2004), and greater inflow of migrants (Fan, 2002; 2008; Zhu and Chen, 2010) and the development of their enclaves (Ma and Xiang, 1998; Zhang, 2001; Zhang et al. 2003), residential segregation based on housing tenures (Li and Wu, 2008; Li et al, 2010) and separation between migrants and urban households (Wu, 2004) and neighbourhood social changes (Wu and He, 2005; Forrest and Yip, 2007). To cope with the increasing mobility and ungovernable urban space, the state initiated the programme of 'community construction' (Wu, 2002; Bray, 2005; Friedmann, 2007) to strengthen local service provision and social management (Xu and Chow, 2006). Similar to the rising 'neighbourhood' agenda under the UK under new labour (Kearns and Parkinson, 2001), the issue of developing territorially-based community is raised into the forefront of policy agenda. Recent policies recognize the marginal status of migrants and attempt to 'urbanize' the migrants and integrate them into urban residents (Zhang and Lei, 2008). These all require a better understanding of neighbourhood social interaction, especially between different social groups in China.

However, 'neighbourliness' is a new topic in China, despite some recent researches on social interaction among residents and sense of community (e.g. Xu et al 2010). There has been even less published on the relation between neighbourliness and social participation. Some general observations suggest declining informal neighbourhood interaction (Wu, 2010), especially the new middle class seeking more exclusive and private living environment in gated communities (Pow, 2009). The interaction of migrants with their urban neighbourhoods is not entirely known. The topic has an implication for the urban poor, because informal and reciprocal help has been an important source for coping with difficulties (Tang, 1999). The issue of neighbourhood social interaction therefore has implication for social and neighbourhood stability. The objective of this paper is to examine the relationship between neighbourhood attachment, social participation and

willingness to stay in the context of low-income communities. The next section will review the literature of neighbourhood level studies and then the changing of urban China is briefly summarized. In section 3 the method and data are introduced. Section 4 discusses the initial findings from cross-tabulation analysis, and section 5 reports the findings. Section 6 examines the context of these findings. Finally, the implication for our understanding of migrants' integration in the cities is discussed and policy recommendations are proposed.

2. Literature review

Neighbourhood and social political participation

There is a long tradition of neighbourhood studies, dated back to earliest notion by Tonnies (1887) on *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*. Classical writings on urbanism such as that of Wirth (1938) reinforced the paradigm of 'community lost'. Researches in the post-war led to the notion of 'community transformed' (Gans, 1967), suggesting suburban neighbourhoods with different kinds of social networks. Wellman and Leighton (1979) provide a succinct summary of three approaches: the lost community, the liberated community, and the saved community. Recent development of gated communities has revived in the interest in social relation in the exclusive environment (Low, 2003) and their political orientation (Walks, 2008).

Specific to social interaction, the classic research by Putnam (1995) suggests that the US was witnessing the declining social capital because of the technological transformation of leisure (e.g. watching too much TV instead of engaging social activities). He suggests that there is a need for public policy to impinge on social-capital formation, learning the lesson from the past in which public policy did not pay enough attention to maintaining social capital. He criticised that, for example, American slum-clearance policy of the 1950s and 1960s destroyed existing social capital through renovating the physical environment. Guest and Wierzbicki (1999) find that there is a trend towards less socializing within the neighbourhood and more outside it, thus a declining attachment to the place. However, they argue that the declining social capital in general may be subtler than Putman (1995) acknowledged, because neighbouring continues to be 'an important activity for a sizable segment of the population' (p. 109). They also find that the U.S. population become more 'specialists in localized versus nonlocalized social interaction', and thus distinguishable locals versus cosmopolitans than in the past. Their research thus highlights the need to define different social groups and examine their attachment to the place, as we aim to do in this paper.

More complicated than the neighbourhood attachment alone is the relation between neighbourhood attachment and social participation. Hays and Kogl (2007) examined the relations between neighbourhood attachment and the building of social capital, and political participation in the city of Waterloo, Iowa. They find that strong informal social networks exist in the neighbourhoods. However, residents who have strong neighbourhood attachment are not necessarily more involved in the formal neighbourhood association. This formal involvement in neighbourhood association seems to be more important to political participation in both local and national political systems. They suggest that there is considerable complexity between place-based social capital and political participation and that the link with local neighbourhood association can contribute to the participation in a larger community, for example voting in presidential election. Their research shows that although informal social interaction is helpful to the building of social capital, the factor itself may not be as crucial to political participation as previous studies thought.

One complication of neighbourhood level research is the variation of residential length. Suburban neighbourhoods, especially those gated communities, are newer than inner city neighbourhoods. Their lower level of social interaction may be affected by the overall length of their period of staying. There is a need therefore to distinguish the different effects between the new features of the built environment (such as gating) and privatization. Kirby (2008) examines social relation in the context of privatization of public space and finds that these gated neighbourhoods in Phoenix do not lack social bonding behaviours. He suggests that there is more 'life' than is typically expected. He also argues that 'current interpretations of privatized urban spaces, that view them in dystopic and even cataclysmic terms, overreach themselves in their efforts' (p.91).

Regarding the controversy of gated community, Walks (2008) examined three neighbourhoods in Toronto to study the residents' political support for privatization. He finds that the urban form influences residents' daily routines and personal experiences, which may further mediate and affect their perception of the uses of public services. This led to the more support for privatization in the suburbs of large urban regions. Although his study does not focus on the relation between neighbourhood attachment and social participation, Walks (2008) provides an interesting perspective on neighbourhood spatial organization and possible different actions. This may suggest that social and political participation is related with not only the strength of attachment but also different neighbourhoods. These researches reviewed generally point to the need to distinguish different neighbourhoods and different social groups at the neighbourhood level studies.

Neighbourhoods in Chinese cities

The transformation of housing provision from workplace based to a market economy, rapid rural to urban migration, and changing neighbourhood governance have led to the development of different neighbourhoods. The neighbourhood attachment is affected by several factors: modernization which reflects some general increase in bureaucratization of social lives, marketization which transforms all-inclusive social services and 'entitlements' to the paid-for services and housing based on income and affordability, the development of the built environment from courtyard / alleyway housing and shared facilities to self-contained apartment estates and exclusive services. In the totalitarian society, there was a strong sense of community, especially in the workplace areas. Since the market reform, a new labour market has been developed outside the state sector. The social organization also changed, under the slogan of 'walking out of workplace and becoming the social man' (Wu, 2002; Bray, 2005; Friedmann, 2007). Confronted with increasing social and residential mobility, the government initiated the program of community construction in the 1990s to re-establish the territorial community.

The limited evidence suggests the declining neighbouring in modern residential areas. Tang (1999), for example, suggests that reciprocal help is important to the poor but the declining neighbourhoods due to rapid urban redevelopment and residential demolition created a new threat to the marginal residents. Wu and He (2005) and Forrest and Yip (2007) find that there is a general trend of declining social interaction from workplace-based to modern or commodity housing estates. Li and Chen (2008) examined neighbourhood social interaction in three neighbourhoods in Guangzhou and find that the social network goes beyond territorial neighbourhood and argue that the recent policy to strengthen neighbourhood governance would be less effective. Wen and Wang (2009) examine the loneliness and satisfaction of rural migrants and suggest that the experience of discrimination strongly affect migrants' satisfaction. Although education and income are related factors, the work and living environment is important. Thus increasing neighbourhood amenities and facilitating migrant family members to live together rather than splitting in different locations are potential useful measures to promote satisfaction of migrants.

Responding to the development of commodity housing and gated communities in China, there are different views about the implication for neighbourhood attachment or social interaction. The prevailing view is the declining interaction among neighbours due to the privacy awareness of residents (e.g. Wang, 2002; Pow, 2009). However, Tomba (2005) argues that the boundaries of gated communities overlap with the boundaries of new housing classes and in turn enhance the awareness and identity, raising the social movement of property owners. Boland and Zhu (2007) note that because of the common property interests, the neighbourhood affairs such as greening and green space protection may mobilize social participation

in these communities. Huang and Low (2008) compare gated communities in China and the US and argue that gating is not always exclusionary. The gating in China reflects some continuation of collectivism, which may imply the gating does not necessarily lead to the end of community participation and engagement. Overall, there is inconclusive evidence about changing neighbourhood in the post-reform period and the variation of neighbourhood interaction and attachment is even less explored across different neighbourhoods.

3. Method

The data for this research come from a survey in six Chinese cities (Guangzhou, Kunming, Harbin, Nanjing, Wuhan, and Xi'an) in 2007. These cities are distributed in different regions in China. In each city, information from minimum living standard support and the distribution of migrants plus fieldwork help to identify 25 neighbourhoods of low social stratum in the city. Alternative sites were compared to choose more dilapidated one according to their built environment. The dataset thus can be viewed as a collection of low-income communities. While they may not represent the overall situation of residential areas in these cities, they generally reflect the bottom layer of the respective cities. Random sample was drawn from these neighbourhoods using the fixed interval with a random start in addresses, creating 1,809 valid questionnaires. The overall rate of successful interview is 95 per cent, because of two reasons: first the survey was supported by neighbourhood cadres; second as poor places they are generally accessible without travel barriers.

In the questionnaire there are a series of questions about neighbourhood interaction, ranging from occasional visit to go to recreation and dinner together. While it is possible to devise the sense of community index (SCI) similar to the one used in the US (McMillan and Chavis, 1986), the applicability of relevant index to the Chinese context still needs to be verified. In the questionnaire, there is also a direct question asking the household head if he/she has the sense of attachment or belonging (*guishugan*) to the place he/she lives, with the choice of 'strong feeling', 'some feeling', and 'no feeling'. In this study, we use this question as a proxy for the neighbourhood attachment. Thus different from the standard composite SCI which measures four elements: membership, influence, meeting needs, and a shared emotional connection, this measure is a single indicator, more towards the membership and somewhat towards shared connection and less about interaction with neighbours. This may explain why the migrants have generally low sense of belonging while they may interact with their fellow from the same origin inside and outside the neighbourhood. In the questionnaire, there are also two questions about

whether the household participate in community social activities, and whether the household head wants to live in this place for a long term. These indicators are then regressed against a set of socioeconomic and demographic variables which are used to control the individual characteristics, plus the 'group' attribute of the type of neighbourhoods and the type of social groups. The typology of these categories is derived from relevant studies on Chinese residential structures and neighbourhood types (Wang 2005; Li and Li, 2006; Liu and Wu, 2006; Wu et al 2010; Li et al 2010). For example, Li et al (2010) listed four types of communities: old alleyway housing, work-unit compounds of reform housing, urban villages of farmers' housing and commodity housing. The categories of this study generally confirm the former three types as low-income places.

4. Neighbourhood attachment, social participation and willingness to stay

This section will provide an initial analysis through cross-tabulation of the survey data. For the neighbourhood attachment, three levels are recorded (Table 1). The retired has the stronger sense of neighbourhood attachment. About 45 per cent of the retired people stated having a strong neighbourhood attachment, while the figure decreased to 25 per cent for the working household heads, and to 22 per cent for rural migrants. The difference in terms of 'none to the sense of attachment' between the working and migrant households becomes larger than the statement of strong sense of attachment. For the working household heads, 25 per cent stated none to the sense of attachment, while 38.5 per cent of migrants stated so. The unemployed demonstrates the pattern between these two extremes. About 35.5 per cent stated a strong sense of attachment, while still 25.6 per cent stated that there is no sense of attachment. The strong sense of neighbourhood attachment for the retired households indicates the long time commitment of these families in the place. Many may be recruited when they started work and stay in the workplace neighbourhoods.

Table 1 Sense of Neighbourhood Attachment in Low-income Neighbourhoods

	None (%)	Some (%)	Strong (%)	Total numbers (100%)
Working	25.2	49.6	25.2	405
Unemployed	25.6	38.9	35.5	414
Retired	18.5	36.1	45.4	335
Migrants	38.5	39.8	21.7	655
Migrants villages	36.4	38.8	24.7	796

Old neighbourhoods	25.7	46.4	27.9	502
Workers villages	20.2	39.5	40.3	511
Total	28.9	41.1	30.0	1809

In terms of the types of residence, workers' villages demonstrate the highest percentage of the strong sense of attachment, over 40 per cent households stated such a commitment. The figure decreases to about 28 per cent in old neighbourhoods, and to only about 25 per cent in migrants' villages. Although the old neighbourhoods and migrants' villages show similar level of strong attachment, the category of none to the attachment is much higher in migrants' villages, which is up to about 36 per cent. Overall, the measure of the sense of attachment shows the low attachment for migrants and for households in migrants' villages. Workers' villages are socially more integrated (and perhaps also more homogenous in terms of low percentage of migrants as 'outsiders'). The territorial bounding is strong for the retired households, partially due to the long period of residence. For the working households, the strong attachment is only slightly higher than migrants, but probably due to the social network around the workplace, replacing the neighbourhood bounded relation.

Table 2 The Percentage of Residents Participating in Neighbourhood Social (civic) Activities

	No (%)	Yes (%)	Total numbers (100%)
Working	52.0	48.0	402
Unemployed	47.2	52.8	411
Retired	44.7	55.3	329
Migrants	63.3	36.7	648
Migrants villages	60.1	39.9	789
Old neighbourhoods	51.7	48.3	493
Workers villages	45.5	54.5	508
Average	53.6	46.4	1790

For social participation, measured as the involvement in neighbourhood social activities, the retired households are more active than other groups (Table 2). About 55 per cent stated their involvement in these activities. This figure is as low as 36.7 per cent for migrants. The unemployed households are still involved in neighbourhood social activities, probably because of the available time and the requirement for allocation for social welfare, such as minimum livelihood support. It is understandable for the retired to be actively involved in neighbourhood social activities because they have more time and also have a stronger sense of place attachment. In terms of households in different types of neighbourhoods, the

workers' villages have the highest percentage, showing about 55 per cent of households involved in neighbourhood activities. There are two possible explanations: first the workplace areas are more organised than other places, and hence the social activities are organised more effectively in these workers' villages, which may be subsidized by their employers. Second, the workplaces areas have a higher percentage of working households as well as the retired people who have higher percentage of social participation. Migrants' villages have lower percentage of social participation for exactly the opposite reason: the place is mainly for private rental housing, and thus there might be fewer organised social activities; and second the places have higher percentage of migrants who are excluded from the formal organisation of these communities. These villages are more like privatized spaces where the village shareholding companies and individual landlords maintain some basic services and facilities.

Table 3 Willingness to Stay in Low-income Neighbourhoods

	No (%)	Doesn't care (%)	Yes (%)	Total numbers (100%)
Working	30.6	29.1	40.2	405
Unemployed	30.9	21.5	47.6	414
Retired	19.7	23.0	57.3	335
Migrants	27.3	30.5	42.1	655
Migrants villages	29.5	26.9	43.6	796
Old neighbourhoods	32.1	27.5	40.4	502
Workers villages	19.8	25.8	54.4	511
Average	27.5	26.8	45.8	1809

How do these different patterns of attachment and participation affect the willingness to stay in the place? Table 3 shows the cross-tabulation across different groups and types of residence. Because of the high residential mobility, it is not surprising to find that for migrants the percentage of willingness to stay is 42 per cent. However, this is not the lowest level, which is actually the working household head, only amounting to 40 per cent. Only 27 per cent of migrants stated the negative response, i.e. a clear preference not to stay, while the same figures are higher for both working and unemployed households, which are around 31 per cent. This is not expected, as migrants are generally regarded as more mobile or 'floating population'. The retired households are among the long term committed residents to their neighbourhoods, because over 57 per cent retired households preferring to stay. Overall, the workers' villages are more stable communities as more than 54 per cent households prefer to stay for a long time in the future. The most unstable places are old neighbourhoods which have more households prefer to leave (33 per

cent) than that in migrants' villages (about 30 per cent). These figures show that the relation between neighbourhood attachment, social participation and willingness to stay might be more complicated than we expect. Interesting deviation is between rural migrants and the unemployed and working households, in that the former group has relatively low place attachment but do not present as a source of neighbourhood residential instability. In order to identify their relationship, other socioeconomic and demographic factors (such as younger migrants) need to be controlled. These factors will be analyzed in the following multivariable regression models.

5. Results of analysis

This section presents a series of results from modelling the neighbourhood attachment, social participation and willingness to stay.

Neighbourhood attachment

The logistic regression model measures how neighbourhood attachment is built up. Because the exact level of 'some sense of neighbourhood attachment' cannot be quantitatively established, we group this category with the strong sense of neighbourhood attachment. Thus, the model contrasts those who have strong and some sense of attachment with those who clearly stated no such sense of attachment (Table 4). Referring to the head of household, years of schooling, as well as the age and years of residence, raises the neighbourhood attachment. The number of years of schooling reflects human capital of the residents. Having a higher human capital may have a stronger desire for territorial bound or know the way to build up local connection. The length of residence may enhance the acquaintance of the place. So is the effect of age, being older household heads may reflect that they are more established residents. Being a male-headed household reduces the likelihood of showing strong attachment, while the female-headed households seem to make closer connection with the place. This may be because the male is more as 'income earner' than 'home builder', and the female is more likely involved in the community. These demographic factors are controlled in regression, and the types of neighbourhoods and social groups are forced to enter the regression model which is referred to as the 'full model'.

Table 4 The Sense of Neighbourhood Attachment

	Full model		Forward likelihood ratio model	
	B	Standard Error	B	Standard Error.
Household size (no. of family members)	0.034	0.030		
Years of schooling of household head	0.051	0.019***	0.051	0.019***
Age of household head	0.020	0.006***	0.020	0.006***
Years of residence	0.041	0.005***	0.041	0.005***
Gender of household head (= male)	-0.384	0.125***	-0.374	0.124***
Neighbourhood types (reference = workers' villages)				
Migrants' villages	-0.507	0.173***	-0.497	0.173***
Old urban areas	-0.428	0.164***	-0.429	0.163***
Social group types (reference = working population)				
Unemployed	-0.524	0.183***	-0.525	0.183***
Retired	-0.578	0.250**	-0.559	0.249**
Migrants	-0.203	0.170	-0.183	0.169
Constant	-0.235	0.413	-0.130	0.402
-2 log likelihood		1936.490		1937.823
Sample size		1761		1761
ρ^2 (Nagelkerke)		0.146		0.145

Note: * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Referring to the reference group of workers' villages, migrant villages and older neighbourhoods see lower likelihood of developing the neighbourhood attachment. This is slightly surprising because the common perception of these old neighbourhoods as established communities is their strong sense of neighbourhood attachment and social stability. This finding is verified in a multivariable context, i.e. the lower sense of attachment in neighbourhood is not due to the new comer of migrants or other demographic factors as they are controlled. Similarly the low sense of migrant village attachment is neither due to the length of stay, the length of residence is also controlled. While in terms of percentage, about 25.6 per cent of unemployed suggest no attachment, almost the same as the working population at 25.2 per cent. However, in the multivariable context, the unemployed status shows a negative contribution to the sense of neighbourhood attachment, because given the same length of stay and age as well as in the same type of neighbourhood (as the controlled in the regression), the unemployed shows a lower expected attachment than the working population. So is the retired population. The forward likelihood ratio model subsequently presents the determinants of attachment, which shows most variables could be included except the household size. These factors thus could not be reduced to fewer determinants, showing the sense of neighbourhood attachment depends upon a variety of reasons. In short, the multivariable regression shows that given everything else is equal the workers' villages are mostly organized with the place attachment, confirming the earlier more institutive studies on neighbourhood relation (e.g. Wu and He, 2005; Forrest and Yip, 2007). Further, regardless the residential location, the working population has the strongest likelihood of neighbourhood attachment. This partially reflects the transition nature of Chinese neighbourhood (Wu, 2002) which has been based on the omnipotent of employers.

Social participation

In contrast, the participation in neighbourhood social activities is dependent upon fewer determinants (Table 5). Fewer variables show statistically significant contribution to the likelihood of participation, among which the length of residence is clearly important, contributing positively to participation. The number of years of school also enhances the chance of participation, because it helps to develop the capacity of participation. The male household head is less likely to participate, compared with female household head, for the reason stated earlier, namely territorial participation is gender related as a tradition of housewife ties. Migrants' village and old neighbourhoods shows a negative contribution as an average to the participation, though these relations are statistically weak. In the full model, none of social group categories show statistically significant relation. Only in the forward likelihood ratio model to show the determinants, the migrants present lower likelihood of social participation. But these are correlated with their relatively lower

education level compared with the urban households. Comparing the results from logistic regression with the cross-tabulation where migrants and migrants' villages persistently show low level of participation among other types of residence and residents, when the number of years of schooling is controlled, the migrant status does not necessarily reduce the level of participation, compared with other working urban population. The regression model also confirms that the lower participation is not due to the fact that migrants might be newer comers, though the length of residence is the overwhelmingly statistical significant factor for social participation.

Table 5 Participation in Neighbourhood Social (civic) Activities

	Full model		Forward likelihood ratio model	
	B	Standard Error	B	Standard Error.
Household size (no. of family members)	0.024	0.025		
Years of schooling of household head	0.034	0.016**		
Age of household head	0.007	0.005		
Years of residence	0.011	0.004***	0.012	0.003***
Gender of household head (= male)	-0.204	0.107*		
Neighbourhood types (reference = workers' villages)				
Migrants' villages	-0.257	0.151*	-0.303	0.148**
Old urban areas	-0.257	0.136*	-0.294	0.134**
Social group types (reference = working population)				
Unemployed	0.097	0.154	0.113	0.146
Retired	-0.013	0.202	0.109	0.159
Migrants	-0.254	0.155	-0.317	0.147**
Constant	-0.681	0.357*	-0.068	0.133
-2 log likelihood		2338.006		2346.232
Sample size		1743		
ρ^2 (Nagelkerke)		0.051		0.045

Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Willingness to stay: a general model

Table 6 presents the general model of willingness to stay. The two categories of 'do not care' and 'do not want to stay in this community' show similar directions of statistical relations, compared with the reference group of 'willing to stay'. For the category of 'do not care', however, only the number of years of schooling and neighbourhood attachment show statistical significance. The number of years of schooling reduces the willingness to stay, and so is the number of years of residence. Education level measures human capital, indicating that when residents are becoming more educated, their preference is more likely to leave low-income neighbourhoods. The negative relation of years of residence and willingness to stay is a surprise. But this may reflect, as seen later, the effect of migrants as new comers. For male-headed households, they are less likely to prefer leaving, partially because this may reflect the level of establishment, i.e. male-headed households are more established and less inclined to move in general. Compared with the strong attachment to the neighbourhood, no attachment clearly drives households to leave, while some attachment may still play the same effect but the odds ratio drops from 47.4 times more likely to leave to 4.8 times more likely to leave. The age increases the likelihood of choosing to stay, reflecting more established households and stable residential location. The household size shows relatively weak statistical relation with the willingness to stay.

The finding of negative impact of length of residence on the willingness to stay is surprising. But it indicates the worrisome dynamics of the low-income neighbourhoods, as more established and long-lasting residents prefer not to stay if possible. These places are preferred by new comers who are actually the migrants and who have a relatively lower neighbourhood attachment. The change residential profile in some of these neighbourhoods thus means more than just replacing more established household with new comers. It means the dismantling of existing social networks and interaction and a stronger outward migrating preference for those who live there for longer time.

**Table 6 A General Model of the Willingness to Stay
(the reference group is those who are willing to stay in this community)**

	Do not want to stay in this community		Do not care	
	B	Standard Error	B	Standard Error.
Household size (no. of family members)	-0.065	0.036*	-0.055	0.035
Years of schooling of household head	0.072	0.021***	0.047	0.020**
Age of household head	-0.017	0.006***	-0.007	0.005
Years of residence	0.014	0.005***	0.001	0.005
Gender of household head (= male)	-0.318	0.145**	-0.031	0.141
Neighbourhood attachment (reference = strong)				
No attachment	3.856	0.226***	3.210	0.224***
Some attachment	1.601	0.189***	1.888	0.179***
Constant	-1.939	0.432***	-2.038	0.412***
-2 log likelihood		3102		
Sample size		1761		
ρ^2 (Nagelkerke)		0.345		

Note: * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

**Table 7 Willingness to Stay by Neighbourhood Types and Social Groups
(the reference group is those who are willing to stay)**

	Do not want to stay in this		Do not care	
	B	Standard Error	B	Standard Error.
Household size (no. of family members)	-0.051	0.036	-0.056	0.036
Years of schooling of household head	0.063	0.023***	0.045	0.021**
Age of household head	-0.021	0.007***	-0.010	0.007
Years of residence	0.007	0.005	0.001	0.005
Gender of household head (= male)	-0.287	0.148*	-0.016	0.143
Neighbourhood attachment (reference = strong)				
No attachment	3.796	0.227***	3.205	0.225***
Some attachment	1.520	0.190***	1.862	0.180***
Neighbourhood types (reference = workers')				
Migrants' villages	0.356	0.214*	-0.221	0.204
Old urban areas	0.667	0.193***	0.194	0.181
Social group types (reference = rural migrants)				
Working urban	0.336	0.215	-0.104	0.207
Unemployed	0.513	0.235**	-0.323	0.232
Retired	0.540	0.303*	-0.020	0.286
Constant	-2.205	0.517***	-1.729	0.491***
-2 log likelihood		3084		
Sample size		1761		
ρ^2 (Nagelkerke)		0.358		

Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Willingness to stay by neighbourhood types and social groups

Table 7 shows the willingness to stay by neighbourhood types and social groups. The reference group is those who state that they prefer to stay in the neighbourhood for a long-time in the future. The model controls demographic characteristics (age and gender, household size), education level, and neighbourhood attachment. The intention is to show residents in which neighbourhood type and social group is more inclined to leave. With the reference group of workers' villages, old neighbourhoods demonstrate a negative willingness to stay. The relationship is statistically strong, while the migrants' village also show agreeing the statement of 'do not want to stay in this community'. However, the statistical significance is only at 0.1. The coefficients also show the difference in scale: compared with the workers' villages, the households in old villages are 1.95 times more likely to leave, while migrant villages are only 1.42 times more likely to leave. For social groups, the reference group is the rural migrants. The unemployed group shows a stronger preference to leave, while the retired also have the statistically weak relationship. The statistical relation for leaving for the working urban households, compared with the reference group, is not significant. Given that these low-income neighbourhoods are less desirable, the result seems to suggest that when the resident lost the job, the preference for leaving is much stronger than other groups. In other words, the willingness to stay is strongly related to job provision. Once residents have jobs, either as migrants in the informal job market or as permanent households in more formal sector, their intention to stay is greatly enhanced. For the two vulnerable groups – the unemployed and rural migrants present strikingly different attitude towards the residential preference: the unemployed wish to leave, so is the retired people, whereas migrants desire to stay. These findings are valid when the length of residence is controlled, i.e. this difference is not due to the fact that migrants are the new comers.

When the factor of neighbourhood attachment is controlled, with the lower level of attachment, we would expect migrants show a low preference to stay in the place. But rather, we find that being the status of migrants does not prevent them from stating a clear willingness to stay. They desire to stay in the neighbourhood despite various hurdles making them 'outsiders' (*wailai renkou*).

6. Discussion

This research shows that rural migrants in the low-income neighbourhoods are less territorially bounded and in this sense their social network is still 'floating', in contrast to relatively tightly organised workplace neighbourhoods and their

predominant state-sector employees. The migrants face not only discrimination in the labour market but also social exclusion in their place of living. Although they are permitted to enter the low-end labour market, they are not treated as citizens, and their entrance to the community is hampered by their relatively low human capital (hence social participation). However, migrants are not the socially isolated group. They develop a different kind of 'virtual community' based on their same origin of township (*laoxiang*) (Ma and Xiang, 1998; Zhang, 2001). In our survey, about 69.7 per cent of migrants received help from relatives or *laoxiang*. About 51.1 per cent of migrants offered help to their fellow *laoxiang*.

Despite being excluded from social affairs, the attitude of migrants towards their urban residents is not totally negative. According to our survey, about 7.1 per cent of migrants believe their urban residents are 'very friendly', and 50.1 per cent choose 'friendly'; 36.5 per cent made a choice of 'neutral', only 5.7 per cent felt they are 'unfriendly'; and the answer to 'very unfriendly' only accounts for 0.6 per cent. The general impression of the city, according to our survey, shows that about 53.2 per cent of migrants stated that they like the city, and 36.5 per cent give an average rating. About 4.2 per cent of migrants dislike the city, and only the very minority of 0.8 per cent dislike the city very much. Still, migrants have low inter-city mobility, and if possible they would like to stay in the same city rather than moving to another. To answer 'if you leave this city, where do you prepare to go?' about 34.9 per cent stated that they don't know or never thought of this. About 46.4 per cent suggest that they will return to the countryside. Only 5.1 per cent and 13.6 per cent suggest that they would go to other cities in the same province or other cities in a different province.

The group of migrants surveyed in the low-income neighbourhoods shows that they are different from earlier migrants who came along to the city for work. About 60 per cent of migrant households have their family members with them in the same city. Only 28.6 per cent do not plan to bring their families to the city in the short term. Flexible household arrangement for migrants, namely work in the city and social bases in the countryside, is noted in the literature (e.g. Fan, 2009), because of the requirement of flexible work. This research shows that the low social participation cannot be explained by their split household arrangement. Migrants are ready for becoming ordinary urban residents. About 49.3 per cent of migrants stated that they have no preference for the neighbourhoods that live predominantly by locals or migrants. Only about 5.2 per cent prefers living with other migrants. However, because of the absence of social support and the valued *laoxiang* network, about 37.8 per cent of migrants choose to live with the people from the same origin of place. Clustering effects of the migrants from the same origin can still be seen. Confronted with the exclusion from the city, migrants tend to prefer to live in the same places.

These findings suggest that the deviation of migrants from the ordinary observation of neighbourhood attachment, social participation and willingness to stay is resulted from the peculiarity of Chinese housing and residential structure. Migrants generally wish to stay in their urban neighbourhoods, compared with their relatively low attachment. Because of inability of becoming socially attached and integrated, they develop a survival strategy to rely on their social network of *laoxiang*, beyond the neighbourhood which is composed mainly by urban households. Moreover, the low-income neighbourhood provides a low cost living environment for rural migrants. In contrast, exactly because of the nature of low-income areas, more established urban residents (longer residential history, higher educated) or old urban neighbourhoods show a lower level of willingness to stay.

7. Conclusion

There have been considerable interests in neighbourhood governance and social stability in China (e.g. Whyte and Parish, 1984). Rapid urbanization in China is likely to transform the territorially-bounded society which has been maintained under state socialism. However, these neighbourhood social changes have not been explored in detail across different neighbourhoods and social groups. Earlier studies (e.g. Wu and He, 2005; Forrest and Yip, 2007) found that in newer neighbourhoods the intensity of social interaction decline. Does this suggest China is seeing the demise of community, as suggested by the context of US (Putman, 1995)? In the western literature, there have been extensive studies on the relation between neighbourhood attachment and social participation (Guest and Wierzbicki, 1999; Hays and Kogl, 2007). The common perception is that strong neighbourhood attachment would lead to more active social participation and consequently the preference to stay in the neighbourhood. Will these observations be valid in the context of Chinese cities? This paper finds that the relation between neighbourhood attachment, social participation and the willingness to stay is not a straightforward one, especially for the poor households and rural migrants in low-income communities.

In the communities surveyed, it is found that the length of residence in the neighbourhood helps to develop social participation. Another significant factor is the status of employment. For those who hold a job, they are more likely to be integrated in the community, especially so in the workplace community – perhaps indicating that in urban China, economic integration is still an important mean to achieve social inclusion, while reciprocal integration exists for old neighbourhoods. Rural migrants are largely excluded, as a fact, from the process of community

construction (Friedmann, 2007). Although the unemployed people participate in community activities, especially in old neighbourhoods and have a strong sense of neighbourhood attachment, they state a low desire to stay in the place. This is not a good sign for urban regeneration for these communities, as this may indicate the decline in the commitment to these places, although they still possess social capital. This may be the determinant for recent outward residential movement to suburban locations – no matter voluntarily or involuntarily. Suburban places are more preferred than old areas. On the other hand, rural migrants, despite being excluded from community activities and having a low neighbourhood attachment, they prefer to stay or state a relatively strong willingness to stay in these places, considering that they are new comers and have lower attachment. The finding of low neighbourhood attachment seems to confirm that the marginal status of migrants as ‘sojourners’ (Solinger 1999). However, through linking with the willingness to stay, it is observed that this low territorial bounding does not prevent their commitment to living in these places. Or more specifically, even with a strong desire to stay, the current institution of household registration (*hukou*) constrains them from building up social capital and neighbourhood attachment in these places. This may reflect that migrants mainly choose the city for working rather than living (Zheng et al. 2009). In short, permanent urban residents and rural migrants demonstrate quite different characteristics: the former group have strong attachment but are not so willing to stay in these places, while rural migrants behave just the opposite.

There are two policy implications from this study. The first implication is for the migrant integration (or so-called ‘*shi ming hua*’) (Zhang and Lei, 2008). Current policies focus on their equal working conditions compared with the urban residents and extending social security to them. These are plausible and progressive changes. This study suggests that migrants do not lack the willingness to stay and they are not ‘floating’ by their own preference. Solinger (1999) criticized the treatment of migrants as ‘sojourners’ because many stay in the city for a substantial period of time. Fan (2002) contrasts the migrants with local natives and elite migrants who moved through formal channels and finds the marginal position of migrants. Zhu and Chen (2010) examine the intention of stay and find although the intention increased in two surveys from 2002 to 2006, migrants essentially present a circular nature of work and living. This research strengthens the critique from the neighbourhood level analysis: even when the length of residence is controlled, migrants fail to build up the place attachment and demonstrate a significant lower level of engagement than their fellow urban residents. Even so, their willingness to stay is strong. The current policy focuses on the labour market rather than social integration of migrants. Thus, any future policy to integrate migrants should consider how to include the migrants in community affairs and to strengthen their interaction with local residents, for example, by a more mixed living environment than the current private rental housing in concentrated migrant villages. Second, there is a need to enhance

residential stability and enhance the preference to stay for old urban areas. These places are under quick transformation: through demolition, capable households move to suburban districts and existing households demonstrate low willingness to stay. The policy of residential demolition rather than *in situ* upgrading perhaps reinforces such a preference, i.e. residents try to negotiate a good deal in relocation whenever possible rather than maintaining their existing social ties in these places. The future policy of regeneration should pay attention to these places with high social capital but an increasing unstable tendency. The contrasting pattern of urban residents and rural migrants shows the danger of these low-income communities deteriorating into a marginal place where the underprivileged such as migrants and the poor are alienated.

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