

Regional Identity of Migrant Children in Southern China: Hukou Status and beyond

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ABSTRACT

Motivated by the idea of examining the assimilation debate in China's situation, this study is to explore whether China's migrant children assimilate in a segmented way and to what extent the Hukou status play the same role in the internal migrants' assimilation process in China as the ethnicity does for the international migrants in North America. The data show major differences in patterns of regional self-identification among migrant children with various Hukou statuses and non-Hukou factors in Guangzhou, China. Generally, holding local or urban Hukou greatly improves the assimilation results, with other predictor variables controlled. Besides, it is also found that being born in Guangzhou, coming to Guangzhou for long stay at a young age, having a good mastery of Cantonese, making friends with locals and visiting their hometowns less often also increase the sense of belonging to the host society. Moreover, we find that the institutional identity in terms of the Hukou status indeed matters a lot while it is not the strongest predictor in determining the assimilation outcomes of migrant children and its influence on the assimilation process can actually be offset by the non-Hukou factors. The comparison of the effect of the Hukou status across different assimilation outcomes further indicates that migrant children with different Hukou statuses may have different probabilities of falling into certain assimilation, but the differences in the odds among various Hukou statuses – local urban Hukou, local rural Hukou, non-local urban Hukou and non-local rural Hukou – are not necessarily significant. The relative importance of the Hukou status among different assimilation outcomes and to other non-Hukou factors clearly shows that the Hukou system indeed matters in the assimilation process but only with a limited and diversified effect.

“I came to Beijing with my parents when I was ten years old. ... I cannot go to the local public high schools because I don't have a local Hukou. I cannot go to the private schools because I cannot afford that. I wanted to go back to my hometown to continue my study, but my parents didn't allow. Actually since I came to Beijing, I have never visited my hometown again. ... I miss everything back in my hometown. I feel free there. I miss my friends. I want to go back.”

——M, 16 years old, junior high school degree (working now), non-local rural Hukou, born in Henan province

“I was born in Beijing and I think I am a Beijing people, although my hometown is in Sichuan. You have to be born here to call yourself a local people, right? I don't have a local Hukou. But I have been in Beijing since I was born and I can speak Mandarin very well. I don't think I should be counted as a foreigner here. However, holding a local Hukou surely means a different thing. You may feel you are a local people inside and out.”

——L, 14 years old, junior high school student, non-local rural Hukou, born in Beijing

“I came to Shanghai with my parents when I was three years old. They were considered as “high-level talents” or something else so that all of us got our Hukou transferred. But you know, I still cannot speak Shanghai dialect, though I can understand it if you speak it clearly and slowly. My parents cannot speak Shanghai dialect very well, so we never speak it at home. ... My father drives us to my hometown in Anhui province every year during the Spring Festival. We usually stay there for about half a month. It's a three-hour drive from Shanghai but it's a completely different place. Maybe because I have been in Shanghai for such a long time, I don't think the life back in my hometown is very convenient or comfortable. No WI-FI, no video games, no friends. ... I have been in Shanghai for such a long time and I own a local Hukou, so I think I am a Shanghainese. But many of my classmates don't think so. Maybe it is due to the fact that I still have a so-called hometown back there. I don't know. Sometimes I just get confused why they think I am not a Shanghainese.”

——T, 23 years old, master student, local urban Hukou, born in Anhui province

The three stories above are from my interviews with migrant students during the past few years. Many of them are born in the host society they are living/working in or brought here when they were quite young. Most of them hold non-local rural Hukou while some others not, though the latter ones still have questions about their identity. Their family backgrounds are also complicated: some parents are the typical “migrant workers” with relatively low human capitals, working longer and ill paid, while some others, like those of T, are the “high-level talents” who are entitled to the local Hukou once they migrate to the host society. With such complexity in their personal and family characteristics, it is no surprising to see that they have different levels of sense of belonging to the host society.

Assimilation is always among the hottest topics in the study of migration. Who am I? To which place do I belong? Am I a local people or not? Researchers have taken great efforts to answer these questions and find the relationship between the identity and other social factors since Parker and Burgess's first definition of “assimilation” in the 1920s (Park and Burgess 1969). Based on the North American experience, some researchers propose a linear, inevitable and irreversible process of assimilation (Warner and Srole 1945; Gordon 1961, 1964), some modify it into a bumpy-line assimilation process (Gans 1992; Perlmann and Waldinger 1997), and some others argue for diversified outcomes (Portes 1996, 2007; Portes and Borocz 1989; Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes, Fernandez-Kelly and Haller 2005; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut 1994, 1997). What is not changed is the core role of ethnicity: for the proponents of the “straight-line assimilation theory”, it is the “middle-class cultural patterns of, largely, white protestant, Anglo-Saxon origin” (Gordon 1964:72); for the supporters of the segmented assimilation theory, it is the diverse ethnicities of the new immigrants. Not surprisingly, the most recent proponents of the assimilation idea also pay much attention to the role of ethnicity (Alba and Nee 1997, 2003). They redefine the term “assimilation” as the decline, and at its endpoint the disappearance, of an ethnic/racial distinction and related cultural and social differences that express it; not emphasizing the importance of ethnicity anymore, the “assimilation process” in this sense actually indicates that both the natives and the migrants share the same possibilities under the same standards other than race and ethnicity to get what they want.

However, when we apply the assimilation debates and theories in areas other than North America, the ethnicity is not necessarily the core of the discussion. China is such a case. This country is not a traditional immigrant country but it has

around 250 million internal migrants (National Bureau of Statistics 2014); and not like the situations in North America, ethnicity is much less an important problem for the migrants than their Hukou status, the household registration system with Chinese characteristics. In the previous studies on Hukou, most researchers emphasize the constraining effect of the Hukou system while some others find that the effect of the Hukou status on the life chances are actually limited and they argue for the human and social capitals. Thus, some questions just go out naturally: Do the Chinese internal migrants, especially the migrant children, assimilate in a segmented way? Does the critical Hukou status serve in the same way in the internal migrants' assimilation process in China as the ethnicity does for the international migrants in North America? This study is conducted to answer these questions. The whole paper is arranged as follows. In the first section, literature on assimilation studies is reviewed and is linked to the Hukou research. Two major hypotheses about the effect of the Hukou status on the assimilation outcomes are then constructed. The second section gives a brief description of the data employed in this research and the hypotheses are examined in the third section with the binary logistic regression models and the OLS regression model. The results are concluded and some implications are given in the last section.

FROM NORTH AMERICA TO CHINA, FROM ETHNICITY TO HUKOU

The Debate on Assimilation

It is interesting to know that the concept of "identity" happened to be developed by an immigrant, Erik H. Erikson, in his well-known "Childhood and Society" (1950) and subsequent works. Though Erickson applies the concepts to analyze adolescent development rather than immigrant adaptation, he admits that the term of identity and the so-called "identity crisis" were inspired by "the experience of emigration, immigration, and Americanization," in a country "which attempts to make a super-identity of all the identities imported by its constituent immigrants" (Gleason 1981). As Erickson argues, an essential task of development during the time of adolescence is the formation of a healthy sense of identity.

Scholars have been arguing about the way of the incorporation of today's new second-generation migrant adolescents for a long time. Gordon (1961, 1964) provides a typology of assimilation to capture the complexity of the process, ranging from cultural, structural, marital, identificational, attitude-receptional, behavior-receptional, to civic assimilation. Though Gordon puts more emphasis on the cultural assimilation, which comes first and is inevitable, and the structural assimilation, which makes "the remaining types of assimilation [have] all take[n] place like a row of tenpins bowled over in rapid succession by a well-placed strike" (1964: 80) but can also be blocked by the ethnic discrimination and prejudice, he still considers "identificational assimilation", i.e. a self-image as an unhyphenated American, as an indispensable (and also inevitable once the structural assimilation occurs) point of such a process. If predictions from the so-called similar "straight-line assimilation theory" (Warner and Srole 1945) are applied to the migrants, it is expected that, if there is no ethnic discrimination or prejudice, the higher the level of acculturation and structural assimilation, the greater the probability of migrants identifying themselves as an "American".

Such a seemingly linear, inevitable and irreversible process of assimilation really works for those who migrated to the United States before 1960s, but it has met with challenges since 1960s with new immigrants mainly from non-European nations. Alba and Nee (1997) conclude three structural transformations that are likely to make a difference in the life chances of the new immigrants, including the absence of a foreseeable hiatus in the immigration stream, the racial distinctiveness of many new immigrant groups, and economic restructuring which is closely related to the work opportunities for immigrants, though they see nothing difference between what the new immigrants are experiencing and what the old European immigrants have experienced. However, Zhou (1997a, 1997b) presents three distinctive outcomes that characterize the new immigrants, including the persistent ethnic differences across generations, the "second generation decline" proposed by Gans (1992) and the "second generation revolt" proposed by Perlmann and Waldinger (1997), and the peculiar outcomes of immigrant adaptation. Based on these observations and focusing on the second generation of immigrants, Portes and Zhou (1993) argue for the "segmented assimilation" as an alternative to the classical "overall" and "inevitable" assimilation process. To challenge the concept of "core culture" in the classical assimilation theory, they raise a seemingly simple but critical question: to what sector of American society does a particular immigrant group assimilate? Instead of a relatively uniform mainstream, they observe several distinct forms of adaptation: "One of them replicates the time-honored portrayal of growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle-class; a second leads straight

in the opposite direction to permanent poverty and assimilation in to the underclass; still a third associates rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's values and tight solidarity." (1993: 82) Besides the ethnic discrimination and prejudice emphasized by Gordon (1964), Portes et al. (1996, 2007; with Borocz 1989; with Zhou 1993; with Fernandez-Kelly and Haller 2005; with Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut 1994, 1997; Zhou and Bankston 1994; Bankston and Zhou 1997) argue for not only the social contexts but also the concentration of immigrants household in the central cities and the social changes that may evaporate the upward mobility. However, not everyone agrees with the segmented assimilation outcomes as the results of ethnicities as proposed by Portes et al.. Alba and Nee (1997, 2003) redefine the term "assimilation" as the decline, and at its endpoint the disappearance, of an ethnic/racial distinction and related cultural and social differences that express it. They consider the diverse outcomes as the differences in the speed of assimilation and attribute them to variations in pre-migration as well as post-migration human capital characteristics, spatial distribution, co-ethnic populations, group size, and continual mass migration – in all, they call them the proximate causes and the distal causes – under the macro institutional changes which have profoundly reshaped the context of immigrant reception and have made it more favorable for the assimilation of newcomers and their children than in the past.

What differentiates Gordon's classical assimilation theory and Portes and Zhou's segmented assimilation theory is clear: different assimilation outcomes under totally different social backgrounds. But ironically and interestingly, Alba and Nee and Portes and Zhou are actually talking about the same phenomena – the diversity of the outcome of the adaptation and they give almost the same sets of factors that may exert influence on the outcomes. No wonder that Portes and his associates (2005) dismisses Alba and Nee's work as "no novel ideas relative to those advanced previously" and "covered in detail by prior researchers, including those that these authors criticize" (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly and Haller 2005: 104) However, they treat these same phenomena in completely opposite ways. Portes et al. keep the original definition of assimilation proposed by Gordon, emphasize the great impact of ethnicity in the adaptation process (for Gordon and those proponents of the "straight-line assimilation theory", it is the "middle-class cultural patterns of, largely, white protestant, Anglo-Saxon origin" (Gordon 1964:72); for Portes et al, it is the diverse minor ethnicities of the new immigrants), treat the new phenomena as the departure from the classical assimilation theory, and thus disprove the original one. Not emphasizing the importance of ethnicity anymore, the assimilation in the sense of Alba and Nee actually indicates all kind of possibilities (as what Portes and Zhou argue) and both the natives and the migrants share these possibilities in the same way and under the similar standards which gradually and, as they argue, largely exclude race and ethnicity. However, by extending the definition of assimilation so broadly and attaching so many qualifications to their preferred concepts, Alba and Nee seem ultimately turn the concept of "assimilation" into a truism applicable to all situations and therefore unfalsifiable.

Therefore, researchers should come back to the debate between the classical assimilation and the segmented assimilation. Alba and Nee surely make great contributions to the discussion on the assimilation theory, but what they argue are actually the same with the segmented assimilation, just in a different and more ambiguous way. Then what we should do is to find the empirical evidence to figure whether the immigrants are assimilated to the mainstream as Gordon argues or are segmentedly assimilated as Portes et al. argue. One more expansion from the original debate on assimilation is the role of the ethnicity plays in the assimilation process. As mentioned above, in the classical assimilation theory, the ultimate target of the assimilation is "middle-class cultural patterns of, largely, white protestant, Anglo-Saxon origin", or the "core culture" (Gordon 1964:72); for the segmented assimilation theory, different ethnicities bear different opportunities to be assimilated into the so-called "mainstream" or the underclass or keep their own immigrant community's values and tight solidarity. Such a focus on the ethnicity is mainly due to the locale where these assimilation studies were conducted: Almost all of the influential assimilation studies are conducted and examined in the very scope of international migration experience in North America and the diverse ethnicities of the immigrants is one of its most salient characteristics. What is lack here is quite obvious: What may happen in the rest of the world? What about the internal migration? Is there any difference or modification we can expect?

Does Hukou Matter?

China offers such an opportunity to examine the assimilation debate in a completely different social context. China is not a traditional immigrant country but it has around 250 million internal migrants (National Bureau of Statistics 2014); and not like the situations in North America, ethnicity is much less an important problem for these migrants than their Hukou status,

the household registration system with Chinese characteristics, for its constraining effect on the life chances (Cheng and Selden 1994; Mallee 1995; Solinger 1999a, 1999b; Fan 2011; Wang 2004; Tang and Yang 2008; Chan 1994, 2009, 2010; Chan and Buckingham 2008). Related to our focus on the assimilation of migrant children, the questions then emerge naturally: Do the Chinese internal migrants, especially the migrant children, assimilate in a segmented way? Does the critical Hukou status serve in the same way in the internal migrants' assimilation process in China as the ethnicity does for the international migrants in North America?

Although it is generally accepted that major changes have been witnessed in the Hukou system since mid-1980s, and these changes have expanded options for rural Chinese to work and live in urban areas, which unleashed large waves of rural-to-urban migration without Hukou transfer, it is also widely believed among scholars that Hukou continues to play a fundamental role in determining migrant workers' life chances in contemporary China (Mallee 1995; Solinger 1999a, 1999b; Wang, Zuo and Ruan 2002; Wang 2004; Chan 1994, 2009, 2010; Chan and Buckingham 2008). For instance, in their article responding to the debate on whether China is abolishing the Hukou system, Chan and Buckingham (2008) argue that the reforms in the last thirty years have in fact made very little difference on the ground, especially in the classification between local and non-local Hukou. The Hukou system remains both "potent and intact" and still seriously affects "the livelihood of hundreds of millions of ordinary people" (Chan and Buckingham 2008: 583). Empirical studies examine how Hukou leads to the socioeconomic inequalities in employment (Wang and Zuo 1999; Guo and Iredale 2004; Shen 2006; Xie 2007; Li and Gu 2011), education (Kwong 2004; Lu 2012; Lu and Zhou 2013), social welfare (Nielsen, Nyland, Smyth, Zhang and Zhu 2005), social mobility (Lu 2004; Wu and Treiman 2004; Wu 2007; Li 2012), and social exclusion (Wang 2001 and 2006; Wang, Zuo and Ruan 2002; Zhou and Zhang 2003; Wang 2009; Wang and Wu 2011; Yang 2013).

For the few studies working on social identity (Chen 2005; Wang 2006; Zhao 2007; Yu and Pan 2008), most of this literature also adopts such an institutional perspective, emphasizing on the powerful, constraining and constructive effect of the Hukou system as an institutional background in the identity building process. However, these studies actually discuss how the specific, labor-market-related, discriminative identities of "Nong Ming Gong", the migrant peasant workers, and "Da Gong Mei", the young rural female migrant workers (Pun 2005; Yu and Pan 2008), are constructed and received by both of the locals and the migrants during the marketization process. Thus, the research focus is always on the adult, first-generation migrant workers with relatively low socioeconomic status. Obviously, this literature can barely have a direct cross-Pacific dialogue with the North American literature to examine the (segmented) assimilation theory, but it still clearly indicates that the Hukou system indeed exerts certain influence on the assimilation outcomes of migrants. This conclusion can be applied to the migrant children. The institutional identity with the "local" and/or "urban" Hukou is likely to work in two ways. On one hand, as shown in M's story, the institutional identity entitles the children with related social resources and social rights that only the local children can enjoy, including the educational opportunities. Such an entitlement offers the migrant children the necessities to live a stable and guaranteed life in the host society and greatly reduce the sense of floating and foreignness. On the other hand, the institutional identity substantially prevents the migrant children (including those second-generation migrant children) from internalizing the prejudicial stereotypes as "migrants". Previous studies on the social identity of the adult migrant workers have argued that such internalization is one result of the institutional inequality and also one of the most important sources of the discriminated identity of "Nong Min Gong" and "Da Gong Mei" (Chen 2005; Pun 2005; Wang 2006; Zhao 2007; Yu and Pan 2008). For the migrant children, they usually have a clear mind about the inferior status as "migrants" to the local children, as implied by M and T; however, a local urban Hukou gives them an efficacy to think and act like "locals", as L has clearly stated in her story, "(with a local Hukou) you may feel you are a local people inside and out". Such an effect of the Hukou status on the assimilation outcomes also predicts the segmented assimilation outcomes. The assimilation outcomes are segmented by various Hukou statuses: local urban Hukou, local rural Hukou, non-local urban Hukou and non-local rural Hukou in terms that migrant children with different Hukou statuses may have different probabilities to choose certain self-identity. Therefore, here comes the first hypothesis on the effect of the Hukou status on the assimilation outcomes of migrant children: *The Hukou status of migrant children will exert great influence on their assimilation outcomes. The assimilation outcomes will be segmented by various Hukou statuses; in other words, migrant children with different Hukou statuses will have different possibilities to fall in different assimilation results. Specifically, migrant children with local hukou or urban hukou or both are more likely to be assimilated and to identify themselves as local people.*

However, some researchers have found other factors which are also related to the assimilation outcomes. Researchers who adopt a more general idea of social identity (Zhang and Lei 2008, 2009), especially that of migrant children (Xiong 2009) have elaborated with case studies the significance of early-year experience, socioeconomic status and cultural capitals and they have concluded with a picture of diverse assimilation outcomes as the segmented assimilation theory proposes. Specifically, migrant children who are born in the host society, who migrate to the host society earlier and whose families have a higher socioeconomic status and rich cultural capitals are more likely to have a high level of assimilation. In a similar way that Alba and Nee (1997, 2003) treat the ethnicity in their redefinition of assimilation, these researchers also dismiss the Hukou status as the only or the most important factor leading to the assimilation outcomes. Such an idea is consistent with several recent studies on the limited effect of the Hukou system (Solinger 1999; Fan 1999, 2001, 2002; Li 2006; Zhan 2011; Zhang 2012) in which researchers find human capitals and social capitals matter more in determining the life chances of migrants. For example, Fan (1999, 2001, 2002) identifies the multitude of migration types, and contends that in terms of human capital attributes, mobility resources, and labor market entry and shifts, permanent migrants are the most privileged, followed by non-migrant natives, and finally by temporary migrants at the bottoms of the hierarchy, which constitutes a new social order of stratification in Chinese cities. She argues that resident status is still central, but what's more essential is the connection with the state and the human capital attributes, which shows the combined effect of both the state and the market. A series of policy analyses on the Hukou system (Wong and Huen 1998; Chan and Buckingham 2008; Zhang 2012) even shows that, along the policy transformation from the Blue Chop Hukou, reforms of *Nongzhuanfei* to the point-based system in recent years, human capitals indeed play an increasingly important role in Hukou transfer under the more decentralized and selective system.

These increasing effects of both of the human capitals and the social capitals in determining the life chances may exist in the assimilation process for migrant children as well. Therefore, based on previous studies on the non-Hukou effect on adaptation and life chances, we can find three sets of non-Hukou factors that may have influence on the assimilation results. The first set of non-Hukou factors is the migratory status in terms of the birth place and the age of arrival. It is argued that the longer the individual migrant has lived in the host society, the more familiar with and the more influenced by the local culture, and thus the more likely to identify with the life style and social context there. The second set of factors includes both of the host society specific human capitals, such as the local language, and the universal ones, such as the relative income. Language is both an instrument to communicate and a symbol of the local culture. A good mastery of the local language, as part of the acculturation process, thus indicates deep involvement into and full understandings of the local daily life, and migrants who can speak the local language well are supposed to be more assimilated. As for the subjective household income status, due to the fact that migrants in generally have lower socioeconomic status than the locals in China (Lu 2004; Wu and Treiman 2004; Wu 2007; Li 2012), a relatively higher household income status is likely to encourage the migrant children to identify as locals. The last set of non-Hukou factors involves the social networks in terms of contact with the local people, their hometown people and other migrants. Previous studies, especially those for the segmented assimilation theory, argue that a high degree of personal involvement in the ethnic community as social support and control or just "the cultural and phenotypical affinity" (Portes and Zhou 1993: 86) may have negative effect on adaptation to the mainstream (Zhou and Bankston 1994; Zhou 1997a, 1997b; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). Therefore, it could be predicted that migrants with more contact with their hometowns are more likely to be supported and controlled by their fellows and to be influenced by the hometown culture; thus, they are less likely to be assimilated and more likely to think and act in the hometown way. Literature also shows that, on one hand, constant contacts with the native-born minorities exposes migrant children to the adversarial subculture developed by the marginalized native youths and thus blocks their assimilation to their own ethnic culture (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes, Fernandez-Kelly and Haller 2005; Portes 2007); on the other hand, association with "localized" co-ethnics has a positive effect on assimilation outcomes (Bankston and Zhou 1997). In China's situation, researchers have also confirmed the importance of the social networks among the fellow townsmen in the economic mobility (Ma and Xiang 1998; Zhang and Xie 2013) though few works have been done on the assimilation issue. Therefore, it could be argued that migrants with more contact with local people are supposed to be more exposed to the local culture and the local lifestyle; thus they are more likely to have a high sense of belonging to the host society. Similar to the effect of the Hukou status, taking all these sets of non-Hukou factors, we actually have found multiple or segmented paths to identity formation and resolution (Portes 1996, 2007; Portes and

Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut 1994, 1997; Zhou 1997a, 1997b). Hence, there comes the second hypothesis: *The effect of the Hukou status on the assimilation results is limited by non-Hukou factors; these non-Hukou factors include the migratory status, the human capitals and the social capitals. The assimilation outcomes will be segmented by various non-Hukou factors. Specifically, in terms of the migratory status, migrant children who are born in the host society and who migrate to the host society earlier are more likely to have a high level of assimilation; in terms of the human capitals, migrant children who have better mastery of the local language and who have a better family background are more likely to have a high sense of belonging to the host society; in terms of the social capitals, migrant children who have more local friends than migrant friends, who visit their hometowns less often and who have fewer possibilities of encountering other migrant children are more likely to be assimilated.*

DATA AND METHOD

This paper employs a migrant children survey conducted in 2014 in Guangzhou with 1342 cases in total. Located in the densely populated and economically developed Pearl River Delta, Guangzhou is one of the megalopolises in China and it is also famous for its millions of internal migrants. By the end of 2013, it is reported that around 4.6 million cross-province migrants were living and working in Guangzhou, accounting for more than one-third of its total population (Guangzhou Bureau of Statistics 2014). “Migrants” in this statistics, as usual, are defined as those whose Hukou is not registered in the city they are living in at the time of survey and who have left their Hukou registration places for more than half a year. However, in the discussion about migrants’ assimilation process, the traditional definition of “migrations” doesn’t seem work. Children with non-local Hukou only consist of part of the population of migrant children because even those with local Hukou may not be born in the current living place and these children can hardly be categorized as “locals” in terms of social identity or assimilation. What is even more complicated is that those who are born in Guangzhou and hold local urban Hukou can also be the so-called second-generation migrants and that they are definitely among the subjects of the assimilation study. Therefore, in this research, we employ a new definition of “migrants” in the very scope of China. The migrants are defined as those who have “hometowns” which are different from the place they are living in. These people may have local Hukou or are even born in the host society, but they still have “hometowns” no matter whether they have ever been there. Such a new definition is quite suitable for the assimilation study to examine either the institutional effect or the non-institutional effect; and to a large extent, this definition matches the one applied in the assimilation studies so far in the international migration. The sample size after the case selection is 1040.

The survey collects rich information on both local and migrant children’s demographic characteristics, Hukou status, family backgrounds, residential communities, school environment, social networks and mental health from two public elementary schools, two public junior high schools, four private elementary schools and five private junior high schools. The schools and classes surveyed are randomly selected. Generally speaking, there are more students with local urban Hukou than students with non-local/rural Hukou in the public schools and more students with non-local/rural Hukou than students with local urban Hukou in the private schools. This is because the enrollment of private schools usually has no or fewer requirements on the Hukou status, let alone local birth.

In order to measure the social identity of the children of various Hukou statuses, respondents were asked to which place they identify themselves at time of survey. The options include “Hometown People”, “Hometown People in Guangzhou”, “Guangzhou People” and “No Clear Identity”. In this analysis, I rearrange the sequence of the options by putting the option of “No Clear Identity” before the option of “Guangzhou People” as a transitional status between those less assimilated to Guangzhou and those more assimilated. Therefore, the higher the score of this variable “sense of belonging” is, the more assimilated the individual is. For the measurements of the Hukou status and migrant status, respondents were asked where they were given birth, where their Hukou was registered, what kind of Hukou they were holding, and when they came to Guangzhou for long stay. Those who were born in Guangzhou were also required to answer the last question because among them there are also some children who came back to their hometowns after birth and came to Guangzhou when they grew up. For those who were born in Guangzhou and had been living there until the time of survey, the time they came to Guangzhou for long stay equals to their birth year. Those who came to Guangzhou for long stay after six years old are categorized as the first generation migrants and those who came before six years old are the second generation migrants (Zhou 2007b). As for other independent variables besides the Hukou status and migrant status, respondents were required to

report their proficiency of both Mandarin and Cantonese, the percentage of their local friends among their best friends, the frequency of visiting their hometowns, their subjective household income status among their neighbors, and the school type to measure their human and social capitals. The frequency of visiting their hometowns is not counted with numbers; the respondents were given five options, “never visited”, “not visited in the last 5 years”, “not visited in the last 3 years”, “not visited in the last 2 years” and “visited every year”. It may be biased if the intervals between each option are simply treated as equal; therefore, I treat this variable not as a continuous one but with 4 dummy variables. The schools the respondents were attending are categorized into two groups: the public schools and the private schools. As mentioned above, more traditionally defined migrant children are to be found in the private schools than in the public schools. Therefore, the school type here serves as an indicator of the daily encounters of these surveyed children. Finally, gender, age, the experience of discrimination by their teachers in the schools and the social environment of the communities they were living in are included in the model as control variables. Binary logistic regression and OLS regression are employed in the analysis. Of course, especially with measures of subjective perceptions and preferences, regional self-identification may have the effect of influencing as well as being influenced by them; with cross-sectional data it is not possible to disentangle such reciprocal effects unambiguously. For the research purposes here, the multivariate result presented as follows should be constructed not as direct causal influences but as relationships between the regional identity and the selected factors in this analysis.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the analysis. Among all the respondent students included in the sample, about 46% thought they were hometown people, 21 % hometown people in Guangzhou, 13 % mixed identity, and about one-fifth students identified themselves as Guangzhou people. Each group involves at least 10% of the cases, picturing the diversity of the assimilation outcomes among the migrant children. Fewer than 30% of the respondent students held local Hukou or urban Hukou. More than one-third of the students were not born in Guangzhou and around 70% came to Guangzhou for long stay before six years old. Most the respondents could speak Mandarin fluently but had a relatively poorer mastery of Cantonese generally. On average, about one-third of their friends were locals. More than 60% of the students visited their hometowns every year and only 3% of them never went back their hometowns by the time of survey. The level of the experience of discrimination in the schools was not high, and the respondent students had mixed perception about their community life. Most of the students thought they had a similar household income status to their neighbors. The last three columns of Table 1 shows the situations in the private schools in which there are supposed to be more migrants with non-local/rural Hukou. As predicted, fewer local/urban Hukou holders were in the private schools and fewer students there identified themselves as hometown people rather than Guangzhou people. There are also more people not born in Guangzhou and more children who came after six years old.

Table 1 has illustrated the diversity of the assimilation outcomes among the migrant children. Then, how does the Hukou status influence the assimilation process? Table 2 presents the sense of belongings by different Hukou places, Hukou types and birth places. The respondent students are categorized into nine groups, from those who are born in Guangzhou with local urban Hukou to those who are not born in Guangzhou with non-local rural Hukou. The former group of people is usually recognized as the typical “locals”, though some of them may have migrant parents and thus are actually the so-called second-generation migrants; the latter group, with those who are born in Guangzhou but still without local urban Hukou, is usually regarded as the typical “migrants” who have received most of the research interests.

In general, there exists statistically significant difference in the sense of belonging to Guangzhou among these groups, which is demonstrated by the Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank test. The difference among the groups implies that the Hukou system and the birth place are greatly likely to influence one’s assimilation process. Specifically speaking, those who are born in Guangzhou with local urban Hukou have the highest sense of belongings to Guangzhou. Compared to these typical “locals”, those who are born in Guangzhou but either with local rural Hukou or non-local urban Hukou have significantly lower senses of belonging, though they are still more assimilated than others. Similarly, the typical “migrants” with non-local rural Hukou, no matter whether they are born in Guangzhou or not, also have much lower senses of belonging than their “local” counterparts with local urban Hukou at the top of the table, though their senses of belonging are

not the lowest. These differences show the effect of the Hukou status in terms of the Hukou place and the Hukou type. Furthermore, both of those with local urban Hukou and those with non-local rural Hukou but who are not born in Guangzhou also score much lower than their born-in-Guangzhou counterparts, indicating that the birth place really matters a lot in the assimilation process.

Variables		Full Sample			Private Schools Only		
		Ob.	Mean / Percentage	Standard Deviance	Ob.	Mean / Percentage	Standard Deviance
Sense of Belonging	Hometown People	1040	.4577		736	.4796	
	Hometown People in Guangzhou	1040	.2096		736	.2255	
	No Clear Identity	1040	.1317		736	.1359	
	Guangzhou People	1040	.2010		736	.1590	
Local Hukou		1040	.2760		736	.2364	
Urban Hukou		1040	.2711		736	.2188	
Not Born in Guangzhou		1040	.6683		736	.7228	
First Generation		832	.3534		572	.3916	
Language Proficiency	Mandarin	1040	3.9962	.4783	736	3.9783	1.0086
	Cantonese	1040	2.7490	1.4242	736	2.7296	1.4090
Male		1040	.5442		736	.5435	
Age		1040	12.5173	1.9645	736	12.3832	1.9684
Percentage of Local Friends		1040	.3395	.3315	736	.3159	.3255
Contact with Hometowns	Never Visited	1040	.0337		736	.0327	
	Not Visited in the Last 5 Years	1040	.0481		736	.0543	
	Not Visited in the Last 3 Years	1040	.0625		736	.0625	
	Not Visited in the Last 2 Years	1040	.2038		736	.1902	
	Visited Every Year	1040	.6519		736	.6603	
Experience of Discrimination against Migrants in Schools		1040	1.7208	.8422	736	1.7039	.8372
Subjective Household Income Status		1040	3.2721	.9045	736	3.2758	.9177
Residential Environment		1040	3.1575	.9259	736	3.1470	.9417
Private School		1040	.7077				

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of the Variables Used in the Analysis

Local Hukou	Urban Hukou	Born in Guangzhou	Sense of Belonging	Observations
1	1	1	3.3617	141
1	1	0	2.1379	29
1	0	1	2.5246	61
0	1	1	2.6316	19
1	0	0	1.5714	56
0	1	0	1.7527	93
0	0	1	2.1371	124
0	0	0	1.7466	517

Table 2 Sense of Belonging by Hukou Places, Hukou Types and Birth Places

Logistic Regression Results

Table 3 presents the results of maximum-likelihood logistic regressions predicting the odds of selecting the four types of regional self-identification. The first model compares the lowest level of sense of belonging to Guangzhou – “hometown people” – to the other three higher levels of sense of belonging, and the last model compares the highest level of the sense of belonging to Guangzhou – “Guangzhou people” – to the other three lower levels. We mainly focus on these two models to illustrate the effects of both of the Hukou status and non-Hukou factors.

With all other predictor variables controlled in these equations, holding urban Hukou greatly reduces the probability for the children to identify themselves as “hometown people” while it significantly increases the chance to regard themselves as “Guangzhou people”. However, owning local Hukou only makes difference between the identity of “Guangzhou people” and other lower levels of sense of belonging. Nevertheless, citizenship still matters in a significant sense; children with local urban Hukou are indeed more assimilated and have a significantly higher sense of belonging to Guangzhou. As mentioned, the institutional identity with the “local” and/or “urban” Hukou entitles the children with related social resources and, more importantly, it greatly prevents the migrant children from internalizing the stereotypes and the senses of being “migrants” or “migrant workers” and thus gives them an efficacy to think and act like “locals”. Nativity is also very closely linked to identity. Those who are not born in Guangzhou and those who came to Guangzhou for long stay after six years old are also significantly more likely to identify themselves as “hometown people” rather than being more assimilated. The coefficients for these variables are also significant in the fourth model only with signs in the opposite direction. Actually Table 3 shows that not being born in the Guangzhou and being first generation are among the strongest predictors to identify as both hometown people and Guangzhou people. The significance of these coefficients proves the idea that the early experience of migration of children, including the birth place and the age of arrival, indeed has great influence on their assimilation process and outcomes. Children exposed more and earlier to the host society are likely to be more familiar with, more influenced by, and thus more identified with the life style and social context there. Such significance of both the Hukou status (the citizenship) and the migratory status (the nativity) may be better interpreted as signaling a stake in the society as a full-fledged member, legally as well as subjectively, with an accompanying shift in one’s frame of reference.

Language is also closely, and affectively, connected to the formation and maintenance of regional identity. Respondent children who have a mastery of Cantonese, the local dialect of Guangzhou, are significantly more likely to identify as Guangzhou people, and less likely to self-define as hometown people. The critical role of language in the assimilation outcomes can be interpreted in two ways. As an instrument, the mastery of the local language usually entails a deep involvement into the local daily life to communicate with local people and to express themselves; as a symbol, the high capability to use the local language also indicates a complete acceptance of the specific meaning endowed in the words and created through the local history and a full understanding of local culture. As emphasized by Gordon (1964), language assimilation, as part of the acculturation, comes first and paves the way to the following steps of assimilation. Unfortunately, the survey didn’t ask about the language ability of their hometown dialects; otherwise, we can examine whether there exists a negative relationship between the proficiency of the hometown language and the sense of belonging to the host society as predicted in previous studies in order to make the statement of the effect of language even stronger. Despite the significant effect of Cantonese, the proficiency of Mandarin, the common language of China, makes no difference in the self-identification. This result is not unexpected because Mandarin is never the mainstream language in Guangzhou and speaking only Mandarin only makes a person feel alienated from the local daily life which is dominated by Cantonese. The subjective household income status, the other measurement for the human capitals in this analysis, is not statistically significant here.

Predictor Variables	Binary Logistic Regression							
	Hometown People		Hometown People in Guangzhou		No clear Identity		Guangzhou People	
	Beta	e ^β	Beta	e ^β	Beta	e ^β	Beta	e ^β
Male	.1574 (.1599)	1.1705	-.3704 (.1828)**	.6905	.4473 (.2259)**	1.5641	-.1904 (.2166)	.8266
Age	-.3112 (.0456)***	.7326	.2149 (.0529)***	1.2397	.0513 (.0599)	1.0526	.1745 (.0598)***	1.1907
Local Hukou	-.2501 (.2256)	.7787	-1.0184 (.2948)***	.3612	-.5170 (.3260)	.5963	1.2601 (.2651)***	3.5258
Urban Hukou	-.6373 (.2011)***	.5287	-.0761 (.2468)	.9267	-.1669 (.2935)	.8463	.8993 (.2433)***	2.4579
Not Born in Guangzhou	.8297 (.2050)***	2.2926	-.2261 (.2358)	.7976	-.3422 (.2838)	.7102	-.7668 (.2695)***	.4645
First-Generation Migrants	.4734 (.1845)***	1.6054	-.2639 (.2161)	.7681	.0321 (.2641)	1.0326	-.7555 (.3179)**	.4698
Mandarin	.0002 (.0813)	1.0002	.1551 (.1020)	1.1678	-.1633 (.1098)	.8493	-.0122 (.1095)	.9879
Cantonese	-.2146 (.0601)***	.8069	-.0044 (.0708)	.9956	-.0481 (.0851)	.9530	.3775 (.0795)***	1.4586
Subjective Income Status	-.0515 (.0935)	.9498	.1275 (.1105)	1.1360	.0341 (.1281)	1.0347	-.0586 (.1206)	.9431
Local Friends	.0101 (.2494)	1.0102	-.8345 (.3109)***	.4341	.1617 (.3461)	1.1755	.6611 (.3186)**	1.9369
Contact with Hometowns								
Not Visited in the Last 5 Years	1.1078 (.6433)*	3.0277	-.5863 (.7091)	.5564	.3293 (.7793)	1.3900	-.7690 (.6896)	.4635
Not Visited in the Last 3 Years	1.6024 (.6139)***	4.9649	-.3335 (.6363)	.7164	.4381 (.7298)	1.5498	-2.4410 (.8314)***	.0871
Not Visited in the Last 2 Years	1.3149 (.5592)**	3.7244	-.2916 (.5693)	.7471	.1339 (.6709)	1.1433	-1.2026 (.5739)**	.3004
Visited Every Year	1.1835 (.5401)**	3.2658	-.1297 (.5427)	.8784	-.0452 (.6438)	.9558	-1.0570 (.5384)**	.7348
Private School	.1008 (.1786)	1.1061	.2248 (.2103)	1.2521	.0140 (.2448)	1.0141	-.3081 (.2347)	1.0307
Discrimination against Migrants	-.0185 (.0980)	.98167	.0362 (.1149)	1.0369	-.0119 (.1346)	.9882	.0302 (.1327)	1.0499
Residential Environment	.0145 (.0876)	1.0146	-.0293 (.1012)	.9711	-.0470 (.1203)	.9541	.0487 (.1180)	.0228
Constant	2.6426 (.9678)***		-4.1488 (1.1449)***		-1.8361 (1.2730)		-3.7811 (1.2363)***	
Observations	832		832		832		832	
Degree of Freedom	17		17		17		17	
LR test	196.38***		68.82***		15.54		305.86***	
Pseudo R-square	.1713		.0822		.0256		.3450	

Table 3 Results of Binary Logistic Regression

Social networks in terms of the percentage of the local friends among his/her best friends, the frequency of visiting his/her hometown and whether he/she was studying in a private school which usually enrolled more non-local students are another important source of various assimilation outcomes. Though not significant in the first model, those who have more local friends than migrant friends¹ are more likely to identify as Guangzhou people, which indicates the effect of the more exposure to the local culture and the local lifestyle. Significant at the level of at least 5% in both models, visiting their hometowns more often greatly decreases the odds of self-defining as “Guangzhou people” or at least more being more assimilated, reflecting the potential power of the social support and social control rooted among the fellow townsmen. The differentiation between private schools and public schools are not statistically significant. As for the experience in the schools and in the communities, both of the coefficients are not significant. The coefficient for age is also significant at the level of 0.01, indicating that as the migrant children get older, they are more likely to be assimilated.

For the middle two choices of self-identifications, only few coefficients are statistically significant. For the “hometown people in Guangzhou” category, the coefficients for gender, age and local Hukou are significant; for the “no clear identity” category, no coefficient is significant except that for gender. However, model two still passes the likelihood ratio test, indicating that these three variables still have sufficient explanatory power to explain the choice of this self-identification. However, it seems that there still exist other factors which are able to explain the choice of “no clear identity”.

OLS Regression Results

The results of the OLS regression model in Table 4 basically replicate what we have got from the binary logistic regression model, though the sense of belonging to Guangzhou here is treated as continuous. Both of the Hukou status and the migratory status show strong influence on the assimilation outcomes, and the effects of mastering Cantonese, making friends with locals and frequently visiting their hometowns are also significant with signs in the expected directions. The standardized coefficients from the OLS regression model are presented in the last column. The results show that in general children’s contact with their hometowns exerts the largest influence on their assimilation outcomes, followed by their age, birth place, their Hukou status, mastery of Cantonese, age of arrival in Guangzhou and the percentage of the local friends. The relative significance of the Hukou status, also shown in the logistic regression results in Table 3, implies that the institutional identity indeed matters a lot while it is not the strongest predictor in determining the assimilation outcomes of migrant children and its influence on the assimilation process can actually be offset by other non-Hukou factors, including the migratory status (the birth place and the age of arrival), the language ability and their contacts with locals and their hometowns. In other words, instead of a uniform assimilative path in terms of the Hukou status, we find multiple paths to identity building.

Another way to interpret the relative importance of the Hukou status is to compare its significance among different assimilation outcomes. In the previous analysis, we just focus on the first and the last model in Table 3 to have a clear picture of the effects of the Hukou status and other factors. However, when we control all other predictor variables and compare the effect of the Hukou status among various assimilation outcomes, such a clear significance does not appear all the time. As mentioned, identifying as “hometown people” is only associated with the Hukou type; however, only the Hukou place matters in the identity of “hometown people in Guangzhou”. For the “not clear identity” option, neither of the coefficients for the Hukou type and the Hukou place is statistically significant. Actually, the choice of “not clear identity” is accounted for by none of the interested factors in this analysis; the model does not even pass the likelihood ratio test. The results of the comparison indicate that, with other predictor variables controlled, migrant children with different Hukou statuses may have different probabilities of falling into certain assimilation, but the differences in the odds among various Hukou statuses – local urban Hukou, local rural Hukou, non-local urban Hukou and non-local rural Hukou – are not necessarily significant. In other words, the Hukou type (or the Hukou place) may exert influence on one choice of the assimilation outcomes while have little impact on another choice; chances are that the gap in the possibility to fall in certain assimilation outcome between two certain combinations of the Hukou place and the Hukou type is significantly different from the gap in the possibility to fall in another type of the adaptation results between these two Hukou statuses. For example, there exists a significant gap in the possibility to identify as “hometown people” between migrant children with

¹ The definition of “local friends” is given by themselves rather than by the researchers.

urban Hukou and those with rural Hukou while there is no difference between local Hukou holders and non-local Hukou holders. However, the difference between local Hukou and non-local Hukou is significant in the categories of “hometown people in Guangzhou” and “Guangzhou people” in terms that holding a local Hukou greatly reduces the odds of falling into the former category but significantly increases the odds of choosing the latter one. For the choice of “no clear identity”, there is no significant difference among the four types of the Hukou statuses.

Predictor Variables	OLS Regression	
	Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients
Male	-.0303 (.0706)	-.0125
Age	.1142 (.0203)***	.1861
Local Hukou	.4153 (.1080)***	.1590
Urban Hukou	.4133 (.0971)***	.1561
Not Born in Guangzhou	-.4380 (.0954)***	-.1786
First-Generation Migrants	-.2145 (.0815)***	-.0849
Mandarin	-.0204 (.0387)	-.0169
Cantonese	.1314 (.0277)***	.1553
Subjective Income Status	-.0021 (.0428)	-.0016
Local Friends	.1836 (.1109)*	.0507
Contact with Hometowns		
Not Visited in the Last 5 Years	-.3572 (.2169)	-.0633
Not Visited in the Last 3 Years	-.7287 (.1873)***	-.1447
Not Visited in the Last 2 Years	-.5183 (.1734)***	-.1741
Visited Every Year	-.4773 (.1591)***	-.1886
Private School	-.1055 (.0784)	-.0405
Discrimination Experience against Migrants	-.0036 (.0439)	-.0025
Residential Environment	.0073 (.0394)	.0056
Constant	.9753 (.4193)**	
Observations		832
R-square		.3276

Table 4 Results of OLD Regression

This relative importance of the Hukou status among different assimilation outcomes and to other non-Hukou factors in terms of the migratory status, the language ability and their contacts with locals and their hometowns clearly shows that the Hukou system matters in the assimilation process but only with a limited and diversified effect. A local urban Hukou indeed greatly improve the assimilation of migrant children; however, without such a privileged but, to a large extent, ascribed Hukou status, we can still rely on the achieved factors such as the language ability and contact with local friends. Various Hukou statuses also claim different odds of choosing certain assimilation outcomes; however, these odds may not significantly different from each other for certain assimilation results, which further diversifies the effect of the Hukou status. In a conclusion, the segmented assimilation by both the Hukou statuses and the non-Hukou factors is presented and demonstrated with the data.

CONCLUSION

This research is motivated by the idea of examining the assimilation debate in China's situation. With the focus on the internal migration in China, the Hukou system rather than the ethnicity is assumed to play the critical role in the assimilation process while other non-Hukou factors may also exert great influence in determining the assimilation outcomes. The data show major differences in patterns of regional self-identification among migrant children with various Hukou status and migratory status in Guangzhou, China. About 46% of the respondent children identify themselves as "hometown people" while about one-fifth choose the option of "Guangzhou people". Those who are born in Guangzhou with local urban Hukou have the highest sense of belongings to Guangzhou. Compared to these typical "locals", those who are born in Guangzhou but either with local rural Hukou or non-local urban Hukou have significantly lower senses of belonging, though they are still more assimilated than others. Similarly, the typical "migrants" with non-local rural Hukou, no matter whether they are born in Guangzhou or not, also have much lower senses of belonging than their "local" counterparts with local urban Hukou, though their senses of belonging are not the lowest. Furthermore, both of those with local urban Hukou and those with non-local rural Hukou but who are not born in Guangzhou also score much lower than their born-in-Guangzhou counterparts. These differences clearly indicate both of the effect of the Hukou status in terms of the Hukou place and the Hukou type and the significance of the migratory status in terms of the birth place.

The importance of the Hukou status and the migratory status in determining the assimilation outcomes is further demonstrated in the logistic regression models and the OLS regression model with strongly significant coefficients. Generally, holding local or urban Hukou, being born in Guangzhou and coming to Guangzhou for long stay before six years old can greatly improve the assimilation results, with other predictor variables controlled. Besides these critical factors, it is also found that having a good mastery of Cantonese, making friends with locals and visiting their hometowns less often can also substantially influence the adaptation outcomes in the more assimilated direction. Taking the non-Hukou factors into consideration and comparing the effect of the non-Hukou factors to that of the Hukou status, we find that the institutional identity in terms of the Hukou status indeed matters a lot while it is not the strongest predictor in determining the assimilation outcomes of migrant children and its influence on the assimilation process can actually be offset or compensated by other non-Hukou factors, including the migratory status (the birth place and the age of arrival), the language ability and their contacts with locals and their hometowns. In other words, instead of a uniform assimilative path in terms of the Hukou status, we find segmented paths to identity formation and resolution. Migration children with non-local rural Hukou are supposed to be significantly less assimilated than those with local urban Hukou if we just take the Hukou status into account; however, if the former ones are born in the host society or learn Cantonese well, or if the latter ones visit their hometowns more often, the gap in the assimilation outcomes will be greatly reduced. Therefore, the effect of the Hukou status on the regional identity is actually limited. On the other hand, when we control all other predictor variables and compare the effect of the Hukou status among various assimilation outcomes, we find that the Hukou type and the Hukou place only matter in certain types of adaptation outcomes. Therefore, migrant children with different Hukou statuses may have different probabilities of falling into certain assimilation, but the differences in the odds for certain assimilation outcome among various Hukou statuses – local urban Hukou, local rural Hukou, non-local urban Hukou and non-local rural Hukou – are not necessarily significant. The relative importance of the Hukou status among different assimilation outcomes and to other non-Hukou factors clearly states that the Hukou system indeed matters in the assimilation process but only with

a limited and diversified effect. The segmented assimilation by both the Hukou statuses and the non-Hukou factors is well demonstrated.

In sum, “becoming a local” takes different forms, has different meanings, and is reached by different paths. But this process is one in which all the migrant children are engaged, defining who they are and to which place they belong. To be sure, this process is complex, conflictual and stressful, and profoundly affects the consciousness of migrant parents and children alike. The process is definitely shaped within a much larger historical and institutional context; for the internal migrants in China, the Hukou system is usually regarded as one of these influential institutions, and both of its effect and its limitation have been presented in this analysis. It is hard to say whether more assimilated migrant children perform better or feel happier; all we have known from this study is how the institutions shape their assimilation process with other non-institutional factors. For future studies, it should be clarified how such an assimilation process through both of the institutional and non-institutional factors are possible and how the self-identification changes among groups and between generations.

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