Mobility and Cultural Convergence in the Context of Modernity—A Case Study of the Immigrant City: Shenzhen

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Abstract: The concept "mobility" always has a rich connotation in my mind that it refers to not only demographic changes, but also far-reaching impacts of social, economic, cultural and demographic reproduction of a country or region. Mobility is regarded as an animal instinct and attribute, but its significance for human is manifested not only in biological characteristics, but also in the form of diversity in society, history and civilization. In the process of modernization, "modernity" and "mobility" have a much closer relationship and "immigration culture" is undoubtedly the most representative practice of this relationship in contemporary society. Indeed, cultural convergence is more than short-term cultural changes; it is a large-scale, long-term and gradual change of concept, behavior criterion, social structure and other aspects. This paper puts forward the social concept "mobility" in the context of modernity and takes the example of Shenzhen, China's largest immigrant city to analyze the characteristics of population migration, cultural convergence and the corresponding impacts of "risk society" (Giddens, 1994:5). Through interviews, case study and personal reflection, this paper investigates the significance of mobility in relation to cultural convergence which not only means "movement" but also means "meaning" and examines whether "mobility" is a representation of cultural reproduction and a basic feature of modernity.

Keywords: Mobility; Cultural Convergence; Modernity; Shenzhen

1. Mobility in the context of Modernity

The surface meaning of mobility refers to the population changes in places of residence. From the physical level, mobility represents migration and movement, which are traditional patterns of mobility. Walking upright is a unique physiological feature of human as well as a form of self-expression that is also carried out via purposeful ideological activities, which mark the biological differences between human and animal and extend the cultural value of migration. Here, "migration" contains the meaning of change and evolution. In addition, mobility is the most notable feature of modernity where "the traditional 'borders' have been broken: capital, ideas, images, information, people, goods and technology are in the moving process" (Appadurai, 1990: 295). In this sense, we can say that human society is developed in "migration" that human's intuition and habit of walking is a way of seeking knowledge, of explorations, and of self-awakening and evolution. Furthermore, "Media enables new forms of mobility through their capacity to bridge time and space" (McQuire, 2009:599). The concept "Media Mobility", a contemporary pattern of mobility, means that users can access all sorts of information from anywhere at any time through any connected device, which makes the concept of mobility too complicated to define. The reflection paper focuses on the physical meaning of mobility, exploring the significance of mobility in relation to cultural convergence. In this paper, mobility not only refers to the migration of individuals or groups, but also suggests an epitome of social and cultural form. For example, nomadism not only indicates lifestyle, but also signifies a specific form of civilization.

2. Mobility and Modernity

In the book Wasted Lives: Modernity And Its Outcasts, British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2004:2) points out that "the story of modernity can be expressed in more than one way". Modernity, as a key concept in many disciplines, has raised divergent views among scholars. Jameson (2002: 45) claims that "we can only describe a variety of modernity scenarios". Weber and Kalberg (2002: 84) suggests that "modernity represents a break in time between modern and the past". Giddens (2000:49) puts forward the definition of modernity with an emphasis on the social system that "modernity refers to a social life or

social organization model, which initially appeared in Europe, and later its impact spread around the world". The distinctive feature of modernity is "industrialism, capitalism, nation-state" (Giddens, 1991:16). As Durkheim (1964:12) states, the sign of modernity is the form of social integration, and "the increasingly complex social division of labor is the fundamental driving force of social transformation". I find the concept "modernity" quite charming in Bauman's (2000:2) "liquid modernity" social theory, where he uses "liquid" to describe the process of modernity and believes that in the process, "like a liquid or gas, the shape is changing by the external force, there is no fixed shape of the space"(2000:2). What can be expanded from his theory is that each mode of production has its special law of population growth and overpopulation. People begin a purposeful migration when they are convinced that they can control nature and society at their will and thus probe in another culture or social life, which marks the beginning of modernity. Therefore, as Bauman (2000:5) argues, "mobility has become a feature of modernity".

Migration, as a social phenomenon, the cultural and psychological prerequisite of its emergence and development is the fundamental change in the attitude and manner in which the external world is perceived. Modernity creates a rational way of thinking that makes the socio-genesis of migration possible. Changes in information technology and transportation technology also facilitate people's movement all around the world. Thus, modernity provides an unprecedented dynamic mechanism for the transformation of an ancient individual behavior to a modern economic industry and cultural life style. Clifford (1999:997) holds the view that "culture is a kind of migration" where human habitation is associated with the way of life and the form of civilization. Humans are relatively in frequent migrations (such as nomadic), or relative in the stable form (such as agriculture), so it is difficult to inject new vitality of civilization if they not to adapt to the natural and environmental changes through migration or movement. Second, cultural differences are related to migration, otherwise, they will lack the logic once out of the migration context, including living, race evolution, ways of communication, and means of transport. Migration is more than a simple walking process, but rather an increasingly close cultural connection with the social environment of the destination. Migrants bring native cultures, which add a unique charm to the destination due to the multicultural convergence.

I will now address the particular respect of mobility and migration which I enjoy: cultural convergence of immigrant cities. Human migration is neither a simple spatial displacement nor a geographical and environmental adaptation. Instead, it is the birth and growth of a new culture. Shenzhen, China's largest immigrant city, has a history of migration, so this paper will analyze Shenzhen's typical immigration culture and its unique cultural characteristics that constitute a unique "city card".

3. An Analysis of Population Migration of the Immigrant City: Shenzhen

After more than 30 years of urban change, Shenzhen transformed from a backward small fishing village to China's super-city. Before the establishment of special economic zones, Shenzhen had a population of 3.3 million people. In the 2000 census, "Shenzhen had more than 7 million people, in which the resident population took up for 4 million and more than 90% residents were immigrants" (Lu, 2011:1). Thus, Shenzhen is a typical immigrant city. The reason behind the population migration is "the reform and opening up policy issued since the 1980s" (Lu, 2011:1). Furthermore, Shenzhen is close to Hong Kong, the strong commercial atmosphere, innovation, fast-paced lifestyle and high efficiency of the latter gives Shenzhen a geographical advantage and remarkable economic achievements over the years.

3.1. Subjects to population migration

"Immigrant city" is an inevitable title in the process of modernity, so a careful examination of the formation of the "immigrant city" in the framework of modernity can sort out the path of the city's evolution. "Immigrant city" is the product of and counteraction to modernity. It refers to a city that immigrants as basic members, it has two characteristics. First, "the immigrant population is much larger than the aboriginals" (Liu, 2003:3). Shenzhen, "in 2011, had a total population of 10.46 million, of which aboriginals accounted for only 0.3 million" (Lu, 2011:2). Second, floating population accounts for the majority of total population. Unlike non-immigrant societies whose populations are more stable, immigrant society members are in a highly mobile state due to the subjective motivation of immigrants and the changes of political and economic environment. Additionally, the openness of the social-economic and political environment of immigrant city attracts generations of immigrants to keep moving in, continuing to increase the mobility of population.

My family is a typical "immigrant family", as my father and aunt have been working in Shenzhen since the 1980s, My cousin and I are the second generation of immigrants. Due to the family language tradition, we do not speak Cantonese and are accustomed to eating hometown cuisine rather than Cantonese cuisine, but "I am a Shenzhen local, born and bred" is our understanding. In contrast, my cousin's son, my five-year-old nephew Zach, is a downright Shenzhen local who is the only one that refuses to speak the hometown dialect. According to my father, his route of mobility was simple:

I have been working in Shenzhen since my university graduation in 1983.
I witnessed thirty years of the city's development and now there are very few aboriginals in Shenzhen, most of people are workers who have no household registration.
Compared to them, I'm a half-local!

As what my father said, the rapid development of Shenzhen increased the city's needs for talent, thus having the local government pay more attention to the introduction of talents. The direct driving force of my father's immigration to Shenzhen was the government's talent introduction program. In addition, highly educated immigrants with human and physical capital are more willing to migrate to new and uprising cities and they are quick adaptors to new immigrants' culture due to their relatively open mind and tolerance of different cultures.

3.2. Factors contributing to migration

My hometown is a small county in northwest China,
so I wanted to seek better development as a college student.
I was optimistic with the city's development in the 1980s,
as Shenzhen then was a young city with more than 30 years of change.
The average age of population was 25 years old, as most young people believed that it was an ideal city for them to make a fortune or settle permanently.

My father is a developmental immigrant who left the original place of birth and moved to another place with an aim of gaining a better life. The main reason for my family's migration was the potentially better living environment and the attraction of more opportunities for development. In the book Empty Meeting Ground, MacCannell (1992:5) argues that "The ultimate goal of people's awareness of migration is to build a permanent home life in a complete world". Modern definition of social "stability" of domestic life and social order is realized through intermittent "mobile" changes. In the modernization, people's daily life and work can hardly be confined to a stable place, which leads to an unprecedented awareness and behavior of migration.

4. An Analysis of Cultural Convergence of the Immigrant City: Shenzhen

"Mobility in modern society is also manifested in the "movement" and "transformation" of culture, and migrants "carry" such symbols, metaphors, lifestyles, and values during the migration process" (Rojek & Urry, 1999:708). Immigrant culture is the conceptual culture of immigrant society, that is, "people's spiritual activities and products in the immigration society that include ethical, religious, philosophical and artistic elements" (Borrie, 1959:12). In contrary to the one-way input or output of culture, immigrant culture convergence is a two-way process that lays emphasis on the blending or conflict of a "native" and foreign culture due to mobility such as population migration, trade activities, marriage, transportation, communications technology revolution and new media. Cultural convergence is a process of "seeking common while reserving differences" and "being inclusive", which are not only reflected in the speed of "mobility" but also indicate a unique attribute of modernity.

"More than 90% residents in Shenzhen are immigrants who occupy a dominant position in all aspects of the city's social development" (Lu, 2011:2). Today, Shenzhen's lifestyle, values, and cultural characteristics are fundamentally different from traditional local culture because the immigration culture gives society a new color and identity.

4.1. Language changes

Language is the carrier of civilization and language change is a means of cultural replacement that alters people's worldview and cultural values.

I am good at Cantonese listening but weak at speaking.
Most people that I contact at work speak Mandarin,
but when I am with my friends, we speak hometown dialect.

Government officials, even Shenzhen locals,
have to speak Mandarin, which is a unified requirement.

Language is a vital part of communication and expression, the acquisition and use of Cantonese can reflect immigrants' acceptance and understanding of Shenzhen culture. For immigrants, frequent contacts with non-Cantonese people reduce the chance of them learning and practicing Cantonese and even make them ignorant of the importance of local language. Therefore, it is important for immigrants to learn local language so as to facilitate barrier-free language exchanges and increase interaction between immigrants and locals. My nephew Zach's language learning is the clear represent to the integration of the cultural environment.

Everyone must speak Mandarin in class,
so most Cantonese I have learned are from after-class talks with my friends and classmates...

Language input dilutes the language environment of Cantonese in Shenzhen, and Mandarin and Cantonese together create a wonderful chemical reaction - Mandarin with Cantonese grammar is a new language popular among young people in Shenzhen. Zach sometimes uses a lot of foreign words, which, according to him, is a result of cultural diversity and integration. Language contact is also a process of cultural contact. In the long-term language convergence, Cantonese absorbs new words from foreign languages such as "mie" (what) and "dan" (eat), which are manifestations of cultural acculturation and adaptation. Furthermore, Shenzhen is a modern industrial and commercial city that the use and integration of a large number of commercial terms highlights the modernity of the city.

4.2. Changes in food culture

As an old saying goes, "The unique features of a local environment always give special characteristics to its inhabitants". People's eating habits are often in accordance with distinct regional and cultural characteristics, so when the place of residence changes, people have to develop new eating habits.

What disappoint me most of living in Shenzhen is the eating habits here.
I was used to eating noodles back in my hometown, but I have to eat rice now.

In northern China, major crops are monotonous because of the cold climate and barren land, so noodle is the staple food there. However, Shenzhen is in south-east China where rise is the main crop. "Because culture is an entirety, a part of culture changes will inevitably lead to the overall part of the interrelated response" (Huang&Gong, 2004:222). As noodles are unpopular on local people's table, they gradually disappear from immigrants' dinner menu. With the influx of immigrants, Shenzhen's food culture exhibits features of different cuisines from all over the country. Local cuisine is called Yue cuisine that focuses to create a light, fresh and smooth taste. However, under the influence of modernity and cultural integration, foods and tastes from all over China and even the world are injecting new vitality into the local food culture, where Italian, Korean, Japanese and Mexican cuisines are all available here.

4.3. Changes in cultural and entertainment activities

I have lived in Shenzhen for more than 30 years but am yet to get used to local culture. I force myself to follow their customs like burning incense every day to extend gratitude to the God of Wealth.
Local people celebrate Christmas and Halloween, and so do I.
However, I still feel unable to get involved in local community.

As my aunt said, Shenzhen household registration is only an official confirmation of her residential identity instead of a symbol of her cultural identity, as she was reluctant to give up her original identity from the beginning. My aunt's difficulty of becoming a member of the cultural society is common among immigrants and it sometimes results in more serious psychological issues. The traditional culture with a strong inheritance feature can be hard for some immigrants to get rid of, which increases the challenge for immigrants to complete their "cultural adaptation" process. Besides, the process of interaction between people can be felt is a variety of regional culture in the collision fusion that constantly reminds immigrants of their "foreign" identity.

Different from my aunt, my nephew Zach is an out-and-out "Shenzhenese" who speaks in the most standard Cantonese tone without any trace of hometown accents. When he comes home after school, it is his routine to open the television and watch TVB Jade, the content of which always makes my 58-year-old aunt perplexed. The preconceived culture of Hong Kong exerts the greatest impact on Zach's worldview, he posted the poster of his favourite Hong Kong cartoon Mcdull in his room. Zach is

a generation that grew up in a social environment that has been strongly influenced and shaped by Hong Kong economy, politics and culture. He is more familiar with Hong Kong-style Cantonese and Hong Kong culture. It can be said that the new generation in Shenzhen is the witness of the city's modernization and cultural development.

5. Risk society

Today, "more than 90% people in Shenzhen are immigrants and most of them are high-quality talents and immigrant workers" (Wang&Pan, 2012:20). This demographic characteristic implies that Shenzhen will inevitably confronts many problems that other cities have never encountered, such as aggravated social stratification and continuously widening social gap between the upper and lower class. It makes anxious that the survival status of non-foundation of the new immigrants. The destiny of the rootless immigrants is linked to a sense of uncertainty and challenge in social integration and cultural recognition.

6. Vagrancy and universal fear

"The rapid development of modernity has produced the largest social and cultural change ever" (Giddens, 2000:48). "Mobility has become a 'mirror' through which people re-examine their relationship with modernity, mobility itself has become a kind of social re-adaptation activity" (Peng, 2004:19). In addition, according to Bauman, "mobility is not only a social state, but also the best recapitulation of individual living conditions" (Bauman, 1999: 10). In the "mobile modernity" period, space boundaries are broken, the community where people live is destroyed, and individuals are "modernized" and mobile like capital. Take my father as an example, the immigration experience has changed his worldview and values fundamentally and permanently. Despite the long time that he has spent as a resident in Shenzhen, he is still, by nature, a vagrant in modernity.

> If you ask me if I consider myself a Shenzhen local,
> I would say yes but my heart might disagree.
> Sometimes I feel isolated and alienated from this city,
> and I even consider returning to my hometown after retirement.

Bauman states, "uncertainty, insecurity, and unsafety are the most distressing things of all the troubles of the era of 'liquid modernity'" (2000: 5). The liquid modern world is full of uncertainty and uncertainty is a breeding ground for fear, so the liquid modern world is a world of ubiquitous fear. Cities are the result of modernity and modernity itself. Immigrant cities such as Shenzhen are the first to experience modernity and vagrancy, so the ubiquitous fear and the feeling of rootless are new yet common to immigrants. "Cities constitute the plight of modernity, but also a symbol of this dilemma" (Podoksik, 2015:414). The sense of vagrancy and ubiquitous fear reflects the place where modernity occupies the most vulnerable and precious place in the depths of our soul.

7. Cultural estrangement and the fracture of interpersonal relations

Cultural estrangement is a natural phenomenon in cultural changes, which often leads to a sense of cultural shock and loss of identity. On the one hand, immigrants find it hard to agree with the new culture. On the other hand, they cannot return to their previous culture and thus become the so-called "swingers" who swing between a few cultures with a sense of strangeness, loneliness, abandonment and disappointment. Their bond with traditional culture and old interpersonal relationships (including family, friends, and cooperative relations) are in a gradual collapse and breakdown. As Bauman states, "The fragility of interpersonal ties is an important attribute of the liquid mobility age, and it is also the essential attribute" (2004:146).

> Of course Shenzhen is a money-oriented city,
> meaning that interpersonal relationships are no different to consumer goods.
> What we once believed in, such as "Kennedy", "forever", and "loyalty",
> are meaningless compared to "money".
> You can trust no one but yourself.

My father keeps telling me that trust and dependence on others can be dangerous in this liquid modern world. In Shenzhen, it seems only reasonable to think of others as competitors, which turn many couples and close ones into strangers, friends into enemies that betray each other. Any

unwarranted trust or reliance on others is regarded as a "premature" or "irrational" behavior. Liquid modernity undoubtedly exacerbates the separation between people and deteriorates human relations, distorting and misinterpreting the core values that were once cherished in traditional culture.

8. Conclusions

The paper introduces the concept of modernity, exploring whether the social concept "mobility" can be regarded as a phenomenon of cultural reproduction and a basic feature of modernity through interviews, case study and personal reflection. The paper first discusses many faces of the concept "mobility", which not only has multi-dimensional interpretations, but also reveals an evolution to "liquid modernity". Shenzhen, China's largest immigrant city, is taken as an example to analyze the subject and motivation of immigration. Furthermore, cultural acculturation in population movement suggests that immigrants from different regions, races and occupations establish a variety of thinking patterns and values in the process of cultural convergence. Last but not the least, the paper provides a critical summary of the serious consequences of fluid modernity, including the uncertainty and risk of immigrants not adapting to the new culture and life. Overall, mobility, as a cultural phenomenon, should be given special attention and its close relation with modernity breaks previous social boundaries and set all things in an unprecedented movement. The appurtenances such as lifestyles and values that immigrants bring along with them through immigration have significant and diverse impacts on the immigrant region. More importantly, the mobility itself is an irreplaceable and irreversible way of life.

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