Special Issue Proposal

Suspension: Complexed Developments and Hypermobility In, From, and To China

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The working population in the private sector in China are exceedingly mobile. Many people change jobs and residence every few years. Rural-urban migrants, for instance, move to a new job every two years.[1] The younger the workers are, the more frequently they move. Migrants born after 1980 change jobs every 1.5 years, compared to 4.2 years among those born before 1980. Women change jobs more frequently than men: every 1.6 years as compared to 2.3.[2] Hypermobility is not entirely new. According to a survey that my colleagues and I conducted in 1994 in the Pearl River Delta, south China, factories there lost 5% of their workforce every month, and workers changed jobs at the average rate of once every two years. In order to retain workers, some factories charged bonds and withheld two months' wages during the first two years, which means that workers would lose the bond and the wage if they leave within two years. But these measures had little impact, and migrants kept moving.[3] Hypermobility is not unique to rural-urban migrants. International outmigration is often an extension of hypermobility inside of China[4]; those who returned from overseas continued their migratory journeys both in China and across borders.[5] Foreigners in China are attracted by economic opportunities in China but have few

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[1] China Academy of Human Resources, 2013, Zhongguo Renli Ziyuan Fazhan Baogao [China Human Resources Development Report (2013)], Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press: 5.

[2] Tsinghua University Research Team, Department of Sociology, Tsinghua University. Nongmingong duangonghua jiuye qushi yanjiu baogao [A Research Report on Migrant Workers' Short-termism trend in Employment]. February 8, 2012. Available at https://wenku.baidu.com/view/617e2c34b90d6c85ec3ac670.html, last accessed 24 May 2019.

[3] Biao Xiang. "Dongzhen Minggong: Tiaocao." [Migrant workers in Dong Town No.3: Jump ships], Issue III 1998: 40-42

[4] Miriam Driessen, this issue. Yang Wei, this issue.

[5] Biao Xiang, "Pocketed Proletarianization: Why There Is No Labour Politics in the 'World's Factory'". In *Precarity and Belonging: Labour, Migration, and Non-citizenship*, eds. Catherine Ramírez, Sylvanna Falcon, Steve McKay, Juan Poblete, Felicity A. Schaeffer. Rutgers University Press. Forthcoming.

opportunities to settle down because of policy constraints, they therefore have to move in and out the country constantly,[6] forming a typical "transient population".[7]

This special issue examines the causes, experiences and socio-political consequences of hypermobility. We do so through the notion of "suspension". "Suspension" is the translation of the Chinese term *xuanfu*, literally "hanging and floating". A typical image of *xuanfu* is one of a hummingbird striving to keep itself still in the air by vibrating its wings frantically. In the condition of suspension, people move frequently and work hard in order to benefit from their present condition as much as possible *and* to escape from it as quickly as they can. "Make as much [money] as you can now, then move on quickly". Little energy is invested in systemic changes here and now. People keep moving without an end in sight. Suspension is both structurally compelled and self inflicted, and is in turn deeply consequential for the society and for individuals. The prevalent condition of suspension partly explains why China is economically dynamic but socially stagnant; why the tremendous economic energy as we witness in daily life fails to translate into sustained social changes bottom up.

In what follows, I will first sketch out an ethnographic contour of suspension—what it looks like and feels like—based on my filed research on migration in and from China over the last 25 years. I will then link the experience of suspension to broader developments in China. After that I will outline how each article in the special issue develops the concept of suspension, and what we aim to deliver collectively.

Move fast in order to stay still

As a lived experience, suspension first means that migrants put on hold some fundamental concerns in their lives in order to pursue particular goals. For instance, migrants work long hours away from home, minimizes social life, foregoing the joys and duties associated with being family members, friends, and neighbours, in order to maximize savings. A laid-off worker, who is also a divorced single mother, in northeast China planned to work as a domestic helper in Italy to earn money for her daughter's college education. She told me that

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[6] Ka-Kin Cheuk, this issue; Xiang, Biao and Qiang Ma. 2019. "Mobility Assemblage and the Return of Islam in Southeast China" in Eric Tagliacozzo, Helen F. Siu, and Peter C. Perdue eds. *Asia Inside Out: Itinerant People.* Harvard University Press: 52-74. Xie Xin has also documented on how African traders follow impulses of the international market and move in and out of China quickly. Xie Xin. M.Phil dissertation, Hong Kong University.

[7] Ka-Kin CheuK. 2019. "Transient migrants at the crossroads of China's global future". *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration.* Volume 3 Number 1: 3-14. See also other articles in the same issue.

she knew the job would be demanding, and the separation from her teenager daughter would be painful. "I will take these three years as if I went in". "In" is a colloquial expression for imprisonment. Mobility is likened to imprisonment because they both suspend a person from the normal life. A migrant taxi driver in his forties in Guangzhou, south China, worked two shifts (20 hours) a day and every day. He was determined to buy a property in his hometown before he turns fifty. But wasn't he worried about this health? I asked. "Health? That is something [to be worried about] in the future." He of course knew that it would be too late to worry about health in the future. He was not simply postponing the concern; he was suspending his life itself, at least till he buys the property.

Sacrificing short-term benefit for long-term future is of course a common experience, as exemplified by deferred gratification[8] on the individual level and, on a much grander scale, socialist modernization particularly campaigns such as the Chinese Great Leap Forward Movement (1958). But suspension is not only a rush to the future, it also means to reduce the present to an empty vehicle to the future. Suspension is driven by the desire to run away from the here and now. During the Great Leap Forward, as horrendous as it was, people were deeply engaged with the present, and saw the present as a basis on which a utopia was to be built. Today, migrants work hard not because they enjoy what they do; they work hard because they want to stop working hard one day by saving enough money. They move frequently to maximize opportunities available and therefore they can afford *not* to move in the future. As Lisa Rofel put it aptly, for migrant workers in China, "affective engagement with a possible future in which one could have another mode of being is what pulls migrant workers through the present."[9] The present is an undesirable state where one needs be "pulled through". Yan Hairong calls this a desire of "ephemeral transcendence".[10] It is transcendence because migrants seek an express path to a radically different future. It is "ephemeral" in the sense few migrants eventually move out of manual jobs, but the desire for such transcendence is a persistent and integral part of the migrants' life.

When asked in our 1994 survey why they changed their last jobs, 21.1% of the migrant workers listed "better pay" as the main reason, and other common causes include "conflict

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[8] Jorge Parodi aptly calls this the "ability to wait". See *To Be a Worker*: *Identity and Politics in Peru*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina *Press*, 2000: 82.

[9] Lisa Rofel and Sylvia J. Yanagisako (2019) *Fabricating Transnational Capitalism A Collaourative Ethnography of Italian-Chinese Global Fashion* (with an essay by Simona Segre Reinach). Duke University Press: 154.

[10] Yan Hairong. 2008. *New Masters, New Servants: Migration, Development, and Women Workers in China*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press: 8.

with workmates" (18%), "following friends who are in a different factory" (17.2%), "quarrel with the management" (16.7%), "changes in romantic relationship" (9.1%), and "boredom" (8.8%)[11]. The workers often recalled their experience of quitting as an act of courage and dignity. "To show to the manager my true colour", one informant explained to me why he walked out of the factory when he was told off by the shop floor manager.[12] Why didn't the migrants show their true colours—arguably brighter and more striking—by confronting the problems and tackling them head on, for instance through consultation and negotiation, instead of walking away? The typical answer given was simple: this would be unwise. It would be "too complicated", they suggested, to change the working and living condition.[13] The wiser choice was to make money and "buy out" oneself from the status of being a migrant worker.

Inspired by Jane Guyer's powerful analysis of the evacuation of the "near future"[14] I characterize the experience of suspension as the displacement of the "near future" and the "nearby". By near future, Guyer means the temporal horizon where concrete socialities emerge and where consequential collective actions can be taken. It is a time scale for reasoning. The "evacuation of the near future" means that, in the public temporal imagination in the post 1970s U.S., the near future is replaced by a combination of fixation at immediate situations and an orientation to a very long-term horizon. Guyer illustrates this by examining the public presentations of macroeconomics and of evangelicalism. Our case is ordinary people's perception and is thus more ethnographically oriented. "Near future" and "nearby" disappear as people make sacrifices to chase opportunities that are available at the moment,

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[11] Biao Xiang 1998. Dongzhen Mingong No. 3: Tiaocao. "Peasant Workers" in Dong Town No. 3 Jumping ships. Zhongguo Qingnian Yanjiu [Chinese Youth Studies]. 1998, issue III.: 40-42. 42.

[12] The trend that younger migrant workers became even more footloose is somehow contradictory. Born after 1980 and known as "new generation migrants", they are better educated, less connected to the countryside, and have a higher awareness of rights. But they change jobs even more frequently. For the discussion on "new generation migrants", see Wang Chunguang. "Xinshengdai nongcun liudongrenkou de shehui rentong yu chengxiang ronghe de gxi" [Social Identification of the Second Generation of the Rural-urban Floating Population and Its Relationship with Rural-urban Integration]. Sociological Research (3, 2001): 63- 76. Cheng Zhiming (2014), The New Generation of Migrant Workers in Urban China. In Mobility, Sociability and Well-Being of Urban Living Eds, Wang, D. & He, S., 67-91. Berlin: Springer-Verlag. Regarding the young migrants' hypermobility, Willy Sier has provided a compelling account. Willy Sier. 2019. *Everybody Educated? Education Migrants and Rural-Urban Relations in Hubei Province, China.* PhD thesis. Department of Anthropology, University of Amsterdam.

[13] Biao Xiang. 1998. Dongzhen Minggong: Qdian yu Liudong. [Migrant workers in Dong Town No.5: Gonghuizuzhi, liyi biaoda he quanyi yishi [Trade union, interest expression and rights consciousness], 46-49.

[14] Guyer, Jane. 2007, 401. "Prophecy and the near future: Thoughts on macroeconomic, evangelical, and punctuated time". *American Ethnologist*, 34 (3).

dream about what a fulfilling life they would lead one day, but are at loss in establishing a content life in a scale of five or ten years and in developing solidarity with fellow workers and residents.

The displacement of near future and of nearby implied in suspension should enrich our understanding about (im)mobility anxiety as highlighted by recent literature. This literature stresses that those in the global south dream migration as a goal in itself and are deeply anxious about being "stuck" (immobile). This anxiety reflects how the poor see the world in existential and even cosmological terms, and is regarded as a main driving force of the supposedly unstoppable migration tides to the global north.[15] The notion of (im)mobility anxiety calls attention to the deep impacts of global inequalities on the life strategies of the poor, and implies that antimigration programmes can be traumatic for many. But more nuanced understanding may be in order as for what the anxiety is really about. It is true for certain urban middle-class Chinese that "[T]o be modern is to be mobile, and the vagaries of performing mobility…is an important part of 'being at home in the world'."[16] But migrants do not pursue mobility for the sake of mobility. As the case studies in this special issue show, migrants resent hypermobility. They wish to stop, but they feel they cannot afford to. This is a form of mobility anxiety, but not an anxiety driven by the fear of not being able to move. Nor is it pulled by imagined modernity in the destination, or by the gap between reality and aspiration. This is an anxiety that is fundamentally about the lack of confidence and ability to make change here and now. I am certainly not promoting "stay-home development" or supporting the antimigration agendas proposed by some European politicians after the so-called "migration crisis" in 2015. Antimigration policies won't work, but increasing mobility won't be a solution either. Global inequalities are much more than the unequal distribution of mobility opportunities.

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[15] Appadurai 1990. "*Disjuncture and Difference* in the Global Cultural Economy" is one of the earliest who pointed to the gap between local reality and global aspiration as a cause of irregular immigration. Julie Chu vividly describes how imagination about migration to the U.S. dominated the local life in Fujian in southeast China. *Cosmologies* of Credit and the Politics of Destination in China by *Julie Chu* (Duke University Press, 2010). Fong highlighted the desire among urban youth and their parents for educational migration to the West. Fong, Vanessa L. 2011. *Paradise Redefined: Transnational Chinese Students and the Quest for Flexible Citizenship in the Developed World*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. It should be emphasized that Chu's case is region specific (Fujian is a pocket with a strong tradition of irregular migration to the U.S.) and Fong's is class specific. Jorgen Carling's 2010 article "Migration in the age of involuntary immobility: Theoretical reflections and Cape Verdean experiences" calls wide attention to immobility anxieties.

[16] Jamie Coates, J (2019) 'The Cruel Optimism of Mobility: aspiration, belonging and the "good life" among transnational Chinese migrants in Tokyo'. *positions* 27(3) 469-497; 472.

Suspension as an exception and *as a norm*

Suspension also refers to migrants' perception that their migrant life constitutes an exceptional period that would pass soon, and as such it should not be subject to the same ethical judgement as one normally uphold. As the migrant nightclub hostesses in southeast China keep reminding themselves, one has to be "a little more realistic" all the time, which means, stop making moral judgements about the present situation, profit from whatever chances one can get, and move on (Jiazhi Fengjiang, this issue). Even more revealingly, a female Chinese worker in Singapore commented on romantic relationship developed during migration that "you will lose out if you take [the relationship] too seriously" or, literally, "commitment to truthfulness is commitment to failure" (Yang Wei, this issue). This does not mean that the migrants give up on moral principles. They often construe their long-term life goal in deeply moral terms, for instance sacrificing for the family, and they are conscious that their current practices are morally ambiguous. But they emphasize that it is just not wise to ask these questions now. Life is instrumentalized, and therefore not problematized.

Migrants refrain from asking ethical questions even when they fall victims of others' unethical actions. In northeast China where I have worked on unskilled labour outmigrants since 2004, would-be migrants typically paid commercial intermediaries USD 6,000 for a contract job overseas of two or three years' long.[17] It happens from time to time that unscrupulous intermediaries disappeared with the money leaving the would-be high and dry. When gossips spread that someone was swindled, fellow villagers tended to laugh at the victim instead of ganging together to demand compensations from the intermediary. The swindled had to keep their heads low in the community. Isn't it obvious who should be sympathized with and who should be punished? When asked, no informant disputed on the principle about what is right and what is wrong. The problem is, they felt that they were not in the position to apply these principles when they were in rush. As a village shop keeper put it:

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[17] The northeast is China's rust-belt and just went through large-scale privatization of state-owned enterprises at that time. Hundreds of thousands workers were laid off, while a small numbers of managers with connections became millionaires. Wealth gap was dramatically widening. It was thus not surprising that the less unfortunate were in rush to migrate, either to other parts of China or overseas, for quick money. Nor was it perplexing that people invested large amounts of money to go overseas.

You have to admit that the intermediaries are capable people […] Everyone wants to make money quickly. Those who go overseas want to make quick money just like the intermediaries. If you don't know how to handle [the intermediaries]…it is just that you lost out to them.

Life is a game that rewards the capable ones. Actions are judged by the actual outcome; success by dubious means is preferred to honest failures. More sympathetic neighbors may encourage the would-be migrants to move on—to find other ways to make money to cover the loss. "Reality is like this", the shop keeper, "You will only lose more time and feel worse if you think in this way (thinking what is right and what is wrong)". As a way to move on, some failed would-be migrants turned themselves into subagents of intermediaries and hoped to earn commissions by recruiting more would-be migrants for the intermediaries.

It is by ending suspension that people start asking what is right and what is wrong again. The dying miners, as Ralph Litzinger demonstrates, cannot suspend their life anymore as they have lost all their working capacity, becoming "waste men" as they call themselves. At this moment they regained their political agency. The "waste men" started facing their health condition squarely and embraces life as it is. They celebrate friendship, cherish family relations, and enjoy meals including cigarettes and alcohol. As there is no long-term future, the present becomes the present itself again. The miners organize themselves, with help from NGOs, and publicly demand compensations and justice from the state.

Although conceived as exceptional and transient, suspension in reality prolongs and even become normalized. As shown in Miriam Driessen's article, construction workers move in order to build a good life for the family, but the expectations about what make a good life rise constantly, and the fear of failing the expectation never ceases, and as such the men cannot stop. They move from the countryside to the city, from China to Africa and further afield. The young salespersons in Willy Sier's article change jobs in order to escape undesirable conditions. As they never challenge the status quo now and here, the condition of the next job is basically the same, and the hypermobility continues.

Thus, far from being a state of exception, suspension represents a prevalent pattern of how labour, and to great extent social life in general, are organized in China. There is no doubt that China would not have achieved industrialization, urbanization and more recently overseas development expansion at such a rate without the large number of workers

suspended their normal life.[18] China's transition to a service-oriented economy also relies on the flexible, hardworking and mobile workforce as Sier describes. Equally if more important, suspension helps to maintain social stability in face of the mounting social conflicts. Hypermobility seems to dissipate rather than ignite grassroots energy for social change from below.

The question is, then, what does it mean when the majority of the working population in a society live in a liminal state—temporary, *transient, exceptional? Conceptually, the liminal is by definition a minority.* Liminal individuals, according to Victor Turner, are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony".[19] Liminality is meant to an exception that upholds the norm, a temporary state outside of the established structure but is critical in maintaining the structure. The literature on migrant liminality highlights how international migrants live between different normative social orders[20]. But the mobile subjects in China do not fall "between" discrete orders. Suspension is the order. This indicates a peculiar condition that China is experiencing: every part of the society is moving fast, but collectively no one knows where the society is moving towards. The next section turns to this broad condition.

Complexed development

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[18] In the case of international migration, Jamie Coates describes how Chinese migrants in Japan, who have obviously made it, feel still floating and not at home, partly because the expectations from others and from themselves constantly rise.

[19] *Turner, Victor. 1967. "Liminality and Communitas" The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.*

[20] Huang, Yeoh, and Lam 2008: 8. Recent writings have expanded the concept of liminality into a larger space of actions where agency and structure intersect, rather than a "threshold", or a step in the rite of passage, the elementary form of liminality. For instance Thomassen argues that within liminality, "the very distinction between structure and agency cease to make meaning" and yet "structuration does take place" (42). Farha Ghannam point that "mobility, a state of in- betweenness, has both spatial and temporal aspects that generate possibilities for the transformation of bodies and identities." Suspension certainly opens a huge space for all kinds of activities,. However, our empirical observations suggest the suspension does not lead to structuration of individual transformation. Social inequalities are definitely widening, but population are not slotted on a fixed system of strata, and more importantly material stratification is not matched by an ideological legitimation. Few people, especially at the lower strata, take this as the destiny. There would be no suspension had everyone accept their place in the society. at the individual level, suspension serves as a means to pursue personal success, but they are more keen to conform to established norm about success rather than transform themselves. They rush into a known identity (e.g. an entreprenure with a respectable family) rather than exploring new types of being. Bjørn Thomassen, "Thinking with liminality: To the boundaries of an anthropological concept,": 42. Farha Ghannam's (2011: 792) "Mobility, Liminality, and Embodiment in Urban Egypt." *American Ethnologist* 38, no. 4: 790 – 800.

Suspension is in a way developmentalism writ small: get rich first, worry about other things later. Migrants' hypermobility and suspension mirror what Chinese officials repeatedly emphasize: "problems arising from development should be handled through development". The officials do not necessarily believe that development will provide genuine solutions, but they are convinced that the continity of development—building more cities, planning larger projects, and investing in expanding infrastructure—will effectively push the problems aside. In other words, development *dissolves* instead of solves problems. After four decades of frantic development, China faces multiple challenges, ranging from widening inequalities to environmental deterioration, and the teleological narrative of development[21] that things will only get better is losing appeal. But ironically, the doubt about the developmentalist promises about technological and economic process enhances a *political* developmentalism. Recognizing the inadequacy of the *results* of development possible pressures for fundamental social reorganization, the state takes the *process* of development as the main basis of its political legitimacy. Development as the "anti-politics machine"[22] became politically more important than before. Development for the sake of development: developmentalism par excellence.

How does the Chinese state handle developmental problems through development? First, in a way that is not dissimilar to migrants who jump from jobs to jobs, government, particularly at the lower levels (prefecture and county), hop from projects to projects. A joke goes that construction in China has to be of low quality because repairing, demolishing, reconstruction will create more jobs and add to the GDP figures multiple times, therefore keeping the economy stay afloat. Second, instead of creating a check and balance system, for instance by unionizing workers to counterbalance employers or nurturing NGOs to check government departments, the state put in place a mechanism of what may be called "balance through contradictions". For instance, the state strives to broaden labour incorporation and enable rural youths through rapid expansion of college education, but at the same time continue curtail labour rights. Local government is urged to transform the economy to become environmentally friendly, but is at the same time pressured to keep a minimum speed of growth in order to provide enough employment opportunities. Third, government often introduces ad hoc measures as emergency solutions to social problems, which exacerbates contradictions in the long run. A typical example is what Lee and Zhang call the

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[21] Cowen, M. and R. Shenton (1996) *Doctrines of Development*. London: Routledge.
[22] James Ferguson. 1994. *The Anti-Politics Machine "Development": Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*.

"commodification of petition"[23]. Under the pressure from the central government to reduce the number of petitions from their localities to Beijing, local government dissuades intended petitioners by paying them money. This work method is summarized as "contradictions among the people should be dealt with by using the Money of the People [renminbi]". The Money of the People is used to reduce social contradictions into calculations about immediate financial gains, a typical strategy of suspension.

These measures result in a condition that I call complexed development. The term "development" is used here firstly because the dynamics are presented as "development"—conscious plans and interventions aimed at improvement. Building a marketplace is presented as a development, and demolishing it two years later is a development too. "Development" here clearly does not mean linear progression; it has become an empty signifier. This makes the word development more accurate than "change" or "transition" as it is not clear whether there is any change or transition. There are many movements and dynamics, but they are often "moving on the spot or in circles" as Lauren Berlant described the "impasse" faced by the public in contemporary U.S.[24]

The word "complexed" means that the dynamics point to different directions and yet are entangled, often resulting in confusion and disorientation. Complexed is a rough translation of the Chinese term *jiujie*. Literally meaning entangled and complexed, *jiujie* is often translated as difficult choice or dilemma. But *jiujie* became a "keyword"—a word that is widely used beyond its original context and therefore indexes broad general concerns[25]—in the Chinese society only in the 2010s. Surely the Chinese people didn't have to wait till the twenty-first century to know there are dilemmas in life. *Jiujie* as a keyword means not only difficult choices that one faces, but more importantly means the condition that one has to follow a path against one's will, or make a choice that conflicts with other options that one is equally compelled to take. Thus *jiujie* is not about making choices, but is about choices that one can't really choose. It is a difficult choice in the ordinary sense between working overseas and being home, and it is *jiujie* that one feels that he/she has to continue migrating, yet at the same time regret for being away the family—thus the double bind (Driessen, this issue).

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[23] Ching Kwan Lee and Yonghong Zhang. 2013. "The Power of Instability: Unraveling the Microfoundations of Bargained Authoritarianism in China". *American Journal of Sociology.* Vol. 118, No. 6: 1475-1508.

[24] Berlant, Lauren. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

[25] Raymond *Williams,* 1976. *Keywords*: *A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Croom Helm.

Complexed development is thus more than uneven, contradictory and compressed development. "Compressed modernity", as proposed by Chung Kyung-Sup, captures a key features in developments in east Asia. Compressed modernity is "a civilizational condition in which economic, political, social and/or cultural changes occur in an extremely condensed manner in respect to both time and space, and in which the dynamic coexistence of mutually disparate historical and social elements leads to the construction and reconstruction of a highly complex and fluid social system." [26] As an example of compressed modernity, deeply ingrained patriarchy coexists with radical feminism, the combination of which partially contributes to especially low rate of marriage and birth. While compressed modernity is integral to east Asian development since the late nineteenth century, complexed development emerged in the twenty-first century China. Compressed modernity is about leaping forward, catching up, reconciling Western modernity with local traditions. In contrast, complexed development is about staying afloat, preserving the status quo, and carrying on the business as usual. In the reminder of this section I will discuss how the state and social norms shape the experience of suspension as two key components in complexed development.

The multiple faces of the Chinese state and suspension as a mode of participation

The Chinese state is well known for its capacity in both imposing social control and promoting economic growth. The household registration system (the *hukou* policy) that divides the rural and the urban populations, the immigration regulation that was always strict but have been further tightened since 2015, and the overseas labour deployment system[27] institutionally place migrants in a suspended status. Strict political control severely incapacitates migrants' ability to challenge the existing order, and forces them to suspend their political actions. But economic growth is an equally important priority for the Chinese government. China's USD 586 billion stimulus package of 2009-2011, although widely criticized for distorting the market order, was critical to protecting the livelihood of a major section of the population in the wake of the 2008 crisis. The state has managed to satisfy the populations' material needs, and this is part of the reason why state repression of workers' self-organization in last decades has not backfired. Finally, the Chinese state also presents itself as a moral agent. Although the population cannot hold the state accountable legally or politically, they expect the state to fulfil

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[26] Chung Kyung-Sup, "The second modern condition*?* Compressed modernity as internalized reflexive cosmopolitanization," *British Journal of Sociology* 61(3): 444-464, 444.
[27] Biao Xiang. 2012. Labour transplant: "Point-to-point" transnational labour migration in East Asia. *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 111 (4): 721-739. Yang Wei, this issue.

its moral duty to help if they are in distress. "You've got to rely on yourself...and the state!"[28] Outmigrants from northeast China told me. You have to rely on yourself because this is a poorly regulated market economy; you have to rely on the state because the state offers quick solutions in case of gross mistreatment. The trust in the state is an important reason why would-be migrants dare to invest in migration projects in the first place.

The Chinese state, particularly at the local level, constantly shifts between the priorities of control, growth and care. This can usher in a state of suspension. Tzu-Chi Ou's ethnography about the cyclical movement of construction-demolishing-rebuilding of housing in migrant a neighborhood outside of Beijing, provides an excellent example. When the government adopts pro-growth policies, migrants are welcomed and local residents expand their houses to accommodate migrants for rents; when the government emphasis shifts to social order and safety, unplanned housing is demolished and migrants are chased away. But before long government tilt towards growth again, and immediately local residents rush to reconstruction before being hit by next round of demolishing. In most of the time migrants manage to find places to stay, in this or that neighborhood, but never know when the roof above the head will be gone.[29] Informal economy is tacitly allowed as it lowers the living costs of the urban residents, creates employment, and increases the property value of the locality. But the informal economy never grows out of control of the government; it is always in a state of suspension and can be curtailed and even crashed whenever needed. In the community grassroots cadres and local landlords are also kept in suspension: they are always in rush, either to promote growth or to "clean up", to build houses or to knock them down, but are unable to plan for the near future.

Social welfare provision is another example of complexed development. The Chinese government has expanded social welfare provision rapidly since the late 1990s and especially the early 2000s. At the end of 2015, 858 million Chinese were covered by the basic pension insurance scheme (State Council part 2, 2016: 3), and 66 million were covered by the minimum

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[28] Xiang, Biao. 2016. "You've got to rely on yourself...and the state!" A structural chasm in the Chinese political morality. In *Ghost Protocol: Development and Displacement in Global China.* Carols Rojas and Ralph Litzinger eds. Duke University Press: 131-149.

[29] I documented how a migrant community in Beijing expanded geographically as a result of government's repeated campaigns of demolishing and cleansing. Biao Xiang. *Transcending Boundaries: Zhejiangcun: the Story of A Migrant Village in Beijing.* Translated by Jim Weldon based on *Kuayue Bianjie de Shequ* (see below). Brill Academic Publishers. 2005.

livelihood assistance.[30] Neither schemes existed before 1997. By the end of 2015, more than 95% of Chinese citizens were covered by medical insurance (State Council part 2, 2016: 3). Despite the wide coverage, however, the amount of provision remains low. It is far from sufficient to provide a strong safety net. Most citizens have to save money on their own in order to meet the ever rising costs in housing, education and medical care. "We sell life to earn money (*maimin zhuanqian*, 'selling life' means working to death) now," a vegetable vender told me, "then we can use the money to buy life (paying for essential health care; *naqian maimin*) later". If one has to "buy life" at a later stage, one has to "sell life" now when he/she can. Social welfare at its current level of provision seems more effective in bringing more citizens into the largely unregulated market and therefore intensifying competition for wealth, than in providing them with secured life sheltered from market volatility.

Under this complexed development, suspension is a form of exclusion as well as a mode of participation. Migrants jump from factory to factory because there are jobs available. Rural-urban migrants are denied of urban citizenship, but are entitled to land in the countryside, which provides them with basic security. Without this entitlement, people would not afford to be so mobile and risk taking. People put themselves in suspension also because they feel that they are entitled to participate in economic development, partly due to the socialist legacy. China's economic reform since the end of the 1970s is in a way a state-led "mass movement". It was participated by the vast majority of the population who had relatively equal assets in the beginning. The inclusive and egalitarian starting point of the reform ironically brought about a particularly acute sense of competition across the masses. The sense of entitlement also induces self-inflicted pressure to prosper and to win respect. Lagging behind one's peers is unacceptable.

The suspended are thus not the excluded[31], expelled[32], or those on the waiting[33]. The suspended are also different from the "precariat". The precariat is primarily a category of the

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[30] State Council, People's Republic of China. *Government Work Report*. The fourth meeting of the 12th National People's Congress. March 5, 2016, Available at http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2016-03/17/content_5054901.htm, last accessed on 12 February 2019. Page 3

[31] James Ferguson for instance called attention to the widespread feeling among contemporary Zambians of "abjection, of "being thrown out [and] being thrown down" (1999: 236), and of being "unplugged" from the world system. Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt, University of California Press. *1999.*
[32] Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*. Cambridge: Belknap Press. 2014.
[33] Graig Jeffrey, *Timepass: Youth, Class, and the Politics of Waiting in India*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2010.

global North. The rise of precariat is caused by the withdrawal of state welfare, the decline of Fordism, and the existence of liberal democracy that gives the precariat public voices and makes them a political subject. They are *deprived* of job security and social protection in advanced countries.[34] The experience in China is different. For those who migrated from quasi-poverty in countryside to urban jobs, the journey can be hardly described as a process of *precarization*. Social welfare provision has been extended rather than curtailed. Finally, migrants voluntarily exacerbate, instead of resist, their precarious condition. Many associate precarity with entrepreneurship and even individual freedom. While the dominant experience of the precariat in the global North is a loss,[35] the overwhelming experience of the suspended is gain, even though the cost is high, the gain is small, the the distribution highly uneven. This explains why the precariat in the global North are disappointed, angry, and politically active— a "dangerous class" as Guy Standing call them.[36] In contrast, the suspended are hopeful and anxious, economically enterprising but politically passive. Despite the apparent similarities, it would be analytically erroneous and politically misleading to lump the suspended and the precariat together.

To suggest that suspension is a mode of participation does not imply that the condition of suspension is more justifiable than that of exclusion or precarity. We point to the participatory dimension in order to highlight specific challenges that we have to face. A main challenge is that, while it is widely felt that the status quo has to change, there is no easily identifiable enemy to attack, nor a clear path to follow. There is no a single overall direction that things are moving to, and therefore it is hard to envision meaningful counter-movements. Put it differently,

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[34] As Munck pointed out, precariousness in the norm in the global south for centuries. Munck,R.(2013)'The Precariat: A View from the South', *Third World Quarterly* 34(5):747–62.

[35] For the prevalent sentiment of loss see Richard Sennett *Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. London/New York: W. W. Norton & Company 1998. Andrea Muehlebach and Nitzan Shoshan 2012. "Post-Fordist Affect." *Anthropological Quarterly*. 85 (2), 317-344; Berlant, Lauren. 2007. Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal: Post-Fordist Affect in La Promesse and Rosetta" *Public Culture* 19 (2): 273-301.

[36] According to Guy Standing (2011), the "precariat" are people who live through insecure jobs interspersed with periods of unemployment, have no access to public resources and other income sources, and therefore cannot foresee coherent career trajectories. The precariat in the global north have replaced unionized workers. A number of scholars have also applied the notion of precariat to analysis on China (e.g. *Kaifang Shidai* 2017; Huang, Philip. 2017 Zhongguo de feizhenggui jinji zai sikao: Yige Laozi shehui jingjishi yu falv shishijiao de daolun [China's Informal Economy Reconsidered: An Introduction in Light of Social-Economic and Legal History]. *Kaifang Shidai* [Open Times] No. 2: 153-163.). The literature assumes that migrant workers in China share similar experiences with the workers in the de-industrializing Northern countries, but the historical causes and structural significances of their apparently comparable experiences are hugely different. In Asia, the most comparable case to the precariat in the West is probably Japan, precisely because they share similar historical trajectory after the Second World War.

had the migrants been clearly excluded from developmental opportunities, it might have been easier for them to organize themselves to confront the present and build a near future. We have to move beyond the exclusion-resistance dichotomy, and to delve deep into the internal workings of suspension.

Entrepreneurial with means, conformist with ends

Complexed development is evident in the domain of social norms too. On the one hand, people's expectations about what constitute a good life—having a flat, a car, a profitable investment…—rise continuously. On the other hand, the fundamental criteria that define the meaning of life—what makes a man admired and a woman respected—become more conformist than before. People are ready to break rules and suspend ethical principles in daily pursuits, but follow conventions when making major life decisions such as whom to marry. The public concerns about the so-called "leftover women" and the loving parents' "forced marriage China style", which became evident in the early 2000s, illustrate the return of the familism norm in China.[37] But forming a heteronormative household is not good enough. A desirable family today must have the capacities of purchasing at least one apartment in the city, guaranteeing reputable education for the children, having savings and ideally investments. One makes extraordinary efforts just to be accepted as ordinary and normal. Conversely one conforms to the norm in order to give meanings to their daily struggles.

Norms are often essentialized into unchanging and unchangeable forms. Fetishized "family value" means that one must have a family of a particular form, but it does not necessarily make one more faithful to the partner, more filial to the parents, or more helpful to siblings.[38] Essentialized norms are dis-embedded from practices, which enables ethical suspension in practice. It is always easy to justify instrumentalist manipulations now by pointing to abstract norms afar.

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[37] Stevan Harrell and Gonçalo Santos have called attention to a similar paradox in the Chinese patriarchal system, in which radical changes coexist with surprising continuities. "Introduction." In Gonçalo Santos and Stevan Harrell (eds.), *Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the Twenty-First Century*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press. 2017: 3–36. For "leftover woman", see Arianne Gaetano. ""Leftover women": Postponing marriage and renegotiating womanhood in urban China." *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 4.2 (2014): 124-149. Ji, Yingchun. "Between tradition and modernity: "Leftover" women in Shanghai." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77.5 (2015): 1057-1073. Fincher, Leta Hong. *Leftover women: The resurgence of gender inequality in China*. Zed Books Ltd., 2016. To, Sandy(2015)'China's leftover women: late marriage among professional women and its consequences' New York: Routledge.
[38] Yunxiang Yan, *The Individualization of Chinese Society*. Berg, Oxford, 2009.

The mix of instrumentalism and conformism is clearly illustrated in case of temporary cohabitation among factory migrant workers in Singapore (Yang Wei, this issue). Independent and enterprising, the women manage the intimate relations as mutually beneficial "deals". In making these deals they capitalize on their femininity and sexuality, therefore actively reinforce the hegemonic gender hierarchy. Furthermore, they repeatedly assert their compliance with the family value—they are doing everything for the good of the family back home—as a way to relieve their moral and emotional anxieties resulted from the extramarital relations. These women's experiences resonate with those of the nightclub hostesses (Jiazhi Fengjiang, this issue). The nightclub hostesses model themselves after essentialized images of femininity in order to boost their "body price", and at the same time stress "family value" as the ultimate justification for what they do.

Apart from conforming to gender and family norms, migrants also take the existing political order as an unquestionable reference point in making sense of life. Migrants who are forced out from their temporary homes by the government accept the government campaign as they imagine that the cleansing would be good for the "grand situation"—national needs or the state plans for further development. The Indian textile traders in south China, as Ka-Kin Cheuk observed, find assertive nationalism and authoritarian statism morally appealing despite, or because of, their unpredictable business prospects and unsettled life. When the nearby and near future disappeared, the established political order became a source of meaning and stability.

Phenomenological problematization

We started this collective project in mid-2018 with a distinct, ethnographically informed hunch rather than a defined theory. We shared the strong feeling that the notion of suspension resonates with our observations, and particularly with how our informants in China feel about their life. Our hunch seems validated by the reaction from the Chinese public to a number of interviews that I gave. While the interviews touched on various aspects of contemporary China, the topic of suspension caught the public imagination. An on-line lecture on suspension was downloaded 20,000 times between 8 November and 10 December 2019 even though the listener has to pay[39]. A more recent video interview, in which the reflection on "nearby" received most comments on the Internet, was watched 30 million times on Tencent and 60,000 times on Youtube in the first two weeks (28 November – 10

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[39] https://www.ximalaya.com/jiaoyu/29648636/218163126

December 2019).[40] Based on the overwhelming comments that I received, it is clear that the public immediately recognize what "suspension" refers to, and feel that the term gives them a vocabulary to express what have bothered and puzzled them for a long time. One audience marked that the notion "touches my wound", and another commented that "it pointed through the window paper"— light suddenly comes through.

Informed by the Marxian intellectual tradition, we embark on this project as way to problematize the world. The notion of suspension is especially appealing to us because it represents how working people in China problematize their own life. Existing metanarratives, such as neoliberalism, precariousness, social exclusion, can indeed explain *away* many phenomena, including hypermobility, but they fall short in capturing how people feel, calculate, and struggle inside these dynamics. If we miss out the anxieties and confusions, we will not understand what is going on in China no matter how much quantifiable data we muster and what neat framework that we develop. Notions such as suspension and complexed development problematizes reality from the inside out, through pre-conceptual experiences, rather than against given concepts or established criteria. Thus "phenomenological problematization".

Phenomenological problematization may lead to new insights by freeing us from predominant frameworks. More importantly, we hope that this approach will enable us to speak *about* subjectivity and speak *to* subjectivity at the same time, that is, to analyze ordinary people's activities in a way that is useful and empowering to the people. It is widely agreed that the terrain of subjectivity is at least as important as the terrain of system for initiating social changes. The shift in focus from system to subjectivity among Western intellectual Left, as most clearly represented by the Foucauldian schools and more recently the "affect turn", has been tremendously productive. But the relocation of attention to subjectivity after the 1960s is paradoxically accompanied by a loss of direct engagement with the public subjectivities. Systemic analyses, particularly in the Marxist tradition, aimed at transforming public perceptions and mobilizing actions. They do not necessarily focus on subjectivities, but they speak to subjectivities. Recent studies on subjectivities tend to treat individual feelings and thinking in narrow academic terms, often presented in languages that

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[40] The video can be viewed on Tencent
https://v.qq.com/x/cover/mzc00200c5sxk4p/o3026pze76s.html?, and on Youtube
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kj0Hu-HJMcI. I thank Beryl Liu, Co-founder of Matters Lab Limited for collecting the data.

are unintelligible to the masses.[41] Can academic rendering of subjectivities contribute to actors' reflections on their own subjectivities? Suspension seems to offer a promising starting point.

Phenomenological problematization itself has a long tradition in critical scholarship. As Tim Rogan demonstrated, the major critics of capitalism such as R. H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, and E. P. Thompson, all started their analyses with a general but deep sense of uneasiness with capitalism. Their uneasiness was based on their phenomenological appreciation of pre-capitalist ways of life. This made them especially attentive to ordinary people's mode of living, which is holistic, organic, hard to articulate but enables them to see through the deep implications of capitalism to real life. Few disciplinary research led by defined questions or neat framework can achieve.[42] In fact, any big and lasting idea is likely to start with phenomenological problematization. But the moment of phenomenological problematization, the real origin of theories, is obscured because research became supposedly value-free professionalized exercise and when theories present themselves as universal.

This poses special challenges for scholars in and on the global South. First, most established social theories are based on phenomenological problematization of European and north American experiences. Organic and empowering in their original context, they can be distorting and confusing in a different setting. "Precarity" as discussed earlier is an example. Second, while we know perfectly well that our phenomenological problematization is what got us concerned with a particular problem, we too often present our thinking in the shadow of theories derived from the North. We treat our excitement, worries, and confusions as noises, mainly because they are not recognizable to readers in the global North. "Can an authentic anthropology emerge from the critical intellectual traditions and counter-hegemonic

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[41] Examples of literature that provides sophisticated rendering of subjectivities but fails to communicate with the wide audience include what Ortner calls "dark anthropology" and particularly what Robinsons describes as research on the "suffering subject". Sherry B. Ortner, "Dark anthropology and its others: Theory since the eighties," HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory 6, no. 1 (Summer 2016): 47-73. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau6.1.004, last accessed 12 August 2019. Joel Robbins 2013. "Beyond the suffering subject: Toward an anthropology of the good." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute.* (N.S.) 19 (3): 447–96. David Graeber attributed the popularity of this type of research to the fact that anthropologists project their own (Western) middle class sensibility to their subject. 2014 Anthropology and the Rise of the Professional-managerial Class. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4 (3): 73-88. DOI: 10.14318/hau4.3.007.

[42] See Tim Rogan, *The Moral Economists: R. H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, E. P. Thompson, and the Critique of Capitalism.* Princeton University Press, 2018. Phenomenological sensibility is important for the key thinkers who developed what is known as the Frankfurt School too. See Simon Mussell, *Critical Theory and Feeling: The Affective Politics of the Early Frankfurt School.* Manchester University Press. 2017.

struggles of Third World peoples?" asked Faye Harrison.[43] Along a similar vein, Jean and John Comaroff asked "What if…it is the global south that affords privileged insight into the workings of the world at large? That it is from here that our empirical grasp of its lineaments, and our theory-work in accounting for them, is and ought to be coming, at least in significant part?"[44] If we are serious about knowledge decolonialization, we must let our, and our informants', excitement, worries, and confusions to surface and to guide our thinking. The subaltern have to speak out. The subaltern's plain narrative, *organized around their own concerns* (not as footnotes to correct Foucault!), can be more powerful in decolonializing knowledge than academic deconstruction of European discourses.

But phenomenological problematization offers no short cut in knowledge production. The journey will be long and bumpy. This special issue serves as an initial step in a long series of experimentation. Fully aware of our limit, we start by focusing on one particular subject group, though we believe that the concept of suspension has wider applications.[45] Our focus group is low-skilled migrants, which in turn include construction workers (Miriam Driessen), factory labour (Yang Wei), salespersons (Willy Sier), miners (Ralph Litzinger), club hostesses (Jiazhi Fengjiang), and petty traders (Ka-Kin Cheuk). Construction and factory jobs belong to the formal sector, club hostesses are typically informal, and sales and trading fall into a grey zone: they are registered and regulated in some aspects, but are informal in other aspects particularly in terms of labour relations. Across these sectors the labour relation is not always precarious but is certainly fragmented: solidarity among workers is low, the level of mobility is high, and the work is alienating.

Although labour relation is an underpinning element of suspension, few migrants identify themselves as labouring subjects only. Suspension is not only a work relation, it is a life experience. The articles in this special issue provide a spectrum of experiences of suspension firstly by covering a number of most common non-labour subjectivities through

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[43] Harrison, Faye. "Anthropology as an Agent of Transformation. Introductory Comments and Queries" in *Decolonizing Anthropology*: 1.

[44] Jean and John Comaroff. 2012. *Theory from the South: Or, how Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa*: 1.

[45] Just consider the contemporary academic world. We strive endlessly for more publications, more grants and more recognition, following fast shifting academic fashions. We know that this is not what research is supposed to be, and we remember that this is not how we were drove into academic research in the first place, but we tell ourselves and each other that if we do not instrumentalize the present, our very survival will be in question. "Be realistic now," we are kindly advised, "you can do more meaningful research later". Once we are realistic and suspend the "ought to" question, theories fly. Faster, higher and ever more convoluted, research is further removed from complex and often sticky local concerns.

which migrants experience suspension: urban tenants (Ou), youths (Sier), family members (Driessen; Yang), victims of work injuries (Litzinger), and men and women subject to dominant gender norms (Fengjiang and Driessen). Related to this, each article focuses on a particular aspect of how the condition of suspension is constituted. Ou traces the making of physical space that is always on the edge of being demolished but also expanding. Sier disentangles the rigorously implemented precarious labour relations in the sales sector. Driessen's story is about how home making drives labour into perpetual mobility. Yang and Fengjiang both delve deep into intimacies where ethical judgement and emotional attachment are suspended. Cheuk focuses on another distinct domain: low-end diasporic trade. He traces how the experiences of suspension among Indian traders in China changed over time due to shifts in the global economy and China's unique global position. Finally, Litzinger brings our attention to friendship and activism that emerged when migrants reengage with their present and near future.

Collectively, this special issue presents a multifaceted configuration of suspension. In this configuration intersectionality at two levels are particularly important. First, on the individual level, intersections between labour subjectivity and other social subjectivity frame how suspension is experienced. Second, on the institutional level, intersections between labour relations, state interventions, and familial/gender norms create the basic condition of suspension. The "African drifters", for instance, suspend their life by keeping postponing the plan of returning home permanently, as they rely on their role as migrant labour to serve their role as respectable men. Behind this is the intersection between family norms, state-led overseas development, and labour outsourcing through which state projects are carried out by commercial companies. In contrast, female factory workers and club hostesses suspend their normal life by setting time limits to the ambiguous relationships that they engage in. The factory workers' time limit is directly tied to the labour export system from China to Singapore which is strictly temporary. The hostesses, who are younger and most unmarried, set the time limit partly because of the fast declining "body price", which reflects a particular intersection between gender norms and affective labour.

This configuration, by identifying elementary components and the basic connections among them, develops phenomenological problematization into systemic and systematic analysis. By revealing that fragmented experiences and conflicting expectations are in fact caused by interconnected institutions, the configuration can potentially empower migrants and help to cultivate a new sense of collective.

This configuration provides a basis for future studies. The intersections, on both the individual level and the institutional level, are highly dynamic and constantly changing. We need to learn more about these connections. For instance, all the articles touch on temporal dimensions in suspension. Life cycle, labour relation, migration plans and wealth accumulation (e.g. appreciation of property value) all have strong temporal dimensions. How do the different temporalities influence each other? The delicate balance between immediate financial gains and long-term life plans is central to suspension. What kinds of calculus do people use to bridge the immediate to the long future when the near future is no longer on the horizon? In what context will migrants realize that the long-term goals are too elusive for them to sacrifice the present for? Finally, the configuration of suspension is historically specific. The articles by Cheuk and by Litzinger make this particularly clear. The very fact that migrants suspend their life to maximize earnings show that people are acutely aware that the growth cannot go on forever and suspension is not sustainable both individually and structurally. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that mobility is slowing down: smaller cities become more attractive than before, and more people relocate to countries in Africa and eastern Europe for their "relaxing" lifestyle[46]. How may suspension end? Would this mean an implosion of the Chinese economy, a repoliticization of social life, or a transition to a more sustainable model? Suspension indeed leads us to big and pressing questions of the coming decades.

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[46] Edwin *Lin.* "Big Fish in a Small Pond": Chinese Migrant Shopkeepers in South Africa. *International Migration Review.* Volume 48, Issue 1, Spring *2014:* 181–215.

Papers

Space of Suspension: Construction, Demolition, and Extension in a Migrant Neighborhood in Beijing

Communities with large concentrations of migrants, who often live in makeshift and illegal housing, have become a common scene on margins of large cities in China since the 1980s. Why do these so-called "urban villages" persist and even flourish despite of repeated crackdowns by the government? While scholarly literature and media reports have called attention to the discrimination and displacement faced by migrants in these communities, this paper sheds light on a more subtle dynamics of city making. Based on two years' field research in Hua Village on the northern outskirt of Beijing, I explore how the multilateral negotiations between local residents, migrant tenants, the village committee, and the municipal government have led to a cyclical movement of construction, demolition, and reconstruction of temporary housing. Local residents who lost farmland build rental houses for migrants as a main source of income. The grassroots government tacitly allows this for the benefit of the local economy, but also periodically demolishes these constructions and evicts migrants under the pressure from the higher level. Once the campaign of demolishing dies down, local residents seize the small window of opportunity to rebuild more houses to the maximum to accommodate more migrants, who, in their turn, extend their living and business space, before the next wave of demolishing comes. Such space of suspension—which has no legal permission and always faces the prospect of being demolished but nevertheless is constantly available and even expanding—provides migrants with leeway in developing their informal economy but offers no formal protection.

Tzu-Chi Ou received her PhD in social anthropology from Columbia University and is currently a postdoctoral fellow in Academia Sinica, Taiwan. Her work focuses on migration and the rural-urban divide in China, examining how the lived experience about place and space remakes the identity and existence of migrant workers. She is especially interested in how the dialectical relation between the pursuit of freedom and the sense of resignation among migrant workers mirrors the tension between economic growth and tightening political control in China.

"Giving up is the greatest failure":
Rural university graduates as sales workers in south and central China

Between 1978 and 2018 the percentage of the Chinese workforce in the service sector rose from 12.2 to 46.3 percent. A large share of this workforce works in sales, selling products that range from household goods, insurances, advertisement space, education, to various services. The proliferation of sales workers in China is facilitated by the dramatic increase in the number of college graduates, from 1 million in 1998 to 8.7 million in 2020. Sales jobs, which are particularly popular among youths from rural backgrounds and graduated from less reputable universities, are characterised by an extraordinarily high level of mobility. Scholarly literature sees this mobility as a sign of precarisation or informalisation of labour, while Chinese media sometimes attribute youth's hypermobility to the fickleness and spoiled nature of the "post-90s generation". Based on one year of fieldwork between 2015 and 2017, this article foregrounds sales workers' perspective and argues that they regard the jobs and hypermobility as a realistic means to participate in the mainstream urban economy for themselves and for their families. Faced with high levels of pressure, long and irregular working hours, competitive environments with little trust and solidarity among colleagues, the graduates refrain from confronting the system and instead try to maximise financial gains by working even harder and changing jobs more frequently, suspending many aspects of normal life and their political agency. They choose this strategy because they are aware of the multiple unequal relations they face in cities and want to seize the opportunities for upward mobility promised by the expanding higher education system and sales work. I thus argue that the sales workers' labour subjectivity should be understood in relation to their broader educational and life trajectories, beyond the frameworks based on the formality-informality and exploitation-resistance dichotomies prevalent in the literature on youth employment in the global South.

Willy Sier is completing her PhD in Anthropology and Asia Studies at University of Amsterdam, and will start her postdoctoral fellowship in the same university in 2020. She has published in *Modern China* and has made an ethnographic film about migration in China.

Africa Drifters (*feipiao*): Masculinity, temporality, and the double bind of mobility

Africa has been a major destination for low-skilled and skilled workers from China since the 1990s, when Chinese enterprises entered its growing construction industry as competitive contractors. The majority of these workers come from rural backgrounds. They toiled on building sites across China before moving to Africa or were the children of this generation of migrant workers and the first ones in their families to enjoy higher education. They have been part of a shifting migration frontier from rural-urban migration to overseas migration to countries in the global South. This movement has been further fuelled by the Belt and Road Initiative; a government-funded campaign that provides an outlet for not just commodities and technology, but also labour, through major infrastructure projects. Many of these workers, I found during 16 months of field research in Ethiopia between 2011 and 2017, have wound up in a state of suspension. Having become 'Africa drifters' (*feipiao*), as they phrased it, they find themselves in a state of hypermobility, as they attempt to meet social norms in the face of declining employment opportunities at home. For young men, the expectation of establishing and sustaining a family is the main hurdle they seek to overcome by moving from one project to another, and from one job to another. While overseas migration and the higher income it promises enables young men to live up to the roles of proper son, able husband, and responsible father, mobility simultaneously prevents them from taking up these roles. They find themselves in a double bind. Sustained by short-term contracts and rising living costs at home, this double bind, and the state of suspension it generates, is symptomatic of China's shift from an industrial to a post-industrial society in which opportunities fall short of expectations, especially for the blue-collar workers and engineers, who see mobility as the only way to create stability.

Miriam Driessen a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies and Jesus College, University of Oxford. Following young men from rural China to Ethiopia, her work attempts to link transformations in mainland China to overseas migration to Africa. She is the author of *Tales of Hope, Tastes of Bitterness: Chinese Road Builders in Ethiopia* (Hong Kong University Press, 2019). Miriam's research has appeared in *The China Quarterly*, *Anthropology Today*, the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, and *Public Culture.* A writer of literary nonfiction in her native language, Dutch, she is the author of *Het Verloren Dorp* (2011).

"Team up to have a life": Temporary Couples among Chinese Migrant Workers in Singapore

In Singapore, one of the major destinations in the world for labour migration from China, an increasing practice among unskilled Chinese workers has been the temporary cohabitation arrangement in the form of a typical heterosexual household, widely referred to by the migrants as "teaming up to have a life." This arrangement is based on the mutual understanding that the relationships will end once one party leaves Singapore. While both married and single men are likely to engage in such relationships, the majority of females involved are married women who migrated on their own to work. This paper, based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2016 and 2019, explores why the women actively seek such arrangements that they see as unsustainable and morally ambiguous. I first demonstrate that the women do so as a reaction to the institutional setup that treat them as nothing more than temporary labourers whose normal life outside of work is suspended. I then illustrate how this practice itself becomes a form of "suspension": the women instrumentalise the relationship as a "deal" in an exceptional circumstance for a limited period. Such deal helps them to maximise savings, which financial gains would enhance their position in the family back in China. In performing intimacy in the temporary partnership, they exploit their femininity and sexuality while avoiding emotional engagement, which serves their interest but also reinforces established gender ideology. Analysing through the notion of suspension, I move beyond the liberal feminist perspective that reads this practice as an example of women's empowerment and resistance against hegemony. I instead argue that women's agency should be understood in a multiscalar manner, which explains the coexistence of entrepreneurial manoeuvring and perpetuating inequalities.

Wei Yang is a PhD candidate in Sociology at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Her research interests include transnational labour migration, gender and family, migrant subjectivity, and women's empowerment. Before pursuing her PhD, she worked as a researcher in a Beijing-based independent think tank - the Centre for China and Globalization (CCG).

"To be a little more Realistic": Physical Mobility, Temporal Demarcation, and Ethical Nonjudgement among Nightclub Hostesses in Southeast China

The recent "ethical turn" in anthropology urges us to study ethics as people's mundane dispositions of making moral judgement as everyday practice rather than fixed doctrines. In China studies, an emerging literature foregrounds the diversification of moral frameworks which allows for individual agency and also creates anxiety. This paper calls attention to 'nonjudgement' as an important ethical practice. I do so by drawing upon my long-term ethnographic fieldwork on a group of young nightclub hostesses in a county town on China's Southeast coast. The hostesses' working life is highly mobile. Migrated from inland provinces, they live in unregistered monthly rental rooms that serve sojourning migrants, and sometimes travel to neighbouring towns in order to appear as newcomers for higher incomes even though this brings about higher risk of violence. Accompanying spatial mobility is their constant juggling between their relationships to their local boyfriends, customers, colleagues, local friends as well as their families afar during the day and the night. These relationships are spatially spread out and are temporally clearly demarcated: one-night customers versus temporary boyfriend versus permanent family relations. Instead of bringing about anxieties about divided selves or enabling navigation between multiple moralities, physical mobility and temporal demarcation enable them to suspend ethical judgement of their strategic engagement and disengagement with these relationships. They describe nonjudgement as a wisdom of 'to be a little more realistic' (*yao xianshi yidian*), making sure that they get what they want at the particular moment. But nonjudgement is not free from stress, a temporal fear—the fear about the loss of youth—creates tremendous anxiety about likely failures in achieving their long-term goals.

Jiazhi Fengjiang is a PhD candidate in Anthropology at London School of Economics and Political Science. She is currently writing up her PhD thesis that examines the rise of grassroots philanthropy and volunteerism in relation to changing meaning of work.

Late-Stage Suspension: Indian Textile Traders in China

Diasporic traders in lower-end sectors from the global South are becoming 'out of place' in the Pacific Asia. They are earning less profits while facing more immigration constraints as many countries in the region strive to upgrade their economies and phase out the low-end niches. One of such groups are Indian textile traders in southeast China. Based on my ongoing fieldwork that started in 2010, this paper traces the careers of the Indian traders in and beyond China since the 1990s. I summarize the vicissitude of their business trajectory into two stages of suspension. First, throughout the 2000s and early 2010s, the traders rapidly expanded their business through hypermobility between different parts of China, the Middle East, South Asia, and other parts of Asia particularly Hong Kong. The expansion model is also associated with a suspension of ethical consideration about labour and environment. That was a stage of suspension by choice, driven by a mentality of "getting rich at all cost first". The second stage started around 2015, when the decline in low-quality low-cost textile production in China coincides with the global recession in demand. The traders face steady decline in business yet they cannot find alternative source places because China's production capacity and stable trading policies are hard for other countries to replicate. As such, the current decline may indicate an end to the pattern of racing to the bottom and the tide-like development that spreads from more advanced countries to less developed. This late-stage suspension is suspension of no choice. The traders hang on with their business as long as they can without a vision of the future. This paper contributes to studies on migration and globalization by calling attention to the poorly understood phenomena of the decline of diasporic trading economy.

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The End of Suspension as the Beginning of Mobilization: Mining Workers with the Black Lung Disease

This essay attempts to use the suggestive metaphor of suspension to reflect on the struggles of miners and construction workers who suffer from pneumoconiosis, commonly referred to as "black Lung disease", in China. The essay is part of a larger research project exploring issues of life, death, and care in the context of mining, industrial explosions and extractive industries in China over the last several decades. This research has taken us into rural mountain mining villages in mostly Guizhou and Sichuan Provinces in the southwest of China, and it has also taken us online. We find that those suffering from disease do not always seek out treatment, so that illnesses remain hidden, both from employers and family members, until one is too debilitated to continue to work. Seeking care, compensation, and justice, some of our interlocutors speak of being in a constant state of waiting (for government action, or for medication or treatment) or in a constant state of watching, as bodies, with hardened and failing lungs, become irreversibly depleted and reach the end stages of life. In this condition some of them turned themselves into activists and pursue social justice and compensation through elabourate social media campaigns and petitioning practices, despite of the constant surveillance and threat of violence. Apart from the notion of suspension, I will also draw on the literature on "social suffering" and Giorgio Agamben's notion of "bare life." It is when they became bare lives that they ended the status of suspension, embraced their suffering, and started taking actions for justice.

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