

DOCTORAL THESIS

Leaving home from Chaohu: patterns and meanings of migration of educated young people

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**Leaving Home From Chaohu:
Patterns and Meanings of Migration of Educated Young People**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Prof. LI Si Ming

Hong Kong Baptist University

March 2015

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work which has been done after registration for the degree of PhD at Hong Kong Baptist University, and has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation submitted to this or other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

Signature: _____

Date: March 2015

ABSTRACT

A large and growing body of literature has been published on migration in China. This thesis has identified several challenges, namely, the destination-biased framework of migration, the neglect of heterogeneity of migrants, the relative dearth of research on the intersection of mobility and place attachment, and the suppression of the significance of the migrant subject. This research responds to these challenges by adopting a native-place perspective and a life-course/biographical approach and using mixed methods to explore the patterns and meanings of migration among educated young adults from peripheral China. The data come from a life-history questionnaire survey and biographical interviews with university and college graduates, who were born and raised in Chaohu and received higher education outside Chaohu. Firstly, it analyses educated young people's migration pathways from home to university and onwards to current place of residence, and develops a four-fold typology of spatial mobility (Stick-in, Move-down, Move-up, and Re-entry) from migration trajectories data. Secondly, it explores how spatial mobility is implicated in the process of bonding with places by examining educated young adults' place attachment and belonging. Four types of migrants (Translocals, Departers, Aliens, and Settlers) and three types of returnees (the Trapped, the Bonded, and the Rooted) are classified. Thirdly, through the lens of agency as a socially situated process, it explores how migration decision-making reflects socially structured patterns, how agency interplays with social structure, and how agency operates in a differentiated and dynamic way. Meanwhile, through its attention to migration aspirations, it further explores the potential for meaningful experiences of geographical mobility to change migrants' subjectivities and considers the emotional dynamics involved in the intersection of identity with senses of place. This thesis contributes to the field of youth migration by providing a mapping of the spatial patterns for migration of educated young people and addressing the complexities and dynamics of spatial mobility with a case study. Also, the present work highlights the importance of a biographical approach that allows us to appreciate the significance of the migrant subject and to investigate the ongoing nature of migration processes.

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