

## *A “Transient Neighborhood”: Africans’ Spatial Concentration in Guangzhou, China*

Dong Niu, Sainan Lin, Hongsheng Chen, and Zhigang Li

### *Abstract*

The formation and rise of African neighborhoods in Guangzhou, particularly Xiaobei (小北), have recently aroused much scholarly concern. The Africans’ spatial cluster imparts knowledge, allows for the exchange of information, is a hub of business and acts as a spiritual home, which links the businesses and lives of Africans, who may live far away, to Xiaobei. However, the formation and development of this spatially concentrated area were not natural and arbitrary; they were strictly controlled by the state and local administrative regime. Based on ethnographic research in Xiaobei, we found that the high

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**Dong Niu** is a postdoctoral fellow in the School of International Studies and Academy of Overseas Chinese Studies, Jinan University, China.

**Sainan Lin** is Associate Professor in the School of Urban Design, Wuhan University, and in the Hubei Habitat Environment Engineering Research Center of Engineering and Technology, China. Correspondence should be sent to [sainan.lin@whu.edu.cn](mailto:sainan.lin@whu.edu.cn).

**Hongsheng Chen** is Associate Professor in the School of Architecture, Southeast University, China.

**Zhigang Li** is Professor and Dean in the School of Urban Design, Wuhan University, and in the Hubei Habitat Environment Engineering Research Center of Engineering and Technology, China.

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ethnic-social diversity, high mobility, nonintegration, and network of the members of the neighborhood differ in nature from ghettos, immigrant/ethnic neighborhoods, or immigrant/ethnic enclaves in typical immigration countries. As such, we argue that the traditional term “immigrant” or “transmigrant” neighborhood, which developed on the basis of migration phenomena in the Global North, cannot address the Africans in Guangzhou properly. Therefore, we turn to the term “transient neighborhood” to better understand recent “immigration” in Chinese cities. In this vein, we articulate the flexibility and instability of recent globalization and how the state plays an increasingly significant role during the process.

As a developing country, China has seen many social elites emigrate to other countries in search of a more relaxed economic, political, social, and cultural environment. Meanwhile, China, as the world’s second largest economy, has also attracted many foreigners. Although foreigners from South Korea, Japan, the United States, India, and Russia make up the top five in terms of their numbers in Guangzhou,<sup>1</sup> Africans in Guangzhou have recently received the most attention. Xiaobei, as a major African spatial cluster in Guangzhou, has been widely discussed in social media and administration and academic research.<sup>2</sup> However, the current research often described the African-concentrated area of Xiaobei as an “immigrant neighborhood” or “enclave”<sup>3</sup> that developed from research based on studies of migration to the Global North (specifically the United States). Are terms such as “immigrant” and “immigrant enclave” applicable to the Global South? Specifically the Africans in Guangzhou, China? Following the call upon “comparative studies”<sup>4</sup> and “provincializing urbanism”<sup>5</sup> in the literature of recent urban studies, the theories originated in the North may not be applicable to the situation of the South, while a comparative study of existing concepts and local practices may generate important new insights or even new theories.

As such, this article aims to examine the nature of African-concentrated areas of Xiaobei in Guangzhou—whether they can be regarded as “immigrant enclaves,” as we have learned from the experiences of countries in the Global North. The remainder of this article is structured as follows: The first part is a literature review on immigrant settlement research in Western Countries and current studies of Africans in Guangzhou, China. Largely from a comparative historical and politic-economic perspective,

we develop a framework to decipher its modality. The second part and the third part explore the historical and current reasons for Africans' spatial concentration in Xiaobei, which would help us understand the nature of African neighborhoods in China. The fourth part summarizes the features of African-concentrated areas of Xiaobei from the ethnic-social, spatial, and politic-economic dimensions and compare these defining features with "immigrant enclave." Then we coin the term of "transient neighborhood" according to the above dimensions, to denote the modalities/nature of African neighborhoods in Xiaobei. The final part makes a conclusion and further examines the concept of "immigrant" to discuss whether it can be used to describe Africans in China.

## 1. Literature Review

In immigration countries, immigrant concentrated areas are often called "ghettos," "immigrant/ethnic neighborhoods," or "immigrant/ethnic enclaves."<sup>6</sup> "Concentration" and "segregation" are the two main topics that concern scholars. In the early twentieth century, as suggested by Park,<sup>7</sup> against the U.S. context where residents of the same race lived together or were clustered, its "neighborhood sentiment" often combined together with "antagonisms" or "class" conflicts. Historically, immigrants have first settled in communities defined by their national origin, forming enclaves that provide mutual support and possibly a way out and into the mainstream.<sup>8</sup> The formed concentration plays four functions: defend members within a larger society, socially support members to pass "ports of entry" into a larger society, preserve members' cultural heritage, and attack outsiders by taking violent forms or non-violent political action.<sup>9</sup> Immigrants in these concentrated areas often experience contact, competition, adaptation, and finally assimilation into mainstream society.<sup>10</sup> Centered on concentration and segregation, the terms "ghettos," "immigrant/ethnic neighborhoods," and "immigrant/ethnic enclaves" have been highly conceptualized. An enclave is a spatially concentrated area in which members of a particular population group, self-defined by ethnicity or religion or otherwise, congregate as a means of enhancing their economic, sociopolitical, and/or cultural development, compared with ghetto, which is a spatially concentrated area used to separate and to limit a particular involuntarily defined population group (usually by race) held to be, and treated as, inferior by the dominant society.<sup>11</sup>

However, those terms were developed on the basis of migration phenomena in the Global North and were used to strengthen the dynamic relationship between marginal immigrants and their host society.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, it will be problematic to apply “immigrant enclave” to describe a spatial concentration, where foreigners do not want to integrate into the host society, and they are not endowed with immigrant status and rights to settle down according to the law of the host country. Moreover, the concept of immigrant enclave was based on the traditional understanding of “community,” which stems from Tönnies’s work *Community and Society*.<sup>13</sup> It referred to a community as a “closed system,” with members who are homogeneous and closely connected by similar interests. Nevertheless, with the increased globalization and development of technology, the meaning of “community” is changing. Community has become “a web of group affiliations.”<sup>14</sup> The members in the community may not be homogeneous and possibly even have conflicts, but they must be dependent on each other. Mobility and network are the key features of a community. Members in the community can form various relationships that are not limited by the geographic boundaries of the community. As such, it is important to understand the changing nature of community, which will help us decipher the modality of Africans’ concentration in Guangzhou.

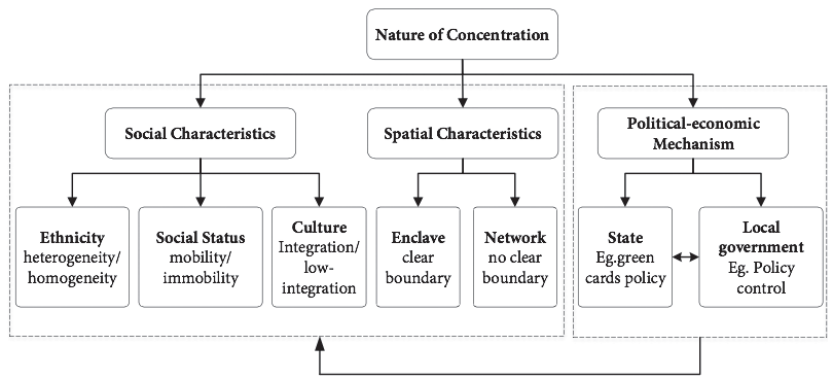
Many studies have been carried out on Africans living in Xiaobei, Guangzhou, China, yet no consensus has been reached on the nature of Africans’ spatial concentration. First, in terms of sociocultural boundaries, there is major debate on the nature of African-concentrated areas in Guangzhou. Bodomo suggested that the African trading community in Guangzhou is an emerging “bridge” for Africa-China relations, which is neither entirely isolated nor fully integrated into local society.<sup>15</sup> Li found that Xiaobei is a place of sojourn where African migrants struggle to live without knowledge of the Chinese language.<sup>16</sup> Their findings indicated that control by the local police and the economic downturn have weakened the linkages between China and Africa. They further concluded that Xiaobei is a typical ethnic enclave featuring Africans of both high mobility and socioeconomic diversity. Zhang also considered Guangzhou’s African-concentrated areas as ethnic enclaves.<sup>17</sup> He claimed that their formation is not necessarily due to cultural affinity but is driven by factors such as business opportunities, the mode of trade operation and the cost of accommodation. On the contrary, there is an increasingly heterogeneous population, including a

high proportion of Chinese, in Guangzhou's African-concentrated areas.<sup>18</sup> Bertoncello and Bredeloup disagreed on calling the trading post an ethnic enclave, instead considering it a marketplace that connects China and Africa, accommodating more or less settled or temporarily settled sub-Saharan African traders.<sup>19</sup> Zhou suggested that Guangzhou's African enclaves are different from the ethnic enclaves in America in terms of both organization and structure.<sup>20</sup> To some extent, Guangzhou's migrant enclaves are similar to the urban ghettos in America due to the high cultural diversity and low social cohesion, yet the underlying mechanism is very different.

Next, in terms of political and legal boundaries, scholars started to focus on Guangzhou's African-concentrated areas through the nation and law. The existing studies have shown that the Guangzhou government has used tough immigrant policies to impede the formation of African enclaves in Xiaobei.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, related laws and acts have been implemented to prevent the African community from extending southward toward nearby "Party and government buildings."<sup>22</sup> In short, the contact between African settlers and local Chinese is controlled. The latter do not see Africans as a cultural threat.<sup>23</sup>

The above literature review has shown that there are ongoing debates about the nature of African-concentrated areas in Xiaobei, Guangzhou. As such, it is urgent to "revisit" these areas and investigate the meaning of Xiaobei to Africans in Guangzhou. This would help us understand the nature of immigrant space today in general, and the dynamics of Africans' concentration in Guangzhou in particular. We argue that the nature of Africans' concentration in Guangzhou is different from "immigrant enclave," in the aspects of social and spatial dimensions, as well as its underlying mechanisms (Figure 1). As such, we contribute to the literature by examining the new nature of immigrant space in the context of newly appeared South-South mobility, largely from the lens of comparative perspective. By articulating the specialties of the newly appeared "immigrant" concentration in Guangzhou, we critically examine the applicability of extant concepts such as "ethnic enclaves" in Southern cities such as Guangzhou. Moreover, we highlight the significant role of the state and consider it as one of the major forces that result in the transiency of African neighborhoods in Guangzhou. In this way, we contribute to the understanding of glocalization, its mechanisms, and the role of the state.

Figure 1: Research Framework



The data used in this article mainly came from our ethnographic field work conducted between July 2013 and May 2015 by Niu.<sup>24</sup> The fieldwork applied mixed methods including participant observation, semistructured interviews, and unstructured interviews. During the initial stage of the field work, communications with more than 300 Africans were established, and strong ties were kept with approximately 90 of them via mobile applications like WhatsApp and WeChat. Finally, 19 of them were intensively interviewed around 30 times in total, and could be regarded as the key informants for this study (Table 1). It should be noted that some of these key informants are the leaders of their associations, with some having lived in China for more than 10 years.

Table 1: General Information for the 19 Key Informants

No.	Gender	Age	Identity	Nationality	Cumulative time in China
01	Male	22	Trader	Kenya	4 years
02	Male	24	Student	Guinea	6 months
03	Male	24	Student	Congo (Kinshasa)	1 year
04	Male	34	Trader	Congo (Kinshasa)	10 years
05	Male	35	Trader	Nigeria	2 years
06	Female	38	Trader	Tanzania	1.5 years
07	Male	28	Trader	Mali	2 years
08	Male	26	Student	Congo (Brazzaville)	3 years
09	Female	26	Student	Cameroon	9 months
10	Male	23	Asylum seeker	Somalia	2 years
11	Male	24	Trader	Niger	2 years
12	Female	18	Asylum seeker	Somalia	1 year
13	Male	39	Trader	Nigeria	2 years

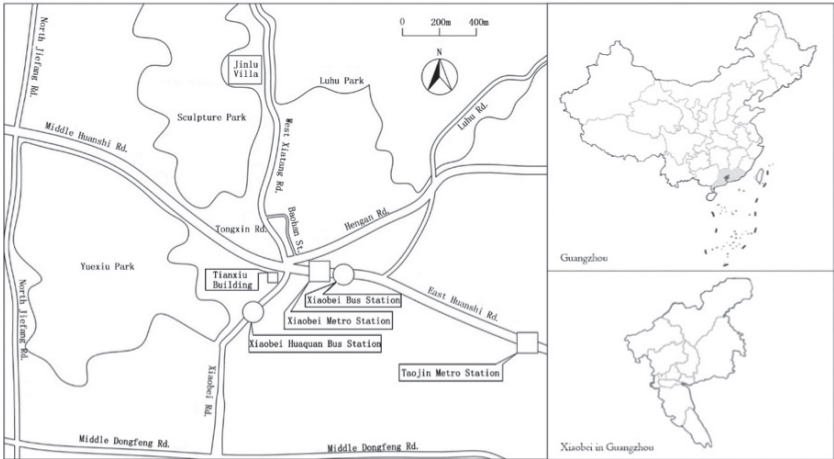
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No.	Gender	Age	Identity	Nationality	Cumulative time in China
14	Male	37	Trader	Senegal	5 years
15	Female	25	Trader	Zambia	2 years
16	Male	35	Trader	Uganda	3 years
17	Male	41	Trader	Mali	8 years
18	Male	18	Student	Congo (Brazzaville)	3 months
19	Male	31	Trader	Sudan	2 years

2. Historical Reasons for Africans’ Concentration in Guangzhou

“Xiaobei” is the area around Xiaobei Road (小北路), Xiaobei Huaquan Bus Station (小北花圈公交站), Xiaobei Bus Station (小北公交站), and Xiaobei Metro Station (小北地鐵站). Taking the Tianxiu building (天秀大廈) as the center, the activity range for Africans in Xiaobei generally extends to the intersection between Middle Huanshi Road (環市中路) and North Jiefang Road (解放北路) in the west, to the intersection between Xiaobei Road and Middle Dongfeng Road (東風中路) in the south, to Taojin Metro Station (淘金地鐵站) in the east, and to the north of the Jinlu Villa (金麓山莊) (Figure 2). Meanwhile, for Africans, Xiaobei can also mean “Dengfeng” (登峰, Dengfeng village, which is also called “Don Franck” among Africans), or “Baohan” (寶漢, Baohan Street), “Elephant” (金山象, Jinshan Elephant Trading Centre), “Yueyang” (越洋, Yueyang Trading Centre, District A), or “Tianxiu building.” These geographical terms combining with places such as “Tongxin” (童心路), “Xiatangxilu” (下塘西路), “Lujinglu” (麓景路), and “Hengfulu” (恒福路) constitute Xiaobei’s space for Africans.

Figure 2: Map of Xiaobei



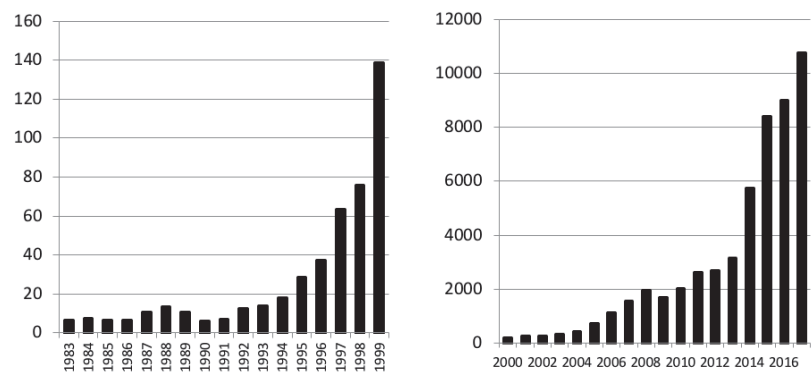
Xiaobei Gate, where the name “Xiaobei” comes from, was one of eight gates of the traditional Guangzhou city in the Ming-Qing dynasty.<sup>25</sup> The traditional spatial range of Guangzhou city starts from Yuexiu Road (越秀路) in the east to Renmin Road (人民路) in the west and Yuexiu Park (越秀公園) along the north wall, which is today’s Xiaobei. At the end of the Qing dynasty, the landscape of Xiaobei was still mainly agricultural. It also served as a cemetery.<sup>26</sup> After 1950, the landscape of Xiaobei started to change tremendously. Following the local government’s call, people planted trees on Yuexiu Mountain, built new roads, dug lakes, and constructed cultural and sports venues. Meanwhile, infrastructure construction has been continuously extending toward Xiaobei.

The most important reason for Africans coming to Guangzhou is not only the increasing economic and trade cooperation between Guangzhou and Africa, but also the direct promotion by the local government. First, the export value from Guangzhou to Africa is growing rapidly. As one of the departure ports of the Maritime Silk Road, Guangzhou had both direct and indirect connections with Africa. However, during the Canton System period (1757–1842), Guangzhou was often passively involved in economic and trade connections between itself and Africa, which were dominated by Western countries. Even at the beginning of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, Guangzhou mainly exported to Hong Kong and Macao, secondarily to Southeast Asia, but not to African countries. After China’s reform and opening up, economic and trade connections between Guangzhou and Africa gradually developed. In 1983, the export value from Guangzhou to Africa was only \$6.22 million. It increased substantially to \$138.5 million by 1999. In 1998, although Guangzhou’s foreign trade had been greatly influenced by the East Asian financial crisis, the export value to Africa still increased about 20 percent compared to the previous year. In 2017, the export value from Guangzhou to Africa had reached \$10.76 billion (Figure 3).

Second, the local government greatly supported the export of goods and encouraged investment in Africa. Since 1993, on the basis of consolidating the traditional markets in Hong Kong, Macao, Europe, and the United States, Guangzhou has vigorously developed new markets in Latin America, the Middle East, the Commonwealth of Independent States, Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, Africa, and neighboring countries. From 1995 to 1998, the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, Guangzhou Sub-council (GZCCPIT) held several Guangzhou trade fairs in South Africa. In 2000, to help Guangzhou enterprises



Figure 3: 1983–1999 and 2000–2017 Guangzhou Total Exports (Unit: Million Dollar) to Africa



Source: Guangzhou Statistical Yearbook data from 1984 to 2018

expand in African markets, both the GZCCPIT and Guangzhou World Trade Centre invited a high-level delegation from South Africa to visit Guangzhou. In the same year, the Canton Fair received 180 African leaders who had just attended the “Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Ministerial Conference Beijing 2000.” Thereafter, the GZCCPIT and Canton Fair Merchant Group paid many visits to trade fairs in various African countries, which helped to promote the diversification strategy for Guangzhou’s foreign trade market, expand Guangzhou’s publicity, and attract African traders. Meanwhile, the Guangzhou government also encouraged Guangzhou enterprises to invest in Africa and carry out foreign-contracted projects. In 2000, 28 African ambassadors and counsellors attended the Guangdong-Africa economic investment orientation meeting and discussed the prospect of investments between Guangdong and Africa.<sup>27</sup> From January to July 2011, the number of investment projects in Africa from Guangzhou enterprises accounted for one-fourth of China’s total investment projects in Africa.<sup>28</sup>

With the increasing export value from Guangzhou to Africa and the Guangzhou government’s support of investment in Africa, a number of African traders started looking for business opportunities in Guangzhou. Since then, Africa and Xiaobei have developed direct connections. Africa has become the main source of Canton Fair participants since 2005. In 2010, the number of African merchants reached 30,471, accounting for 8 percent of the total participants of the Canton Fair. This is in accord with

the oral history of Africans Niu interviewed. As one businessman from Congo (Kinshasa) recalled:

I have been coming back and forth between my hometown and Guangzhou for 10 years. Every year, I come to Guangzhou two or three times, and stay one or two months each time. Guangzhou has changed tremendously in the past 10 years. In 2004, there was no subway. Even in 2008, there wasn't such a convenient transportation system. Dengfeng [Xiaobei] is so different now. You had to walk a long way to find a shop, because there weren't many shops. There weren't many Africans either. You could even count the total number of them. After 2008, the total number of foreigners increased substantially. The Olympic Games were held in China.<sup>29</sup>

Third, the local government directly promoted the concentration of Africans in Xiaobei. "Jinlu Villa," built in 2006, is a residential community built by Dengfeng Group Company, a local village committee. In 2007, the first management and service station for foreigners was established on Dengfeng Street. The station helped guide foreigners to live in Jinlu Villa in moderate concentration,<sup>30</sup> with effective management and services.<sup>31</sup> In 2012, an integrated family service center was established in Jinlu Hexie Apartment, which provided free yet professional social services for foreigners in the area. As to China, the services and management implemented by Guangzhou's departments are groundbreaking. Therefore, since 2008, Jinlu Villa, as a demonstration plot for Guangzhou's foreign affairs services and management, was often visited or inspected by state, provincial, and city officers. This also shows the government's strong will to explore the experience of foreign affairs management and services. Accordingly, the relatively good service has attracted a great number of Africans.

In sum, the rise of Xiaobei as an African cluster is largely due to the increasing economic and trade cooperation between Guangzhou and Africa, and the direct promotion of the local government. Guangzhou's growing exports to Africa, the promotion of Guangzhou's goods, and the Guangzhou government's encouragement of African investment jointly attracted African traders.

### **3. Contemporary Reasons for the Africans' Concentration in Xiaobei**

Recently, Xiaobei has become more than just a geographical space, but a place with multiple meanings for Africans in China. No matter how far away, the lives of Africans are connected with the area.

First, Xiaobei is a *de facto* international trade school for African traders. Although quite a few Africans have received higher education or even graduate education (education level is distinct among Africans from different countries), they have to start from the beginning to learn international trade knowledge after they come to Guangzhou. This knowledge is important for Africans who have just started a business in Guangzhou. In fact, if one is patient enough, one can learn a lot from one's predecessors about price negotiations, settling transnational accounts for freight container costs, legal knowledge for establishing a new company, as well as how to place orders and avoid trade disputes. When asked about learning international trade knowledge, one Congo (Kinshasa) businessman said:

After I came to Guangzhou [Xiaobei], first I went to their company [which was owned by another person from Congo (Kinshasa)]. And then I just sat there and watched what they did. Why? Because when you just come to Guangzhou, you know nothing, and of course you have to follow these experienced people. You follow them everywhere they go. Until you get familiar with everything, get to know how to run a business, and then you don't need to follow them.<sup>32</sup>

Second, Xiaobei is an information exchange station. In Guangzhou, all information related to Africans' businesses and lives is delivered through Xiaobei. Africans can get better exchange rates for dollars or euros from unregistered banks in Xiaobei compared to official banks located in the area;<sup>33</sup> they can conveniently make international calls and buy international air tickets; they can also pick up the latest domestic information, legal information concerning the validity of their visa, or even specific information on a product or the development of a certain factory. Due to Africans' familiarity with Xiaobei, they prefer to meet friends and clients there. For many Africans, "meet in Xiaobei" means "meet at the D exit of Xiaobei Metro Station." One Niger businessman described the role of Xiaobei as an information exchange station as follows:

I live on West Xiatang Road, which costs me 3,000 yuan for a two-bedroom apartment. Although the living cost in Baiyun [a district of Guangzhou] is much cheaper, it's not good for a businessman. You know many foreigners, when they arrive in China for the first time, they go to Xiaobei directly after they get out of the airport. They call you from Xiaobei, but you tell them that you need an hour or two to get there [because you live in Baiyun]. What can we do? And you also need to go to the market with your clients every day. It

is not good. It is the reason why it's better for foreigners to live close to Xiaobei.<sup>34</sup>

Third, Xiaobei is a commercial and trade center. There are many shops in the shopping malls and office buildings that are engaged in international trade. Africans need to inspect the factories and finalize orders in factories, in order to reduce the middlemen in international trade and lower the risks. However, due to the increasingly tightened visa policy for Africans, many Africans are permitted to stay in China for only seven days on a tourist visa. This is not enough time to inspect the factory, place orders, and load the containers. This situation has created opportunities for factory agents and freight agents in Xiaobei. Xiaobei has also become a commercial and trade center for Africans and other foreigners. One Ugandan businessman described Xiaobei as follows:

There are many good factories in Foshan and Shenzhen. If you are in Guangzhou, you can easily go back and forth. They usually set up offices for their agents in Xiaobei. If you cannot visit their factories in Foshan or Shenzhen, you can place orders with their agents in Xiaobei.<sup>35</sup>

Last but not the least, Xiaobei is a spiritual home for Africans. In the process of adapting to Guangzhou's local environment, common nationality-based and leader-centered associations (unregistered NGOs) have gradually formed in Guangzhou, which not only provide assistance and guidance for the members internally but also interact with other associations on the behalf of their own groups externally.<sup>36</sup> Africans facing difficulties can ask for help from the associations. As a supportive network, these social associations have promoted the process of Africans' localization and increased Africans' sense of belonging as well as the sense of "at homeness."<sup>37</sup> The majority of African countries have set up their association offices in Xiaobei. In addition, one can find African hair stylists, African food, and African music and speak hometown dialects; there are also African women engaged in prostitution. Speaking of walking down Tongxin Road, one Congo (Kinshasa) businessman claimed, "Every time I come back to Xiaobei from inspecting factories in other cities, I feel like I'm home. I don't feel this way even when I go back to my home country."<sup>38</sup>

Above all, Xiaobei is more than its commercial and trade functions and geographical space. It has multiple meanings to Africans, which are the current reasons motivating Africans to come. It not only imparts

knowledge and allows for exchanges of information and business transactions, but also has become a spiritual home for the Africans in Guangzhou and elsewhere in China. Based on the multiple meanings to Africans, the concept of “transient neighborhood” will be proposed as follows.

#### **4. The Nature of Africans in Xiaobei as a “Transient Neighborhood”**

##### **a. The Politic-Economical Mechanism: Impacts of State and Local Regimes**

For a long time, dozens of laws and regulations targeted at foreigners in China were implemented by dozens of departments at different levels of the Chinese government. At the ministerial level, there are at least 17 authorities in charge of foreigners in China.<sup>39</sup> Guangzhou’s Africans often considered the “Exit and Entry Administration Law of the People’s Republic of China” and “Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on Administration of the Entry and Exit of Foreigners” as “the law for immigrants” and the division of Exit & Entry Administration Department of Public Security of Guangzhou City as “the bureau for immigrants.” Permanent residence permits for foreigners in China, known as “green cards,” have been described as “the card which is most difficult to get in the world” due to the high threshold and complicated application procedure. It wasn’t until April 2018 that the “national immigration administration” was set up as a department of the Chinese government.<sup>40</sup> Despite that, the nature of China as a nonimmigration country has never changed. In the globalization era, the purpose of the new State Immigration Administration is to attract more foreign talent to speed up China’s development, while most Africans are obviously not a desired foreign group by the Chinese government. As such, African traders still have to apply and renew their visas frequently to maintain their legal status in China.

In fact, Africans are much more regulated by the local government, mainly Guangzhou police, which often triggers conflicts between Africans and China’s nonimmigrant environment. Two “mass incidents,” protests arranged by Africans that were triggered by police raids in Guangzhou, were aimed at Guangzhou’s local police station. Although they did not take place in Xiaobei, this has increased the determination of the local government to crack down on illegal immigration, residence, and employment of foreigners in the African-concentrated areas. Since 2014,

Xiaobei has been increasingly controlled by Guangzhou's government. They not only applied maximum fines to punish "illegal" Africans but also rewarded those who reported "illegal" foreigners. Guangzhou police frequently set up stations on the streets of Xiaobei to check the visas and residential registrations of foreigners (mostly Africans). Sometimes dozens or even hundreds of police showed up in major African-concentrated areas such as the Tianxiu building, Jinshan Elephant Trading Centre, and Jinlu Villa. During these checks, they controlled the exits and swept the floors, one by one. Even some law-abiding Africans were scared and ran away from police questioning. In May 2014, foreigners in Jinlu Villa who were involved in drug trafficking were arrested. The local government began to promote the installation of a residential access control system. As such, the formation and development of spatial concentrated areas for Africans were not natural and arbitrary but were strictly controlled by the local government. Since then, many Africans have moved out of Xiaobei to avoid the strict control by the local government. Therefore, the state and local government regimes have greatly influenced the nature of Africans spatial cluster in Guangzhou, which is reflected in the social and spatial characteristics of Africans in Xiaobei.

## **b. The Social Characteristics of Africans in Xiaobei**

### *High Ethnic-Social Diversity*

In the context of an immigration country, immigrants are often described and stereotyped in terms of their relatively stable political status, economic level, cultural characteristics, and professional roles. But in Guangzhou, it is hard to do the same. On the one hand, the African-concentrated areas in Guangzhou have high ethnic diversity. Take the data from 1 April 2014 for example: in the north of Middle Huanshi Road (Tongxin community, Xiatang community), there were foreigners from 31 African countries and 27 other countries and regions.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, these areas in Guangzhou also consist of various social classes. First, there are some political elites among Africans in Guangzhou. For example, some association leaders maintain close connections with their embassies and consulates, to serve the people of their country in Guangzhou and increase their chances to meet the leaders of their own country when they visit China. Second, Africans differ greatly from each other in terms of economic level. Some own apartments (although many are registered under their Chinese wives' names) and private

parking spaces, but others quickly become poor due to personal financial problems. Overemphasis on the Africans in Xiaobei has not only obscured the presence of other foreigners but also neglected the local Chinese, who are the majority in the area. The high ethnic-social diversity of Xiaobei indicates that the African-concentrated areas in Guangzhou are neither ethnic places nor closed areas. Such a concentrated area is unlikely to have the functions of defense, social support, preservation, and attack.

### *High Mobility*

In an immigration country, after immigrants obtain immigrant status, particularly after obtaining employment, their life tends to be stable, and their spatial activity range is also gradually reduced. However, for the majority of Africans in China, their period of stay and accommodation are not stable and fixed. African businessmen often travel back and forth between China and Africa and around different provinces and cities in China seeking business opportunities and solving visa issues. The M-type (business and trade) visa gives Africans high mobility. Many of them have to leave China, to places such as Hong Kong or Macao, then come back to keep their visa valid. Even if they know that there will be no business transactions, Africans still travel around Guangzhou, the Pearl River Delta, and even other professional markets in China. This movement is often seen as unavailing, aimless, and similar to so-called "blind flow" in the Chinese *hukou* system. However, Africans believe that high mobility has its own function: becoming familiar with markets and Chinese businessmen creates the possibility of future business transactions. Being static for too long is considered "lazy," "indulging in pleasure and comfort," and "resting on one's laurels" by their own people, and this influences their reputation in their own country.

A negative reputation, on the one hand, places great pressure on them. On the other hand, it may also impact the realization of their business model. For instance, some Africans engage in freight services, where the expansion of the customer network depends on a positive reputation. For a period, the above transnational and transregional business activities force Africans to live in a "homeless" condition. If one connects all of the places that Africans go during their daily lives, they will seem to be living in a network. As such, the use of locational attributes such as "China," "Guangzhou," or "Xiaobei" to describe Africans' location seems problematic.

*Nonintegration*

The Chicago School argued that immigrants enter the host society by experiencing contact, competition, adaptation, and assimilation, which naturally happens without any external forces. However, it is common among scholars that Guangzhou's Africans contact local people only for business reasons. In fact, even in business, Chinese and Africans lack a common language for communication, so instead use "calculator communication," which is just using digital calculators to exchange the ideas of prices.<sup>42</sup> Some of the informants generally believed they could not make Chinese friends before they learned Chinese and that the Chinese businessmen they do know are not true friends. Language is a necessary for crossing the cultural boundary and integrating into the host country. However, Africans who speak English do not think it is necessary to learn Chinese. An African student who goes to university in Guangzhou said,

For those who can speak English, Chinese is not important, because they believe English is the world's first language. Although Chinese is the first language in China, they still do not care about it. They believe, "My language is English, I can use it to deal with my business." Very few of these Africans who speak English join the Chinese courses in my college. And others, because their visa allows them to stay in China only for a quite short time, such as 10 days, a month, 3 months, they don't have time to learn Chinese, so they won't join the courses in my college.<sup>43</sup>

For those students who are trying to learn Chinese, their goal is not to integrate into Chinese society through language but to try to gain some employment advantage in their own country. Many foreign students from Africa explained that the reason they learn Chinese is because there are a lot of Chinese in Africa engaged in mineral development, real estate, and infrastructure construction, so there is a vast job market in language translation between Chinese and local languages. It is true that many African children who have grown up in Guangzhou, Africans who have married local people, and businessmen who own a company in Guangzhou have achieved a high degree of social integration. However, Chinese panic over African "immigrants" has magnified this phenomenon and obscured the truth that the ultimate goal of Africans who come to Xiaobei is not to achieve upward social mobility in China and integrate into Guangzhou's society but to facilitate their business transactions.



### c. The Spatial Characteristics of Africans in Xiaobei

Enclave often describes a bounded small area that is within a larger area where people of a different kind or nationality live. Immigrants who live inside the enclave often have little contact with people outside their neighborhood.<sup>44</sup> However, Xiaobei not only is a concentrated area for Africans but also links many Africans who live far away from Xiaobei. As a Sudan businessman said:

Now I just stay in the hotel here [in Xiaobei], most times I stay in my home [rental housing] in Foshan because I have clients over there. I come to Xiaobei to visit my friends.<sup>45</sup>

One Cameroon woman who studies in Wuhan said:

In the past three years, I only went back to Africa once during the winter vacation of the first academic year due to the long distance. At that time, I only had two Chinese friends. I was so homesick. During Christmas of the second year, I visited Guangzhou and got to know my boyfriend. He runs a business in Xiaobei and often comes to visit me in Wuhan. Now it's summer vacation time. I've come to Guangzhou to see him.<sup>46</sup>

There are also many stories of Africans moving back to Xiaobei due to loneliness. For example, to seek a better living environment, one Cameroon reporter moved to Tianhe district from Jinlu Villa. She paid 5,500 yuan for a two-bedroom apartment. However, she soon felt lonely in Tianhe. She said: "Living there [Tianhe], there is no food, no friends and no atmosphere."<sup>47</sup> After only a month, she moved back to Jinlu Villa, giving up her 9,000-yuan rental deposit.

As such, although there is spatial concentration of Africans in Xiaobei, the actual social networks are far beyond the geographical boundary. The spatial characteristic of Africans in Xiaobei is more of an open network than a closed neighborhood with a clear boundary.

In sum, the formation and development of Africans' spatially concentrated area was not natural and arbitrary but was strictly controlled by the state and local government. The social and spatial characteristics of Africans in Xiaobei differ in nature from immigrant/ethnic enclaves in immigration countries, and the underlying mechanisms also vary. Therefore, we named the Africans' spatially concentrated area of Xiaobei a "transient neighborhood." The comparative defining features of "immigrant enclave" and "transient neighborhood" are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: The Comparative Features of Immigrant Enclave and Transient Neighborhood**

		Immigrant enclave	Transient neighborhood
<b>Mechanism</b>	The state and local government regime	Voluntary	Strictly controlled
<b>Social characteristics</b>	Ethnicity	Homogeneity: particular group of ethnicity or religion or otherwise	Heterogeneity: multiple ethnicity, religion, and otherwise
	Social status	Low mobility; upward social mobility	High mobility; non-upward social mobility
	Culture	Economically, social politically, and/or culturally integrated by the host society	Low integration
<b>Spatial characteristics</b>		Clear boundary	Opened network

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

This article addressed the nature of Guangzhou's African-concentrated area and proposed the concept of "transient neighborhood." A "transient neighborhood" can be applied to describe a kind of spatial concentration, where a foreign groups' characteristics are high ethnic-social diversity, high mobility, and low integrity, which is often without a clear boundary while regarded as an open network, and are deeply influenced by the global and local regimes. This definition involved our understanding of "immigrants" in the context of Chinese society. We argue that the concept of "immigrant" cannot explain the concentration of foreigners in China.

First, the concept of "immigrants" cannot be adapted to the overall environment of China as a nonimmigration country. Although China has experienced several massive population movements and national integrations in its history, it has gradually established a blueprint for a multi-ethnic country composed of 56 ethnic groups. There was no "immigration law" or "immigration bureau" in China's legislation or an administrative framework before April 2018. Currently, there is no official plan to assimilate them. Foreigners wishing to obtain permanent residency face barriers. From 2004 to 2013, only 7,356 foreigners obtained a Chinese "green card."<sup>48</sup> According to China's sixth (2010) population census, the number of foreigners who have stayed in China for more than three months or who are sure to stay more than three months accounts for only 0.045 percent of China's total population.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, in terms of

law setting and population composition, China is clearly a nonimmigration country. Under this condition, although foreigners can enter China with different visa types, the majority of them are excluded by China's society and culture. In other words, the overall environment of a nonimmigration country assigns the label of "foreigner," which is made up of appearance, language, dress, manner, and nationality, and this follows foreigners during their time in China. Foreigners are not endowed with immigrant status and rights; in turn, they hardly consider themselves as immigrants in Chinese society.

Therefore, it is not hard to understand the concentration of foreigners in Chinese cities. For instance, the foreigners' residential area in Beijing is constructed as a "gated community" that is separated from the outside by doors and walls and is under 24-hour surveillance by closed-circuit cameras and security guards. The residents have to use an entrance card to get in and out. They even have to use this card to use the elevator and enter their apartment.<sup>50</sup> The majority of Afro-Caribbeans in Shanghai are expats from Africa, North America, and the Caribbean. They tend to live with people who are similar to themselves, which could prevent contact with Chinese civilians.<sup>51</sup> Japanese in Guangzhou depend on their own ethnic economy, forming a relatively independent living space in the city, and therefore have not integrated into Guangzhou society.<sup>52</sup> The British and Singaporeans in cities such as Suzhou and Wuxi have high mobility and do not intend to settle down.<sup>53</sup>

Second, the current prevailing concept of "transmigrant" cannot be applied in an analysis of foreigners in China. In the early 1990s, Nina Schillar and other two anthropologists found that the intention to uproot oneself, give up a former lifestyle, and painfully learn a new language and culture makes "migrant" and "immigrant" a poor fit for the new population flow phenomenon. They proposed a new concept, "transmigrant,"<sup>54</sup> but it cannot be ignored that the framework of transnationalism developed in an immigration country, the United States. As such, the important premise of "transmigrant" is that the person should have stable immigrant status and immigrant rights, have settled down, be integrated, or have obtained citizenship of the host country. From 2010 to 2015, more than 50 million foreigners traveled to China each year, which fits with the increasing mobility of the world's population since the 1990s, emphasized by transnationalism. However, since the majority of foreigners in China, as discussed in this article, have not settled down in China and integrated into society, it is impossible for them to be

assimilated and become Chinese citizens. Even if they travel back and forth between China and their source countries and establish transnational social spaces, considering them “transnational migrants” will still be challenging.

In conclusion, this study responds to the recent call for a “comparative (re)turn in urban studies” and claims that the theories originated in the North may not be applicable to the situation of the South. The term “transient neighborhood” will be helpful for better understanding the concept of “immigrant” in Chinese society. For Africans specifically, the rapid spread of racist remarks on social media and the strict control of the African-concentrated area by Guangzhou’s local governments imply Chinese society’s exclusion of foreigners and promote the formation of the “transient” nature of foreigners.

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