



行道遲遲，
載渴載飢 Yearning for
a Complete Home

民工對家與歸屬的追尋

MIGRANT WORKERS ON THE ROAD

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《漢書》說：「安土重遷，黎民之性；骨肉相附，人情所願」。但是在一九八零年代中期以後的中國，卻有越來越多的人，選擇離開老家的村子，離開父母子女，離開熟悉的謀生方式，離開原有的語言與身份，到城市裡打工，適應新的社會價值，同時揹起了充滿貶義的農民工身份。我一直想回答這個看似簡單的問題：「民工為什麼離家？」我曾有機會和幾位因為思念年幼的孩子而天天拭淚的媽媽民工聊這個話題。「地裡都乾得冒煙了，如果可以的話，誰會願意離開孩子呢？」其中一個媽媽的回答道出了孩子的中心地位，還有她為了家庭生計無奈的選擇。另一位三十好幾的媽媽阿玉說，種田掙不了錢，她

需要多存錢，把老家破落的房子翻修，好讓兒子長大了可以娶個好媳婦。逐漸地，我明白了民工離家是因為深信，只有通過到大城市掙錢，才能建立一個圓滿的家。幾年的觀察，加上對比兩代民工的想法，我卻發現面對社會無止境的商品化與對金錢需求的不斷擴大，我的民工朋友們似乎困在了築夢的旅途上，長期漂泊在回家的夢想中。「行道遲遲，載渴載飢」描述了離家的旅人，在路途中的磨難與對家的思念。我想透過一段對他們「返家」的身影的描述，來說明民工的夢想與回不了家的困境。



北京機場附近的一個民工村
A migrant workers' village near the airport in Beijing

“To be attached to the homeland is a human nature - so is being together with our family and children.” - wrote the *Book of Han*. Yet, since the mid-1980s, more rural Chinese moved away from their home villages to work in the city, leaving behind parents, children as well as acquainted ways of making livings, mother tongues and identities. They have no other ways but to adopt a new set of social values and being tagged negatively as “rural migrant workers”. I was always trying to answer this seemingly easy question: why do they leave their homes? Later I had chances to talk to several female workers who shed tears everyday for missing their young children. “The farmland had become dried and ‘smoky’ (i.e. barren)! Who would leave their children if they had other choices,” one of them said. She reminded me the central place her kid had in her mind. Leaving their children was a helpless choice for livelihood. Xiaoyu, a mother in her thirties, said farming could never earn the money needed for renovating her old home, so that her son will be able to “marry a good wife”. I began to realize that they firmly believed that working in big cities was the only way to bring them a complete home. Having observed for years the two generations of rural migrant workers, I found that the aggravatingly commercialized and commoditized society of China and the ever growing needs for money have set a goal which my migrant worker friends could never meet - despite all the sacrifices they had to make. *“Tottering on my way home I am stricken with hunger and thirst”* (from the *Book of Songs*) describes the hardship and homesickness of a wanderer. By making a sketch of these “homecoming” workers, I hope to explain what they dream about and why their dream of going home becomes a mirage.

“Rural migrant workers” is a collective name for rural villagers who quit farming to become a wage labourer in the city. Yet they vary largely in age, educational level and distance from their hometowns, as well as their reasons for leaving, destinations and the jobs they engage in. Those I have known for years are females from Anhui born in the 1960-70s. They were mothers in their 20s or 30s when they first left their homes. While they worked as domestic helpers in Beijing, their husbands at the same time worked in construction sites in the same city. I met Xiaoyu the first time in 2000, only two weeks after she left her village. She was in her nicest clothes that she got from her home when applying for the job of domestic helper. In her thirties she had the wrinkles and tans of a normal peasant on her face. Bewildered, she fastened her gaze on the floor. But once she talked it was like yelling to someone over the field. After we got to know each other better, I asked if I could visit her temporary home in Beijing.

小玉暫居的第一個民工村
The first migrant village
that Xiaoyu lived
(2000)



小玉 Xiaoyu

工作中的小玉
Xiaoyu at work



雖然大眾慣以「民工」一詞統稱離開農業生產，到城市出賣體力掙錢的農村人，但是所謂民工的年齡、教育程度、老家的偏遠程度其實形形色色。他們離家的緣由、選擇的目的地，以及在城市裡從事的工作，也有諸多的差異。我熟識多年的民工是在一九六零至七零年代出生的安徽女性。他們第一次離家時，已經是二十好幾到三十多歲的母親。她們在北京從

事家務幫傭的工作，先生也全部都在北京的建築工地打工。我在二零零零年第一次見到阿玉時，她剛離家兩週，穿著她在老家時最好的衣服來應徵幫傭的工作。三十多歲的她臉上有著農人常見的風吹日曬的刻劃。她手足無措的把眼光緊釘在地板上。一開口，是在田野間吆喝的音量。等我們熟稔了，我請她帶我到她在北京暫住的地方看看。

沒想到，這竟然是一趟單程長達三個小時的路途。我們從北京四環東北角外出發，一路換了三趟公車，又走了一段長路，才到達她在北京西南郊區的家。小玉居住的地方是典型的「民工村」。北京郊區原也務農的居民，把家裡的四合院，分租給外地來的農民工，轉以收租為生。遷入的農民工，又介紹親戚老鄉遷入好互相照料，漸漸地，就成了一個個安徽村、四川村。我們上了擁擠的公車之後，小玉變得異常的沉默。我逗她說笑，問她問題，她只是牽牽嘴角，點點頭。到了東三環東南角的國貿中心等車時，我指指背後有著明亮玻璃帷幕的國貿商城，問她有沒有去過，想不想進去逛逛。她回頭看了一眼，安靜地說：「不想」。我吃了一驚。她解釋：「不喜歡進去那些高貴豪華的地方。別人會覺得我們是鄉巴佬。」上了車之後，小玉又陷入沈默。直到在軍事博物館附近搭乘的第三班公車向著西南又走了一段路後，她才有了笑容。路途越來越顛簸，乘客越來越少，慢慢的直來直往的京片子銷聲匿跡，我赫然發現自己已經被不熟悉的鄉音包圍。週遭幾乎全數為女性的乘客嘰嘰喳喳的，朗聲地說著什麼，邊笑邊指著我。小玉也抿著嘴笑，斷斷續續回答他們的問題，一邊大聲招呼著車裡的熟人。這和我平常見慣了的她，還有先前的警扭著不肯開口的樣子判若兩人。我忽然明白了，這輛北京的公車開著開著，在什麼地方跨越了看不見的邊界，進入了安徽老鄉的地盤。他們疲累的臉和繃緊的身體在這輛「安徽公車」上，終於放鬆了下來。

小玉所住的村子
The village Xiaoyu lived
(2011)



小玉租住的小屋所在的院子
The courtyard of Xiaoyu's rented home



Never did I imagine that it was a long trip of 3 hours. Starting from the northeast corner of the 4th Ring Road, we took three bus trips and walked a long way before reaching her lodging in the southwest outskirts of Beijing. She lived in a typical “migrant worker village”, where the locals, originally peasants as well, switched to sublet their Siheyuan (quadrangular homes) to migrant workers. It is not uncommon that migrant residents would invite more relatives and home fellows to move in and form closer bonds. Some Anhui or Sichuan villages thus gradually emerged. We managed to get on the sardine bus where Xiaoyu became unusually quiet. She just smiled and nodded to whatever jokes or questions I made. We were waiting at the bus stop at the 3rd Ring Road in front of the glassy mall of the China World Trade Center. I pointed and asked if Xiaoyu had been there, or if she wished to browse around. She glimpsed and said quietly, “No.” I was shocked. She explained, “I don’t like to walk into those expensive places where people would call me a bumpkin.” She muted again when we got on the next bus. It was not until we took the third bus near the Military Museum and journeyed for a while towards southwest did her smile reappear. The bus thrashed through and passengers were getting fewer. The clanging Beijing dialect diminished, replaced by an accent strange to me. Around me were nearly all female commuters; they laughed, pointed at me and jabbered loudly. Xiaoyu, smiling tight-lipped, echoed on and off while calling out to her friends on the bus. It was not the Xiaoyu I knew, nor the one who struggled to open her lips earlier that day. All at once I realized that this bus from Beijing had crossed an invisible line and entered the Anhui locale. Their weary faces and bones finally unwound on this “Anhui bus”.



在北京站等搭火車回安徽的小玉
Xiaoyu waiting for her train back
home to Anhui in the Beijing Station



小玉的父母在村子裡廢棄的老家
The abandoned old home of Xiaoyu's parents in the village



小玉與她二零零四年在老家重蓋的房子。
這間房子從沒有人真的住過。
Xiaoyu and her home rebuilt in 2004 in her
home village, which no one had ever lived in.

其實小玉可以選擇乘坐地鐵，能節省一半以上的時間。但是她捨不得單程兩元左右的票價差。她說掙錢辛苦，每一分錢都要省下來。寧可每天早晨五六點就出門，一天花上至少六個小時在北京的公車上。我問她存到錢了嗎？她開心地說準備過年回家時，就先買磚，存夠磚就蓋房子。進了她住的院子之後，我又替她覺得一陣心酸。他和先生的小屋，是一間大約兩米乘兩點五米的小房間。除了一張單人床大小的板床，就只有幾件衣服，和門外煮飯的小爐子。一到家她要我先坐坐，然後就自願自在的在房門口煮起了湯飯。原來她一大早出門以後，因為捨不得花錢，不論工作幾個小時，一定等到回家才再吃東西。她在刷鍋的時候，也住在同一個村子的妹妹來了。妹妹比她早離家，個性比較固執也比較有主見。她聽懂了我的疑惑，感嘆地說：「雖然我們總是盼著回家過年，念著孩子，但是回到老家以後，卻覺得心裡空空的，著急。得等到又到了北京，才覺得踏實。能掙錢，才踏實。」

小玉的妹妹所住的村子
The village where Xiaoyu's sister lived
(2011)



小玉的妹妹租住的房間
The room that Xiaoyu's sister rented
(2011)



小玉的妹妹租住的房間
The room that Xiaoyu's sister rented
(2008)



小玉的妹妹在合肥擁有的公寓所在的社區。這套房子終年空著，因為全家人都在北京打工。

Xiaoyu's sister owns an apartment in this community in Hefei. It is however left vacant as the whole family works in Beijing.

Xiaoyu could save more than half of the commuting time if she had use the subway, at the cost of only two more dollars per ride. Every cent means harsh labour and should be saved, said Xiaoyu. She would rather leave home at 5 or 6 am and squander six hours on a Beijing bus to save each cent. *Did she have a nice saving?* She said merrily that she would buy some bricks back home during Spring Festival. A new house would be possible if they got enough bricks. Entering the courtyard that she lived in was a pang to me. The humble cell that Xiaoyu and her husband dwelled in was only of 2 x 2.5m², nothing besides a single-sized plank bed, some clothes and a small outdoor stove. She had me seated, and hurried outside to cook some rice in soup. To save every single cent, she never ate out no matter how long she worked in the day, starving until feeding herself at home. When she was scouring the pot, her younger sister dropped by. A more persistent and self-assertive figure, she left earlier than Xiaoyu and settled in the same village. She caught my question and sighed, "We do look forward to returning home for the Spring Festival, and we miss our children a lot. Yet when we are home, we feel empty and anxious. Only in Beijing we feel settled - when we can earn money, we feel settled."



小玉的妹妹在她租住的小屋裡，和我說能掙錢才踏實的事。
Talking with Xiaoyu's sister in Xiaoyu's humble room about how earning money made her feel settled.
(2000)



小玉的妹妹所住的院子
The courtyard where Xiaoyu's younger sister lived
(2008)



安徽老家的農地和農田中的廁所
The green fields and a toilet hut in her village in Anhui

在這趟最初的旅程之後，十多年來我又拜訪過他們在北京居住的不同的「村子」。他們暫居的小屋的硬體建設，漸漸地有所改善。但是隨著北京的城區不斷擴大，追逐著低廉的房價而遷徙的他們，居住的地點也已經從四環撤退到六環外。不管北京的交通建設如何的改進，他們的交通時間卻不見減少。他們居住的地方永遠是城市的邊緣。有時候我會想，也許除了低廉的房價，他們心底深處也寧願選擇一個可

以不太卑躬屈膝的「安徽人」的地方。我常常想到「不想去高貴豪華的地方」的說法。曾經有一位老太太在說起她在一九六六年加入全國大串聯的故事時提到：「當年，從新疆一路到北京，我一朵花都沒看。一有花，我們就把頭別過去，因為看花是走資派的行為。」然後可親的老太太自己笑得好靚艷：「聽起來好傻吧？但是，當年我們都是認真的。」我想，如果當時上北京的路上有明亮氣派的國貿商城，老太太應該也會別過頭去「不想去」。但是，不同的是，小玉及她的民工親友是被光鮮亮麗的人和地方看不起，所以「不想去」，而不是主動的拒商場於千里之外。這兩種「不想去」，說明了中國這些年來的變化；也說明了民工苦苦離家、掙錢、存錢的追求目標。

有好幾位人類學家曾經提及，毛的共產黨描繪了一個物質豐滿的世界，中國人為了對這個美麗新世界的憧憬而犧牲努力。我發現二十一世紀的民工，依然是如此。他們把生活的實在感建立在有收入上；努力存下每一分錢，希望給子女和富起來了的中國匹配的生活方式。但是，從我對長大了的民工子弟的理解，我發現他們都有想在他方尋找認同的願望。小玉的女兒輟學到河北的工廠工作後，很快就不顧父母的反對和男友私奔，甚至到青海的高山上開餐館，為了自己的小家庭努力。民工離家，掙錢，翻修房子，想著要回去和子女安享晚年的那個家，對他們的子女而言，卻在父母離家當年，已經快速的崩解了。☹



在老家見到鄰居好姊妹，笑開懷的小玉。
Xiaoyu laughed heartily when meeting her neighbour-sisterhood.

ANTHROPOLOGISTS ON THE ROAD

After this first rendezvous, for more than a decade I have visited some other villages in Beijing that they have resided in. Despite itty-bitty upgrades of their temporary residences, the fattening downtown of Beijing has ousted their dwellings from the 4th Ring to outside 6th Ring. As “marginalized” dwellers of the city, the advancing transport system in Beijing does not lessen their commuting hours. To live in the outskirts of the capital city may not be only a matter of lower house rent: I suppose they also crave a place with fellow workers from Anhui where they need not to grovel. Their reluctance to go into “expensive places” still haunts me. I remember an old lady recalling the days in 1966 when she took free transport as a token for promoting the Cultural Revolution, “From Xinjiang to Beijing I did not admire one single flower. We turned our heads away whenever we saw flowers - we didn’t do what only a capitalist would do.” The amiable old lady herself turned into a bashful smile. “It did sound silly, right? We were very serious though.” She would certainly turn away if there were this haughty China World Shopping Mall back then, I thought. The case was different in the sense that Xiaoyu and her fellows did not avoid the mall willfully, but were looked down by the flashy people and place. Such contradiction outlined how China has changed through these years, and what migrant workers who exiled and strived in the cities are actually looking for.

A few anthropologists have remarked that the Maoist Communist Party depicted a world of material abundance; the Chinese masses sacrificed themselves and endeavoured for the dream of this “better world”. It still befits the twenty-first century migrant workers. They labour to make meaning for their livelihood, and to raise their children’s living standard to meet that of the better-off China. However, to my understanding, the migrants’ children share a common goal of being recognized in a new ground when they grow up. Xiaoyu’s daughter, who worked in a factory in Hebei after dropping out of school, shortly eloped with her boyfriend regardless of her parents’ opposition. They opened a restaurant on a high mountain in Qinghai and started a new family. To the migrant workers, the old home is what they strive hard for in a distant city, hoping to refurbish and to live in with their children after retirement. What an irony that this home, to their children, had crumbled right after their parents migrated. ❖



小玉在二零零四年重蓋的房子因為沒人住，院子裡的雜草長得比人還高。
Weeds grew taller than a man at the front lawn of Xiaoyu’s empty home renovated in 2004.



二零一一年在安徽老家自家的農地前和研究者的合照
I and Xiaoyu in front of Xiaoyu’s farmland.