

Research Article

Overview Related Research About the Muslim Floating Population and Cultural Forms in China

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Abstract

Since the 1980s, the influx of Uyghur Floating workers into mainland cities has steadily increased, with the majority originating from impoverished regions in Xinjiang. However, Uyghur Muslims face unique challenges compared to other Floating workers due to differences in language, religious beliefs, customs, values, and behavior. These disparities often result in significant difficulties during their transition to urban environments, accompanied by heightened psychological barriers and a pervasive sense of loneliness. In the academic world, a significant number of monographs and academic papers have examined urban Floating populations, addressing topics such as the characteristics of Floating workers, group dynamics, social security, mobility impacts, crime, and policy solutions. However, research focusing on another Floating populations, particularly the Uyghur Muslim Floating community, remains limited. Systematic studies exploring the survival and adaptation processes of Uyghur Floating in urban areas from sociological, ethnological, and anthropological perspectives are particularly scarce. This article mainly reviews and discusses the research on Uyghur Floating population from the perspective of academic history, and puts forward some viewpoints.

Keyword

Uyghur, China, Floating Population, Related Research

1. Introduction

The term “Floating Population” is a concept specific to the Chinese sociopolitical context, originating from the registered residence system (hukou) established during the planned economy era. Under this system, the movement of urban and rural populations was tightly controlled, with individuals generally restricted to live, work, and remain in their place of household registration. Floating without formal hukou changes was typically small-scale, short-term, and did not form large Floating groups. However, with the reforms and opening-up policies, these restrictions gradually loosened, leading to an unprecedented wave of large-scale Floating

across the country.

From a hukou perspective, Floating can be categorized in to two types: Floating involving changes to registered permanent residence and Floating without such changes. To differentiate between these, population management designates the former as “Account Migration population” and the latter as “Floating population.” In practice, the term “Floating population” is most often used to describe non-local individuals temporarily residing in cities without hukou status.

In short, “Floating population” refers specifically to non-local residents who have entered urban areas without a change in their

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registered residence. This group encompasses agricultural Floating, often referred to as Floating workers and their families, as well as non-agricultural or urban floating.

Since the 1990s, a significant number of monographs and academic papers have examined urban Floating populations, addressing topics such as the characteristics of Floating workers, group dynamics, social security, mobility impacts, crime, and policy solutions. However, research focusing on another floating populations, particularly the Uyghur Muslim Floating community, remains limited. Systematic studies exploring the survival and adaptation processes of Uyghur floating in urban areas from sociological, ethnological, and anthropological perspectives are particularly scarce. This article provides a review of relevant research, highlighting key contributions to the field.

2. The Uyghur Floating Population in Beijing

One of the earliest studies on the Uyghur Floating population in Beijing is Abdueli's doctoral thesis, *Investigation and Research on Uyghur Floating Population in Beijing* (Central University for Nationalities, 2011). This comprehensive study spans 122 pages and synthesizes historical documents alongside interviews with elder Uyghurs in Beijing. It explores the historical Floating of Uyghur populations to the capital and analyzes factors driving their movement, including environmental, economic, and social influences. Abdueli provides detailed accounts of Uyghur floating' living and working conditions, their social networks, and the adaptation challenges they face in an urban context [1].

Abdueli's thesis also highlights the initial struggles Uyghur Floating encounter in adapting to unfamiliar environments. Adaptation, as the study emphasizes, involves resolving challenges across multiple domains, including economic, social, and cultural dimensions. This research forms a foundational overview of Uyghur Floating' urban experience.

Early contributions to the field include the work of Ren Yifei and Yasin Wushur from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who, in the early 1990s, conducted a comprehensive ethnological and sociological survey of Uyghur Floating in the "Xinjiang Cun (Village)" area of Ganjiakou, Beijing. Their report, *Survey of Xinjiang Cun (Village) in Beijing*, chronicles the formation of this community, their business activities, and the daily challenges they face. [2].

In the mid-1990s, Yang Shengmin of the Central University for Nationalities conducted an ethnological study focused on "Xinjiang Cun"¹ in Weigong Cun, Beijing. This work centers on Uyghur restaurants and their cultural significance, as presented in *The Changes of Beijing's Xinjiang Cun (Villages)*. By leveraging historical documents, Yang traced the transformations of the community from the Yuan Dynasty to contemporary times. [3].

Subsequent research includes a sampling survey conducted in 2000 by Wang Hansheng and colleagues, which analyzed 11 Uyghur-owned restaurants in Weigong Cun. Their study explored various aspects of the Floating' lives, including demographic profiles, career trajectories, business operations, and social interactions. This research culminated in the report, *The Formation and Evolution of Ethnic Minority Floating Population Settlements in Large Cities: Investigation of Xinjiang Cun (Villages) in Beijing, Part 2*. [4].

Zhuang Kongshao's work, *The Spatiotemporal Process of Food Culture in the 'Xinjiang Street' of Beijing*, delves into the spatial and social reconstruction of "Xinjiang Jie (Street)" in Weigong Cun. Zhuang argues that the historical identity and cultural expressions of the Uyghur community, such as their culinary practices, play a crucial role in their adaptation to modern urban life. The study also highlights how these symbolic cultural elements serve as markers of Uyghur identity within a rapidly transforming urban landscape. [5].

Additional studies, such as Arslan's *the Food Culture of Xinjiang (Cun) Villages in Beijing*, further explore the cultural dimensions of Uyghur Floating life in Beijing. [6].

Zhang Yahui and colleagues investigated the motivations behind Uyghur Floating to Beijing, noting stark differences from Floating patterns in cities like Lanzhou. For instance, restrictions on religious practices in Beijing have significantly altered Uyghur Floating' religious lives. According to their findings, only 19.2% of Uyghur Floating in Beijing are able to participate in Friday worship regularly, and many resort to private religious practices at home. This represents a substantial shift from their traditional communal worship practices. [7].

The studies reviewed here primarily focus on Uyghurs engaged in Beijing's catering industry, offering valuable insights into their economic and cultural activities. Collectively, this body of work establishes a foundation for understanding the unique experiences of Uyghur Floating in urban environments, while also highlighting areas for further research into their broader societal integration.

3. The Uyghur Floating Population in Shanghai

Two notable master's theses examine the Uyghur Floating population in Shanghai: Gao Yanhua's *Urban Adaptation Issues and Social Support Pathways for Ethnic Minorities in Shanghai and Xinjiang: A Case Study of Putuo District* (East China Normal University, 2008) and Chen Hui's *Research on Xinjiang Uyghur Floating Population in Eastern Cities: A Case Study of Shanghai* (Nanjing University, 2008).

In Gao Yanhua's research, the study focuses on several case studies from Putuo District, representing diverse groups of Xinjiang minorities, including individuals of different genders, ages, and social backgrounds. Using in-depth interviews, Gao identifies the primary challenges faced by these groups in adapting to Shanghai. The research attributes the main factor

¹ "Xinjiang Cun" refers to Xinjiang Village.

hindering adaptation to a lack of social support. This deficiency encompasses both informal support networks, such as family and close-knit community groups, and formal structures provided by society and government institutions, with the latter posing the most significant gap. To address these issues, the study proposes the establishment of a comprehensive social support system. This system would include legal and policy measures, community and workplace support, interethnic relationship networks, and the active involvement of social work initiatives. Gao concludes that these multifaceted difficulties reflect varying levels of adaptive capacity among Xinjiang minorities, necessitating tailored support models to meet their diverse needs. [8].

Chen Hui's thesis emphasizes the fluidity and complexity of transient ethnic minority populations in urban areas, with a particular focus on Uyghurs in the metropolis of Shanghai. Drawing from existing literature and field investigations, the research incorporates interviews with both Uyghurs and local Shanghai residents to analyze the interactions and tensions between these groups. Chen highlights the unique sensitivities surrounding Uyghur Floating and explores how their presence affects urban stability and ethnic unity. The thesis also provides recommendations for managing this special population to foster positive contributions to the city's development and interethnic cohesion.

Chen's research is organized into four chapters. The first defines key concepts, including the transient population and its ethnic minority subgroups, while reviewing relevant literature and outlining the study's design, theoretical framework, and significance. The second chapter presents findings from field research on Uyghurs selling raisins in Shanghai neighborhoods and the perspectives of relevant management departments. The third chapter draws on interviews conducted by a Uyghur student from Nanjing University with representative Uyghur figures in Shanghai, offering an analysis of their socioeconomic challenges and cultural experiences. The fourth chapter proposes solutions to address the issues identified. [9].

Both studies reveal that Uyghur Floating face significant pressures in adapting to urban environments. These challenges stem not only from cultural conflicts between rural and urban life but also from the intersection of ethnic differences with other groups. The findings suggest that overcoming these barriers requires dismantling systemic hurdles such as urban household registration systems, alongside addressing national barriers like linguistic and cultural differences, religious practices, and customs. Compared to the Han Floating population, Uyghur Floating face significantly greater obstacles in achieving integration and stability.

4. The Uyghur Floating Population in Cities Such as Wuhan

Research on the Uyghur Floating population in Wuhan includes two key works: Ma Xu's doctoral thesis, *Research on*

Urban Adaptation of Ethnic Minority Floating Population: A Case Study of Wuhan City (Minzu University of China, 2007), and Hankiz Turak's master's thesis, *Research on Urban Adaptation and Survival of Uyghur Floating Workers in Mainland China: A Case Study of Uyghur Floating Workers in Wuhan, Hubei Province* (Central China Normal University, 2012).

Ma Xu's study is an empirical exploration of the urban adaptation process among China's Floating populations, using Wuhan as a case study. Drawing on diverse ethnic groups and industries, Ma employs methodologies such as in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and questionnaires to examine the various stages of urban adaptation, including preparation, strategies, outcomes, and influencing factors. Comparative analyses highlight the adaptation characteristics of different ethnic groups, leading to the identification of universal patterns and mechanisms underlying the adaptation process of ethnic Floating workers. [10].

Hankiz Turak's research focuses on the survival and adaptation of Uyghur Floating workers in Wuhan through a predominantly quantitative approach informed by sociological theories. The study examines the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of adaptation, identifying three primary factors that influence success: registered residence status, ethnic background, and individual capabilities. Hankiz emphasizes that the adaptation of ethnic Floating populations and cities is a two-way process. While Floating is expected to integrate into urban environments, cities must also adapt to the needs of their Floating populations. This mutual adjustment, the author argues, represents a forward-looking trend in the study of ethnic Floating populations. [11].

These two studies provide significant insights into the factors influencing the urban adaptation of ethnic Floating populations, viewed through the lenses of social support systems and ethnic self-socialization, and hold pioneering significance in this field.

In addition to Wuhan, research on Uyghur Floating populations has been conducted in other cities, including Nanjing, Tianjin, Guangdong, Lanzhou, and Xi'an. For example, Liu Chunbin's article, *Investigation Report on Employment and Living Conditions of Uyghur ImFloating Population in Tianjin*, explores the labor economy of Peyziwat County Floating in Tianjin through a questionnaire survey. [12].

Similarly, a master's thesis titled *Investigation and Research on Uyghur Floating Population in Lanzhou City* uses participatory observation to study Uyghur Floating in Lanzhou. The research finds that Lanzhou serves as a key destination for Uyghur Floating due to a combination of economic opportunities, higher income potential, and strong ethnic and religious ties. The city's substantial Muslim population and abundant mosques provide Uyghur Floating with a sense of psychological familiarity and continuity. Furthermore, religious practices and traditions are largely preserved, making Lanzhou an appealing relocation option for Uyghur Muslims. [13].

Abduweli, Yimit, and others contribute to the discourse

with their article, *Characteristics, Problems, and Countermeasures of Uyghur Floating Population: Based on Surveys in Urumqi and Xi'an*. They highlight the significant differences between Uyghurs and Han Chinese in areas such as language, physical appearance, attire, dietary habits, religious beliefs, customs, values, and behaviors. These differences pose numerous challenges for Uyghur Floating in adapting to urban life in unfamiliar environments. The study attributes the low mobility of rural Uyghur labor to factors such as limited education, weak proficiency in the Chinese language, and narrow social networks. Floating often engage in low-income, unstable occupations such as small-scale catering, vending dried fruits, or flexible employment with minimal security. [14].

5. A Comprehensive Study on the Challenges of Floating Populations

The China Social Science Foundation project titled *Research on Xinjiang Uyghur Floating Workers and Business Workers in Eastern Cities*, led by Professor Hua Tao from Nanjing University, represents a systematic investigation into the survival and adaptation challenges faced by Uyghur Floating workers in urban areas. The research team conducted surveys and interviews with young Uyghur farmers who had migrated to eastern cities to sell raisins, gathering extensive first-hand data. The findings were compiled into the report *Research on Uyghur Youth Going Out to Work and Engage in Business in Rural Areas of Southern Xinjiang*. [15].

Wang Cifu and Miao Zhijuan, in their article *On the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Ethnic Minority Floating Workers in Coastal Cities of Xinjiang*, analyze the challenges and potential solutions for safeguarding Uyghur Floating workers' rights as they move toward coastal cities. The authors argue that Uyghur workers face unique issues arising from their dual identity as both ethnic minorities and Floating laborers. Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering social harmony and promoting equitable development in urban areas. [16].

Li Weiliang and Chen Yun focus on social support networks in their study of urban ethnic Floating, using Wuhan as a case example. They analyze these networks through four key aspects: social interaction, access to life services, employment and entrepreneurship, and ethnic community engagement. The authors propose constructing social support networks by focusing on five areas: developing urban ethnic economies, fostering urban cultural integration, cultivating interethnic relationship networks, establishing new forms of urban ethnic relations, and streamlining the ethnic work system in urban governance. [17].

Chen Xiaoyi's research builds on fieldwork in Shenzhen's China Folk Culture Village, analyzing the cultural adaptation of ethnic employees across material, institutional, and spiritual dimensions. The study introduces a three-dimensional

analytical framework that offers valuable insights into cultural adaptation processes in urban settings. [18].

Zhang Jijiao and colleagues adopt an anthropological perspective to explore the adaptation and maladaptation of ethnic groups in urban environments. Their study identifies three strategic pathways within the "urban adaptation process model": utilizing relationship networks, leveraging ethnic characteristics, and addressing cultural differences. The findings reveal that individuals employ varied adaptation strategies depending on their level of adaptability during different stages of employment and entrepreneurship.

In summary, prior studies on the urban adaptation of ethnic populations have primarily emphasized social support systems rooted in cultural characteristics, relationship networks, and differences in urban and rural lifestyles. These studies also underscore the importance of understanding ethnic identity and intergroup dynamics. However, comprehensive research specifically focusing on the Uyghur Muslim Floating population in mainland cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Wuhan remains sparse.

This volume seeks to fill that gap by employing group adaptation as its analytical lens. Drawing from field investigations, it examines the survival strategies, developmental trajectories, and adaptation challenges faced by Uyghur Floating-particularly those of Muslim faith-in urban settings. By focusing on their experiences in cities like Beijing and Shanghai, I hope to provide a nuanced understanding of their realities and contribute to a more accurate global perception of the Uyghur Floating population in China.

6. Overview

The above related research focuses on Uyghur Muslim Floating in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Wuhan. These individuals are defined as Uyghurs who have resided in these cities for three months or more. The study subjects share common characteristics, such as adherence to Islam, distinct ethnic cultural traits, and the multicultural influences of the Uyghur region. Participants include both students and professionals with collective hukou registration in these cities, as well as those who have temporarily or permanently left their hometowns without formally transferring their household registration. However, Uyghurs visiting these cities for short-term purposes, such as tourism, family visits, or transitory stays, are excluded from the study.

Floating who leave their hometowns face numerous challenges across various domains, including employment, entrepreneurship, daily life, and social integration. The related research examines the livelihood, social interactions, and adaptation strategies of Uyghur Muslims in urban settings. The term "Floating population" is explored from both specific and general perspectives, encompassing social, economic, and psychological dimensions as well as broader adaptation processes. Floating is not merely a movement but also a state of adjustment, involving the gradual transformation of habits

and practices in new environments.

A critical aspect of the related research is the examination of social exclusion during the adaptation process. Social exclusion is a multifaceted phenomenon that can occur across different groups, professions, and regions. Investigating the exclusionary experiences of Uyghur Floating provides valuable insights into this historical and social issue, fostering a more accurate and critical understanding of their realities.

Author Contributions

Alimtohte Shiho is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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