

## **Objective and Subjective Social Distance to Migrants in Urban China**

It has long been a part of the conventional wisdom among both social scientists and laypersons in China that the contemporary Chinese society is characterized by high levels of prejudice and discrimination directed at rural-to-urban migrants (so-called floating population). Yet little research has addressed this issue. This study explores the predictors of objective and subjective social distance to migrants in contemporary urban China using individual-level data from China General Social Survey 2005, which have been linked with contextual-level data from Chinese Population Census 2000 and China Statistical Yearbooks. The sociological theories of racial relationship and attitudes toward immigrants in the Western literature are borrowed and applied in the Chinese context. Three aspects related to social distance to migrants are examined: (1) demographic factors; (2) media effects; (3) socioeconomic conditions.

### Data and Methods

The individual level data for this study are taken from China General Social Survey (CGSS)<sup>1</sup>. The CGSS is a national survey of adults in China conducted annually since 2003 (excluding Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Tibet). This survey uses a multi-stage stratified sampling scheme with unequal probabilities. The sample upon which my analyses are based includes 5,424 urban respondents sampled from 125 county-level

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<sup>1</sup> Data analyzed in this paper were collected by the research project “China General Social Survey (CGSS)” sponsored by the China Social Science Foundation. This research project was carried out by Department of Sociology, Renmin University of China & Social Science Division, Hong Kong Science and Technology University, and directed by Dr. Li, Lulu & Dr. Bian, Yanjie. The author appreciates the assistance in providing data by the institutes and individuals aforementioned. The views expressed herein are the author’s own.

primary sampling units across 28 provinces in 2005 (Qinghai and Ningxia were in the survey population, but not sampled).

Data on the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of provinces are drawn from the 2000 Chinese Population Census (PCO 2002) and China Statistical Yearbooks.

The dependent variables are respondents' objective and subjective social distance to migrants. In China General Social Survey 2005, Bogurdas Social Distance Scale was adopted and revised to ask respondents' attitudes toward migrants:

- (1) Would you be willing to work with migrants?
- (2) Would you be willing to have migrants live in your neighborhood?
- (3) Would you be willing to have migrants live next door?
- (4) Would you be willing to have migrants come to your home as your guests?
- (5) Would you be willing to have migrants as your children's or relatives' boyfriend or girlfriend?

I compute a subjective social distance scale by summing the domain scores.

Respondents were also asked their experience with migrants:

- (1) Have you ever worked with migrants?
- (2) Have you ever had migrants live in your neighborhood?
- (3) Have you ever had migrants live next door?
- (4) Have you ever had migrants come to your home as your guests?
- (5) Have you ever had migrants as your children's or relatives' boyfriend or girlfriend?

Similarly, an objective social distance scale is computed by summing the domain scores of the five items.

The demographic factors at the individual level include age, gender, marital status, completed education, household registration status, and self-evaluated SES.

In terms of media exposure, the respondents were asked how often they watched TV, read newspapers, and browse the internet. A media exposure scale was computed based on these three items. Although the correlation analysis and factor analysis show that these three items are significantly correlated, the reliability of the scale is not high (Cronbach's Alpha is equal to .493). Given the differential control over these media types by the government, these items are put into the model as three independent variables.

The measures of socioeconomic conditions at the provincial level include proportion of migrant population, GDP per capita, proportion of urban population, unemployment rate, and urban-rural income inequality.

## Results

Table 1 and 2 present descriptive statistics for subjective and objective social distance to migrants among urban respondents. A majority of the urban respondents are willing to work with migrant (78.5%) or live in the same neighborhood with migrants (71.1%). 61.7% of them are willing to have migrants live next door, more than half would like to have migrants as their guests, and almost half can accept migrants as their children's or relatives' boyfriend or girlfriend. The objective social distance to migrants is lower than the subjective social distance. Almost 60% of respondents have migrant

coworkers, about 70% live in the same neighborhood with migrants, more than one third have migrants live next door, and almost one third have migrants as their home guests. But the percentage of having migrants as their children's or relatives' boyfriend or girlfriend is as low as 15.9%.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Subjective Social Distance to Migrants.

Would you be willing to have migrants	Yes (%)	No(%)
As coworkers	78.5	21.5
Live in your neighborhood	71.1	28.9
Live next door	61.7	38.3
As your home guests	55.4	44.6
As your children/relatives' boyfriend or girlfriend	49.1	50.9

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Objective Social Distance to Migrants.

Have you ever had migrants	Yes (%)	No(%)
As coworkers	59.8	40.2
Live in your neighborhood	72.1	27.9
Live next door	38.5	61.5
As your home guests	33.3	66.7
As your children/relatives' boyfriend or girlfriend	17.3	82.7

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for dependent and independent variables in the analyses.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Dependent and Independent Variables.

	Min	Max	Mean	S. D.
<i>D.V.</i>				
Subjective social distance to migrants	.00	15.00	8.86	6.01
Objective social distance to migrants	.00	15.00	5.36	4.53
<i>I.V.—Demographic factors</i>				
Age	18.00	94.00	44.68	15.45
Gender (1=female)	.00	1.00	.53	.50
Marital status (1=not married)	.00	1.00	.19	.40

Completed education	1.00	22.00	12.06	4.66
Household registration (1=non-local)	.00	1.00	.05	.22
Self-evaluated SES	1.00	5.00	2.25	.90
<i>I.V.—Media exposure</i>				
TV	1.00	6.00	5.77	.75
Newspaper	1.00	6.00	4.16	2.01
Internet	1.00	6.00	2.00	1.77
<i>I.V.—Socioeconomic conditions</i>				
GDP per capita	530.58	5148.58	2019.71	1330.19
Proportion of migrants	2.00	26.60	8.48	7.86
Proportion of urban population	26.87	89.09	50.55	18.46
Unemployment rate	2.10	5.60	3.80	.77
Urban-rural income inequality	2.26	4.54	2.92	.59

Multivariate analysis (Please note: the final draft will report multilevel analysis results) starts with a regression of subjective social distance to migrants on demographic factors, media exposure, and socioeconomic conditions (Table 4).

The results indicate significant differences in subjective social distance response by age, gender, education, household registration status, and self-evaluated SES (Model 1 in Table 4). Younger people and males report higher preference for intimate interaction with migrants. The highly educated avoid associating with migrants. Respondents with non-local household registration prefer to intimately interact with migrants. High self-reported SES is associated with intimate subjective social distance.

With regard to media effects, no significant effects are found either for watching TV or for reading newspaper (Model 2 in Table 4). However, internet use is positively associated with intimate subjective social distance. With media effects controlled, the effects of demographic factors all decrease except for education.

Model 3 in Tale 4 brings in the variables of socioeconomic conditions at the provincial level. All of these factors are significantly associated with subjective social

distance to migrants. Respondents in provinces with higher GDP, larger migrant population, higher unemployment rate prefer to intimately interact with migrants. Those in provinces with larger urban population and higher urban-rural inequality report lower preference for intimate interaction with migrants. With contextual variables controlled, the effects of demographic factors decrease while media effects increase.

Table 4. Regression of Subjective Social Distance to Migrants on Demographic Factors, Media Exposure, and Socioeconomic Conditions.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Demographic factors</i>			
Age	-.054*** (.006)	-.050*** (.007)	-.041*** (.007)
Gender	-.872*** (.171)	-.819*** (.172)	-.633*** (.174)
Marital status	.207 (.220)	.090 (.227)	.065 (.230)
Completed education	-.081*** (.021)	-.114*** (.023)	-.071** (.024)
Household registration	3.531*** (.379)	3.498*** (.379)	3.475*** (.382)
Self-evaluated SES	.703*** (.097)	.632*** (.098)	.443*** (.101)
<i>Media exposure</i>			
TV	---	.174 (.116)	.214 <sup>a</sup> (.115)
Newspaper	---	.063 (.049)	.136** (.050)
Internet	---	.168** (.059)	.159** (.060)
<i>Socioeconomic conditions</i>			
GDP per capita	---	---	.001** (.000)
Proportion of migrants	---	---	.240*** (.023)
Proportion of urban population	---	---	-.196*** (.021)
Unemployment rate	---	---	1.416*** (.191)
Urban-rural income inequality	---	---	-.625** (.221)
<i>Intercept</i>	10.915***	9.682***	10.774***

	(.515)	(.812)	(1.460)
$R^2$	.055	.058	.126

Similar patterns are found for objective social distance (Table 5).

Table 5. Regression of Objective Social Distance to Migrants on Demographic Factors, Media Exposure, and Socioeconomic Conditions.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Demographic factors</i>			
Age	-.036*** (.004)	-.035*** (.005)	-.033*** (.005)
Gender	-.267* (.121)	-.139 (.121)	-.091 (.125)
Marital status	.109 (.157)	.031 (.161)	.098 (.166)
Completed education	.008 (.015)	-.059*** (.016)	-.047** (.017)
Household registration	4.012*** (.279)	3.950*** (.278)	3.562*** (.286)
Self-evaluated SES	.259*** (.068)	.172* (.069)	.119 <sup>a</sup> (.072)
<i>Media exposure</i>			
TV	---	.092 (.082)	.095 (.083)
Newspaper	---	.267*** (.035)	.272*** (.036)
Internet	---	.108** (.041)	.085* (.043)
<i>Socioeconomic conditions</i>			
GDP per capita	---	---	.001* (.000)
Proportion of migrants	---	---	.171*** (.017)
Proportion of urban population	---	---	-.083*** (.015)
Unemployment rate	---	---	.443*** (.137)
Urban-rural income inequality	---	---	-.325* (.159)
<i>Intercept</i>	6.228*** (.364)	5.244*** (.569)	6.160*** (1.044)
$R^2$	.067	.080	.104

Subjective social distance represents attitudes toward migrants, while objective social distance represents respondents' interaction experience with migrants. Attitudes and experiences influence each other. Therefore, the next step of analysis is to estimate the effects of these two items on each other (Table 6). Model 1 and 2 both suggest a strong positive association between subjective social distance and objective social distance. When subjective social distance is brought in to explain objective social distance, the impact of socioeconomic conditions disappears except for the proportion of migrant population.

Table 6. Regression of Objective Social Distance on Subjective Social Distance and Regression of Subjective Social Distance on Objective Social Distance.

	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Demographic factors</i>		
Age	-.026*** (.006)	-.014** (.005)
Gender	-.650*** (.160)	.201 (.124)
Marital status	.024 (.212)	.057 (.163)
Completed education	-.056** (.022)	-.012 (.017)
Household registration	1.260*** (.362)	2.715*** (.277)
Self-evaluated SES	.365*** (.093)	-.021 (.072)
<i>Media exposure</i>		
TV	.216* (.107)	.028 (.082)
Newspaper	-.038 (.046)	.232*** (.036)
Internet	.107 <sup>a</sup> (.055)	.036 (.043)
<i>Social Distance</i>		
Subjective Social Distance	---	.342***

		(.011)
Objective Social Distance	.573*** (.018)	---
<i>Socioeconomic conditions</i>		
GDP per capita	.001* (.000)	.000 (.000)
Proportion of migrants	.145*** (.021)	.086*** (.017)
Proportion of urban population	-.147*** (.020)	-.011 (.015)
Unemployment rate	1.192*** (.176)	-.110 (.136)
Urban-rural income inequality	-.518* (.203)	-.085 (.157)
<i>Intercept</i>	7.338*** (1.346)	2.304* (1.042)
$R^2$	.297	.282

The multilevel analyses suggest significant differences in both subjective and objective social distance response by demographic factors. Contrary to the findings in the literature, strong positive media effects are found. Socioeconomic conditions have strong influence on subjective social distance, but not for objective social distance.

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