



# Cohort differences in the urban settlement intentions of rural migrants: A case study in Jiangsu Province, China



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## ABSTRACT

China has experienced a massive rural-urban migration process since the mid-1980s. During the period, a new generation of rural migrants has increasingly accounted for a large segment of the total floating population. The younger generation differs from its predecessors with respect to certain characteristics, exhibiting improved human capital, less farming experience and a stronger desire for urban settlement. This generation prefers to settle in urban areas rather than return to rural hometowns to farm. Although the topic of permanent migration and urban settlement is an issue confronting China and other countries, research focussing on cohort differences in urban settlement decisions is limited. The paper, which reports the results of a 2010 survey of rural migrants in Jiangsu Province, China, provides an in-depth comparison of the determinants of urban settlement for younger and older generations for different types of urban destinations. Survey respondents were divided into two cohorts based on birth year, and both geographic and socioeconomic factors were examined. Binary logit regression models found that disparities between the two generations were related to differences in the life-cycle stages of the two cohorts, attitudes and behaviours, and recent economic and social transitions in Jiangsu Province.

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## 1. Introduction

Identifying the determinants of urban settlement intentions in the floating population is currently a prominent issue facing scholars and policymakers due to the rapid urbanisation process occurring in China. Today, the size of the rural-urban migrant population reaches approximately 269 million, and the younger generation of rural migrants<sup>1</sup> has increasingly accounted for a large portion of the total floating population (NBS, 2014). Compared with their predecessors, the younger generation of rural migrants exhibits different characteristics. First, the older and younger generations of rural migrants are at different stages of the life cycle, with concomitant differences in marital status, household structure, career life cycles and associated familial and social roles, which make different urban amenities attractive to each group and therefore produce cohort differences in the cities chosen as

settlement destinations. Second, younger rural migrants generally exhibit better human capital, less farming experience and a stronger desire to live in urban areas (Duan & Ma, 2011; Wang, 2001; Yue, Li, Feldman, & Du, 2010). Because they exhibit little attachment to their rural hometowns but are designated as having a rural identity in urban areas, they often belong nowhere (Yang, 2013), which exacerbates the problem of urban settlement for the group. The conflict between their desires and reality might produce urban instability. Various government agencies have focused on this issue in recent years. For instance, the No. 1 Document, which is one of the most important national policy guidelines issued by the Central Committee of the P.R.China, has stressed the urgent need to address the problems facing the younger generation of rural migrants to urban areas. Given their distinct profiles, their determinants of the settlement intentions might differ substantially from those motivating their predecessors. However, because limited studies have investigated cohort differences in urban settlement intentions, further research is needed to understand the basis for urban settlement decisions.

Furthermore, in the Report of the 18th CPC National Congress (2012), China's new leadership launched an initiative of national importance, calling for 'a new type of urbanisation'. One of the core

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<sup>1</sup> Persons in this category were individuals who were born after 1980, originally migrated from rural areas and were registered as temporary residents in host cities (see Liu et al., 2012).

proposals of the government initiative involves accommodating the majority of rural migrants in medium-sized and smaller cities and towns rather than in large cities. Nevertheless, existing research investigating rural migrants' urban settlement intentions has primarily focused on large cities. The situations and determinants that might motivate rural migrants to settle in smaller cities and towns are largely unknown. Consequently, research on urban settlement determinants related to different types of urban areas is essential to establish a sound theoretical basis for policy-making.

To bridge the gap in the literature, the present research investigated cohort differences in the settlement determinants for different types of urban areas. The study, which was based on a 2010 survey in Jiangsu Province, identified and compared the effects of features of different urban destinations and individual socioeconomic characteristics on the urban settlement intentions of different cohorts.

The remainder of the paper is organised into the following sections: a review of relevant research, a description of the database, object and area of study, and presentation of the analysis of settlement determinants for different types of urban areas. The final section presents a summary and conclusions based on the study findings.

## 2. Literature review

In general, economic and social theories propose that rural-urban migration is driven by the surplus of labour in rural areas and the gap between rural and urban wages (Lewis, 1954; Ranis & Fei, 1961). Neoclassical economics claims that rural-urban migration is motivated by expected income disparities between urban and rural areas (Todaro, 1976), while the new economics of labour migration regards migration as based on family or household decisions rather than individual choices (Stark, 1991). However, temporary migrant destinations are sometimes not their final settlement destinations (i.e., permanent migrant destinations). Migrants might eventually move to another city or return home. Therefore, settlement determinants might differ from the factors motivating temporary migration. Some scholars have focused on the issue of permanent migration (e.g., Balaz, Williams, & Kollar, 2004; Djamba, Goldstein, & Goldstein, 1999; Nelson, 1976). For instance, studies indicate that the permanence of city-ward migration is influenced by both urban and rural conditions (Nelson, 1976), and movement is driven by educational and cultural goals as well as economic conditions (Balaz et al., 2004).

In contrast to the concept 'permanent migration' relative to the length of stay in destinations in other countries, rural-urban permanent migration or urban settlement in China is strongly associated with institutional schemes—the *hukou* system. The rural-urban permanent migrants or settlers in China are thus defined as those who have got Lanyin *hukou*<sup>2</sup> (Blue-stamp *hukou*) or formal local urban *hukou* (Cai & Wang, 2008; Chan & Buckingham, 2008; Hu, Xu, & Chen, 2011), who are different from temporary migrants (those do not have local urban *hukou*) (Li & Siu, 1997).

In China, the *hukou* system strictly separates residents into the two tiers of urban or rural resident, which has resulted in dramatic differences in access to social benefits such as education, social security, employment opportunities and subsidised housing. Rural temporary migrants are thus barred from urban citizenship (Zhang & Wang, 2010) and suffer various forms of social exclusion and marginalisation in China's urban areas (Solinger, 1999).

Institutional obstacles often prevent rural migrants from permanently living in urban areas. Many return to their rural hometowns or maintain their floating status due to institutional and social discrimination in urban areas (Wang & Fan, 2006). However, other factors, such as market and individual factors, also influence rural-urban permanent migration or urban settlement in China. For instance, Zhu and Chen (2010) found that household income, employment contracts, housing conditions and the city type influenced migrants' urban settlement intentions in addition to *hukou* status. Connelly, Roberts, and Zheng (2011) investigated several determinants of permanent settlement in cities, such as length of stay and living with family members. And Hu et al. (2011) found that stable employment, higher income and educational attainment, and a broader range of experiences were factors motivating migrants to seek permanent urban residence.

In the Western research literature, migration is thought to exhibit distinctive age patterns (Lowry, 1966; Rogers, 1979; Warnes & Williams, 2006) due to factors such as family and career life cycles as well as the relationship between age and community attachment. Compared to older persons, younger individuals have weaker place-specific ties, fewer family commitments, less investment in employment prestige, and more investment in human capital (Pandit, 1997; Simpson, Greller, & Stroth, 2002). Among these factors, life-cycle stages strongly affect migration decisions as well as related factors such as education, labour force activity, marital status and differences in economic costs and benefits (Hogan, 1978; Lansing & Kish, 1957; Sandefur, 1985). In addition to the demographic structure of the population, the migration behaviours of different cohorts are also related to cohort disparities due to period effects, which reflect the particular economic and social conditions of a cohort's historical time period (Greenwood, 1988; Rogerson, 1987). Because economic and social contexts continue to evolve after each generation enters into the labour market, period differences such as wage differences, the varying number and quality of employment opportunities, and the influence of mass media might differentially affect settlement behaviours. Thus, settlement determinants might differ for older and younger cohorts.

However, the extant research on cohort differences in determinants of rural-urban permanent migration or urban settlement in China is relatively limited. Most studies focus on comparing the socioeconomic characteristics and behaviours of the two generations (e.g., Duan & Ma, 2011; Liu & Xu, 2007; Wang, 2001). Among the few studies investigating cohort differences in urban settlement, Yue et al. (2010) and Zhu, Li, Lin, and Dong (2012) analysed the settlement decisions of rural-urban migrants from a generational perspective; marked differences between two generations were found. However, the research did not investigate urban settlement intentions with respect to different types of urban areas, in particular, medium-sized, small cities and towns. Thus, exploring cohort disparities in urban settlement intentions and settlement determinants for different types of urban areas would be worthwhile.

## 3. Data and study area

The data analysed in the present study were drawn from a 2010 survey of rural migrants in Jiangsu Province administered by the Farmer-Labourer Office of the Jiangsu Provincial Committee. The area of Jiangsu Province, which is located in China's eastern coastal area, was selected for the research. It is one of the most developed provinces. However, development in Jiangsu Province has been unbalanced, with clear regional inequalities. Based on local development, the province includes three sub-regions: South Jiangsu, Central Jiangsu and North Jiangsu (Veeck, 1995). In South Jiangsu,

<sup>2</sup> Lanyin *hukou* is a semi-permanent local *hukou* that is based on migrants' contributions to local cities and primarily includes three categories: investors, property buyers, and skilled workers/professionals (see Chan & Buckingham, 2008).

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