

Article

Two-Way Floating or Irreversible Floating? The Transition of Migrants from Urban Social Integration to Permanent Settlement in the Cities in China

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Abstract: Oversized population mobility is an important feature of China's urbanization. Every year, a large number of rural migrants move between urban and rural areas in China. However, the periodic mobility of rural migrants between urban and rural areas and between regions does not mean that migrants stop settling down in cities. In this study, using data from large sample surveys from the 2017 Chinese Migrants Dynamic Survey collected from eight cities in China, we analyse rural migrants' urban settlement in China. Our findings reveal that 82.02% of rural migrant reported that they will stay in the city in the future and that residence duration dependence exists in the social integration and urban settlement of China's rural migrants. That is, the longer rural migrants live in cities, the higher level of social integration and the more likely they are to settle in the city. Among the socio-economic factors, the influence of education on the social integration of rural migrants is greater than that of income. Social integration has a significant mediating effect on the floating duration and urban settlement intention, as well as education level and urban settlement intention. Further, the ownership of contracted land and homestead in rural areas (place of origin) are also important factors affecting the settlement of migrants in cities. For rural migrants to settle down in cities, contracted land acts as an economic support, and a homestead is a guarantee for the future. This study put forward that the mainstream of migration flow in China is the rural-urban one-way, irreversible flow from the countryside to the city and further proposes that the social policies should be based on encouraging migrants to improve social integration and increase the possibility of settling in cities. In future research, we should further consider the transformation of China's urbanization stage. Settling in cities may become the "final choice" for most migrants and their family members. The social policies should help migrants and their family members get a better life and achieve upward social mobility in cities.

Keywords: social integration; urban settlement; irreversible floating; rural migrants; rural land; urbanization

1. Introduction

Beginning in the 1980s, China has experienced rapid urbanisation, with large numbers of rural residents moving to cities. The city life and social integration of rural migrants has attracted the attention of many scholars [1,2]. However, there is still much controversy concerning whether rural migrants are truly integrated into urban society and the impact of social integration on migrants' urban life under the background of the rapid urbanising process in China [3–5]. For example, during the early implementation of the reform and opening up in China, *hukou*-based (registered permanent residences) institutional barriers impeded rural migrants' social integration in the city and even hampered the free migration of rural migrants to the city [6,7], but after years of reform of the *hukou* system, the function has now changed and *hukou*'s effect on rural migrants' urban life is becoming increasingly

weaker [8]. However, non-hukou and economic factors have a greater effect on migrants' social integration, such as urban housing ownership [8,9].

The migrants' social integration is a factor that changes over time. However, in previous studies, social integration is often regarded as the result of socioeconomic factors, and few studies have revealed the role of social integration in the transition of rural migrants from 'urban outsiders' to 'permanent urban resident' and from 'temporary residence in the city' to 'permanently settled in the city'. For example, many scholars have found that migrants of higher socio-economic status have a high degree of social integration and migrants of higher socio-economic status are also more willing to settle in cities [10–12]. As we know, China, which is undergoing a massive and rapid urbanisation process, is experiencing both mass migration of rural residents to cities and migration back to the countryside [13,14]. Rural-urban migration in China is not complete relocation. Although many rural migrants live in cities for many years, they continue to maintain a close relationship with their place of origin, and many periodically 'floated' between urban and rural areas [15,16]. The integration of migrants into the city does not necessarily mean that they will settle in the city. One of the important reasons for the formation of population mobility pattern is the right of rural land use by rural migrants. Rural areas are the foundation of China's economic development. Therefore, the Chinese government has long implemented a land policy that stabilizes the structure of rural land rights. However, with the improvement of China's urbanization level, China's urban-rural development gap has continued to widen, causing a large number of rural residents to leave the countryside. This has further led to a large amount of agricultural land and rural houses being left unused [17]. In this context, the Chinese government has implemented a rural revitalization strategy to promote the transfer of rural land in order to increase the utilization rate of rural land [18,19]. Therefore, rural land has also become an important factor affecting population mobility in China.

Thus, in order to contribute to the literature, our study focuses on the following questions: 1. What is the function of social integration on migrants' urban settlement? 2. For those rural migrants who have been living in cities for a long time, what are the effects of their land property rights in the countryside on their social integration and urban settlement? To answer these questions, this study takes social integration as a mediating factor in the process of migrants settling in the city. In terms of theoretical contribution, research on the above issues can better understand the complexity of rural-urban population movement in China under the background of institutional transformation. In terms of policy contribution, this research can help the Chinese government formulate more favourable policies to promote urbanisation and citizenization (*Shiminhua*) of rural migrants.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Migrants' Social Integration and Urban Settlement

According to previous literature, social integration status and its influencing factors of transnational and internal migrants are quite different. For transnational migrants and ethnic minority groups, the social integration difficulties they face mainly lie in the large gap between their socioeconomic status and cultural tradition and the mainstream society [20,21], which makes it difficult for migrants to completely integrate into or adapt to the mainstream society. However, there is also a view that social integration does not require migrants to abandon their own social-cultural traditions, and maintaining their diverse social-cultural traditions may be more conducive for them to find a better way to live and settle in the new living environment [22]. For internal migrants, economic factors and social capital has a greater impact on their integration into mainstream society. Furthermore, in developing countries, social structural factors are also considered to be important factors affecting social integration [10,23]. For example, China's hukou system and rural-urban dual structure have been regarded by many scholars as an important factor affecting the social integration of migrants [24,25].

Migrants' urban settlement is an interrelated topic with social integration; however, there are still not enough empirical studies on the relationship between the two subjects.

For migrants, low social integration does not directly cause migrants to return to their place of origin, and many migrants still struggle to stay in cities in search of a better life [5,26]. Migrants' urban settlement intention can be divided into three types: the first type temporarily live in the city for the purpose of accumulating enough economic and social capital and once this is achieved, they return to their place of origin; the second type temporarily live in the city, but these migrants do not have a preference for where they go in the future; the third type is determined to stay in the city and have no desire to return to their place of origin. Most of the previous studies on migrants' urban settlement focus on the second type of migrants, whose urban settlement are influenced by factors of family needs [27], economic and social status [28], and place of origin and reception [29]. In the existing literature, income, education level, age, married status, and migration distance have been proved to have a significant impact on migrants' urban settlement intention (Table 1).

Table 1. Variables that have been proven to have significant effects on migrants' urban settlement intentions.

Variables	Main Effect	References
Income	+	Gu et al. [30]; Hao and Tang [29]; Chen and Wang [31]
Educational attainments	+	Gu et al. [30]; Hao and Tang [29]; Chen and Wang [31]
Age	+ / −	Yu et al. [28]; Hu et al. [32]; Stockdale and Catney [33]
Married status/household strategy	+ / −	Gu et al. [30]; Wang and Fan [34]; Zhu [35]
Duration of stay in the city	+	Gu et al. [30]; Connelly et al. [36]
Migration distance	+ / −	Liu et al. [37]; Liu and Shen [38]

"+" indicates a significant positive impact. "+ / −" indicates that the variable' impact can be either positive or negative.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework of this study. This study focuses on the relationship between the social integration and urban settlement intention of migrants. First, it analyses the influence of the length of 'floating duration' away from their hometown on migrants' urban settlement intention. In China's discourse context, domestic migration is also known as 'floating population' (*liudong renkou*); the word 'floating' (*liudong*) conveys that the relationship between migrants and the city is not close and even contains some meanings of wandering between rural and urban. This study will explore whether the length of time away from hometown reduces the possibility of migrants returning home or increases their possibility of staying in the city. Second, it can be seen from the existing literature that the individual's socioeconomic status can influence both the social integration and urban settlement intention of migrants [39,40]. Therefore, in this study, we utilize individual socioeconomic status as the main independent variable, and socioeconomic status is mainly reflected by household income and education level. Rural land ownership has been a neglected factor in the social integration and urban settlement of rural migrants. The value of rural land has increased significantly, particularly with the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy in China [41]. In this context, the impact of rural land on the urban settlement of migrants is worthy of research. In addition, urban settlement is the result of a migrant's life in the city, and the social integration of migrants is a process evaluation of migrants' urban living state, which may have a certain impact on the urban settlement intention. Unlike existing migration studies, because the social integration of internal migrants is changeable, we do not consider the social integration of migrants as an outcome. Therefore, this study will analyse the mediating role of the social integration between residence duration/socioeconomic status/rural land and duration dependence and urban settlement intention.

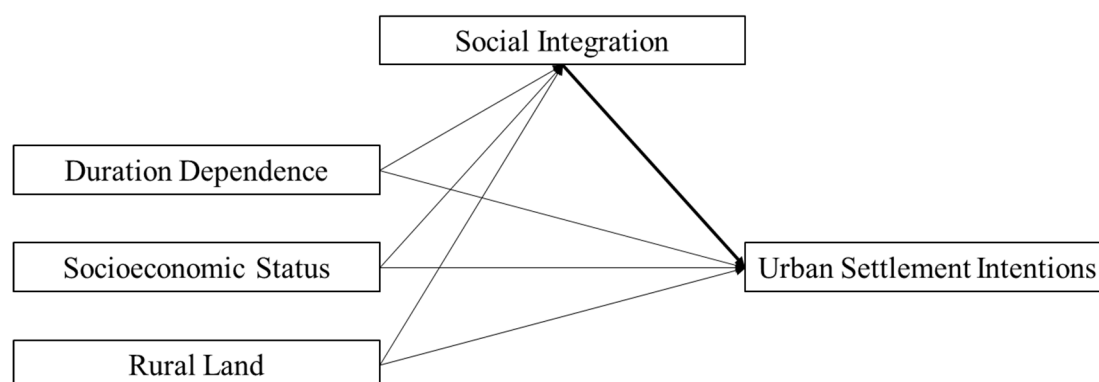


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of this research.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Data

The data used in this study is from the 2017 Chinese Migrants Dynamic Survey (Part C) conducted by China's National Health Commission. This survey focuses on migrants' social integration and public health, and was conducted in eight cities in eastern, central, and western China, including Changsha, Guangzhou, Qingdao, Suzhou, Urumqi, Xishuangbanna, Zhengzhou and Chongqing. The survey was conducted among internal migrants, who do not have a local hukou (registered permanent residence) and have lived and worked in the city for more than a month. In this study, a total of 12,061 valid migrant samples were used to analyse migrants' urban settlement intention after excluding samples with incomplete information. Of the 12,061 valid migrant samples, 9892 migrants expressed that they would continue to live in cities, including 7382 respondents who had relatively clear plans for future urban residence duration; these samples are further used for the analysis of the duration of future urban settlement.

3.2. Measures

The dependent variables in the following analysis include migrants' urban settlement intention and their future residence duration. In the 2017 Chinese Migrants Dynamic Survey (Part C), migrants' urban settlement intention was divided into three categories: 'will stay in the city in the future', 'will not stay in the city in the future', and 'not sure whether or not to stay in the city in the future'. So, we use multinomial logistic models to analyse the factors affecting migrants' urban settlement intention. The other dependent variable is migrants' plan on future residence duration in the city. Respondents were asked to answer this question: If you intend to stay here, how long do you expect to stay? Respondents had six options to choose from: (1) 1–2 years, (2) 3–5 years, (3) 6–10 years, (4) more than 10 years, (5) settled here, and (6) unsure. In this part, we use linear regression models to analyse the factors affecting migrants' residence duration in the future in the city.

The independent variables were social integration, length of floating duration away from the hometown, average monthly household income, and education level. Social integration is a very broad term. The social integration of migrants is not only a social outcome, but also a social cognition. In this study, we define social integration as identification with the city where they stay, which is not tied to the countryside (place of origin). Social integration was measured using responses to eight items with response options of 1 = strongly disagree through 4 = strongly agree. The statements on social integration include (1) I like the city I live in now, (2) I am concerned about the changes in the city I live in now, (3) I would love to integrate in and be a part of the local community, (4) I think the locals are willing to accept me as one of them, (5) I feel locals look down on migrants/outsideers, (6) It is more important for me to follow the customs of my hometown, (7) My health habit is quite different from that of the local people, and (8) I think I'm already a local. The Cronbach's reliability coefficient was $\alpha = 0.72$. Migrants' social integration scores are

calculated by adding up the scores of the items (1) to (4) and (8) and subtracting the scores of the items (5) to (7). The floating duration away from hometown is calculated from the first-time migrants left their hometown for the city. The average monthly household income and education level are often used as important indicators of socioeconomic status. We used rural land ownership and migrants' demographic characteristics as control variables in this study, including ownership of rural contracted land in the hometown (categorical variable), ownership of rural homestead in the hometown (categorical variable), facing living troubles in the city (categorical variable), age (continuous variable), married status (categorical variable), and place of origin (categorical variable).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics by Migrants' Urban Settlement Intention

Staying in the city is the future choice for the majority of migrants. Among the selected migrant samples from the 2017 Chinese Migrants Dynamic Survey (Part C) in this study, 9892 (82.02%) respondents reported that they will stay in the city in the future, 275 (2.28%) reported that they surely will not stay in the city in the future, and 1894 (15.7%) reported that they are not sure about it.

Table 2 and Figure 2 present descriptive statistics of the data on migrants' urban settlement intention ('will stay in the city in the future' vs. 'will not/unsure if will stay in the city in the future') and the related factors. Migrants' social integration, the length of floating duration away from hometown, average monthly household income, education level, own rural contracted land in the hometown, own rural homestead in the hometown, age, married status, and migration distance are significantly related to migrants' urban settlement intention. That is, migrants with a higher level of social integration, longer floating duration away from a hometown, and a higher level of socioeconomic status (higher income and education level) are more likely to stay in the city in the future. Ownership of rural land (rural contracted land and rural homestead) in their hometown may also be an important factor on migrants' urban settlement intention. For example, among the migrants who do intend to stay in the cities, 55.53% of them own rural contracted land in their hometown, which is slightly higher than that of the migrants who do not intend to/are unsure if they will stay in the cities in the future (50.76%). In terms of demographic characteristics, the mean value of age of migrants who reported that they will stay in the city in the future is lower than their counterparts. Among the migrants who do intend to stay in the cities, 81.11% got married, which is higher than that of the migrants who do not intend to/are unsure if they will stay in the cities in the future (73.81%). In terms of migration distance, among the migrants who do intend to stay in the cities, 38.51% and 5.84% come from other provinces and other districts (or counties) in the same city, respectively, which are lower than that of the migrants who do not intend to/are unsure if they will stay in the cities in the future (41.26% and 6.41%). Of migrants who plan to stay in the city, 55.65% are from other cities in the same province, while among those who do not plan to or are uncertain about staying in the city, 52.33% are from other cities in the same province.

4.2. Regression Results on Migrants' Urban Settlement Intention

Multinomial logistic models are utilized to examine the relationship between migrants' urban settlement intention and social integration (see Table 3). The regression results demonstrate that migrant respondents with a higher level of social integration, longer floating duration away from a hometown, and a higher household income are more likely to stay in the city in the future. Compared with migrants who own a rural homestead in their hometown, migrants who do not own a rural homestead in their hometown are more likely to stay in the city in the future. However, migrants who did not know if they own a rural homestead are more likely to leave the city. This may be because they may have more than one sibling, and other siblings may have inherited rural land. This suggests that owning a homestead or not does not affect migrants' mobility choices or if they want to

leave the city. Interestingly, unlike the impact of rural homesteads, rural contracted land does have a significant impact on migrants' choice of staying or leaving the city. Migrants who own rural contracted land are more likely to return to the countryside under certain circumstances. In terms of demographic variables, older migrants are more likely to leave the city in the future, and compared with single migrants, married migrants are less likely to leave the city in the future.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of migrants' urban settlement intention ($N = 12061$).

	Will Stay in the City in the Future		Intend to/Are Unsure if They Will Stay in the City in the Future		<i>t</i> -Test/Chi-Square	<i>p</i> Value
	Mean/Proportion	S.D.	Mean/Proportion	S.D.		
Social integration (−9–9)	3.04	2.51	1.76	2.38	−21.70 ^a	0.000
Floating duration away from hometown (years)	12.17	7.62	10.08	7.83	−11.51 ^a	0.000
Average monthly household income (10,000 yuan)	0.75	0.51	0.63	0.42	−9.99 ^a	0.000
Education level (1–7)	3.45	1.06	3.31	0.99	−5.58 ^a	0.000
Own rural contracted land in the hometown (%)					40.88 ^b	0.000
Yes	55.53		50.76			
No	38.39		39.65			
Unsure	6.08		9.59			
Own rural homestead in the hometown (%)					56.55 ^b	0.000
Yes	74.11		74.46			
No	22.57		19.04			
Unsure	3.32		6.50			
Facing living troubles in the city (%)					0.01 ^b	0.945
No	45.98		46.06			
yes	54.02		53.94			
Age (years old)	35.93	9.91	36.70	11.23	3.19 ^a	0.001
Married status (%)					70.85 ^b	0.000
Single	15.92		23.47			
Married	81.11		73.81			
Divorced & widowed & others	2.97		2.72			
Origin place (%)					7.99 ^b	0.018
Another province	38.51		41.26			
Another city in the same province	55.65		52.33			
Another district in the same city	5.84		6.41			

^a *t*-test statistics. ^b Chi-square statistics.

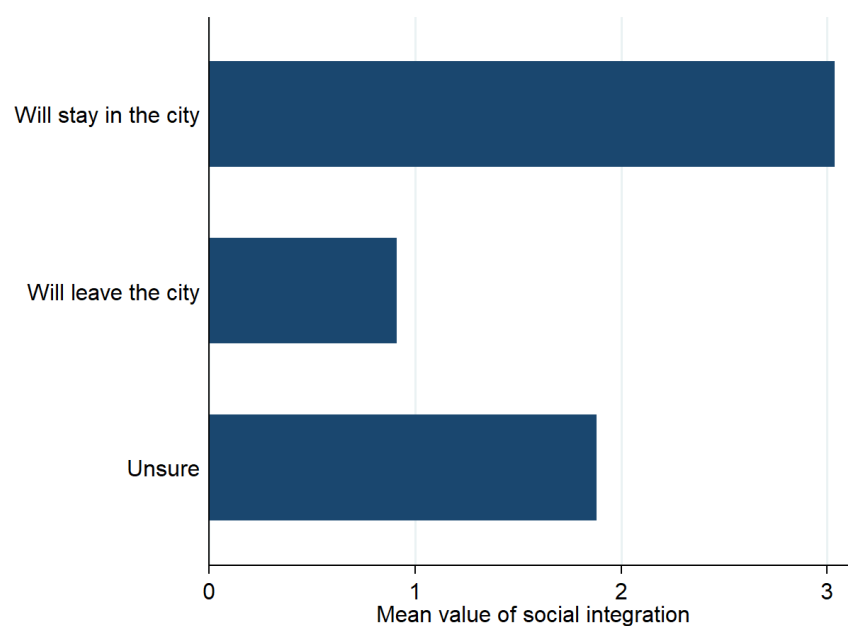


Figure 2. The distribution of social integration value of migrants with different urban settlement intention.

Table 3. Multinomial logistic regression results on migrants' urban settlement intention.

Urban Settlement Intention (0 = Will Stay in the City)	Model 1: Will Leave the City		Model 2: Unsure whether or not to Stay in the City	
	Coefficient	S.E.	Coefficient	S.E.
Social integration	−0.350 ***	(0.026)	−0.187 ***	(0.011)
Floating duration away from hometown	−0.023 ***	(0.009)	−0.044 ***	(0.004)
Average monthly household income	−0.364 **	(0.172)	−0.392 ***	(0.071)
Education level	−0.052	(0.071)	−0.077 ***	(0.029)
Own rural contracted land in the hometown (ref: yes)				
No	0.008	(0.142)	0.184 ***	(0.060)
Unsure	−0.371	(0.307)	0.456 ***	(0.104)
Own rural homestead in the hometown (ref: yes)				
No	−0.360 *	(0.185)	−0.134 *	(0.070)
Unsure	0.691 **	(0.290)	0.377 ***	(0.125)
Have living troubles in the city (ref: no)	−0.102	(0.128)	0.030	(0.053)
Age	0.036 ***	(0.007)	0.030 ***	(0.003)
Married status (ref: single)				
Married	−0.745 ***	(0.191)	−0.550 ***	(0.078)
Divorced, widowed, and others	−0.526	(0.366)	−0.826 ***	(0.178)
Origin place (ref: another province)				
Another city in the same province	−0.209	(0.130)	−0.085	(0.055)
Another district in the same city	−0.042	(0.292)	0.166	(0.112)
Constants	−2.722 ***	(0.419)	−0.878 ***	(0.176)
N	12,061			
Log likelihood	−6041.147			
Chi-squared	932.099			

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

4.3. Regression Results on Residence Duration in the Future

Table 4 shows the linear regression results on migrants' residence duration in a city in the future. The level of social integration, floating duration away from hometown, monthly household income, and education level are all significantly and positively related to migrants' future plan of residence duration in the city. Compared with migrants who have rural contracted land in their hometown, the future residence duration in the city of those without rural contracted land in their hometown is significantly shorter. However, rural homestead has a dissimilar effect from rural contracted land on migrants' future residence duration in the city. Compared with migrants who own a rural homestead in their hometown, the future residence duration in the city of those without a rural homestead in their hometown is significantly longer. Unexpectedly, migrants who are facing living troubles (such as not being able to afford a house and children unable to attend local schools) are more likely to stay in the city longer than those who are not. This suggests that the difficulties of city life do not deter migrants from settling in cities. Married migrants are also more likely to stay in the city longer than single migrants. Further, compared with migrants from another province, migrants who come from another city in the same province or another district in the same city are more likely to stay in the city longer. This indicates that the differences in migration distance and living environment are also important factors influencing the settlement intention of migrants in China.

Table 4. Linear regression results on migrants' residence duration in the future.

	Model 3: Future Urban Residence Duration		Model 4: Social Integration		Model 5: Future Urban Residence Duration	
	Coefficient	S.E.	Coefficient	S.E.	Coefficient	S.E.
Social integration					0.156 ***	(0.006)
Floating duration away from hometown	0.031 ***	(0.002)	0.021 ***	(0.004)	0.028 ***	(0.002)
Average monthly household income	0.380 ***	(0.033)	0.082	(0.058)	0.368 ***	(0.032)
Education level	0.205 ***	(0.017)	0.260 ***	(0.030)	0.165 ***	(0.016)
Own rural contracted land in the hometown (ref: yes)						
No	−0.095 **	(0.037)	−0.133 **	(0.066)	−0.075 **	(0.036)
Unsure	−0.029	(0.078)	−0.222	(0.138)	0.006	(0.075)
Own rural homestead in the hometown (ref: yes)						
No	0.664 ***	(0.042)	0.672 ***	(0.074)	0.559 ***	(0.041)
Unsure	0.266 **	(0.104)	0.095	(0.184)	0.251 **	(0.100)
Facing living troubles in the city (ref: no)	0.123 ***	(0.033)	−0.406 ***	(0.059)	0.186 ***	(0.032)
Age	0.002	(0.002)	0.011 ***	(0.004)	0.000	(0.002)
Married status (ref: single)						
Married	0.606 ***	(0.053)	0.061	(0.093)	0.597 ***	(0.051)
Divorced & widowed & others	0.706 ***	(0.108)	0.231	(0.191)	0.670 ***	(0.104)
Place of Origin (ref: another province)						
Another city in the same province	0.496 ***	(0.035)	0.347 ***	(0.061)	0.442 ***	(0.033)
Another district in the same city	0.471 ***	(0.072)	0.800 ***	(0.126)	0.346 ***	(0.069)
Constants	1.099 ***	(0.112)	1.455 ***	(0.198)	0.872 ***	(0.109)
N	7382		7382		7382	
R-sq.	0.145		0.039		0.209	
adj. R-sq.	0.143		0.038		0.208	
Log likelihood	−12,917.601		−17,104.240		−12,628.448	

Standard errors in parentheses. ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

We used Baron and Kenny's approach [42] to detect the mediating effect of social integration on the relationship between migrants' floating duration and their residence duration in the city in the future, and migrants' socioeconomic status and their residence duration in the city in the future. Figures 3–5 demonstrate that adding the mediating variable of social integration into Model 3 reduces the effects of floating duration away from hometown, education level, and rural land ownership (rural contracted land and rural homestead) from a coefficient of 0.031, 0.205, -0.095 , 0.664 to that of 0.028 , 0.165 , -0.075 , 0.559 , respectively. However, we found that average monthly household income had no significant effect on migrants' social integration, indicating that social integration had no mediating effect on the relationship between household income and migrants' future urban residence duration.

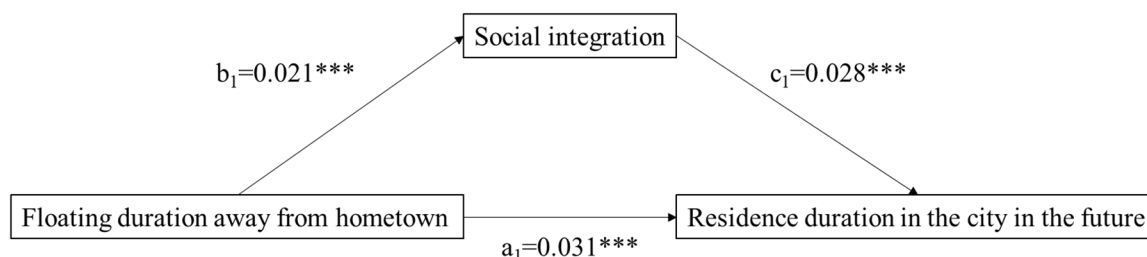


Figure 3. Unstandardized coefficients for the direct and indirect paths from floating to residence duration in the city in the future among migrants. *** $p < 0.01$.

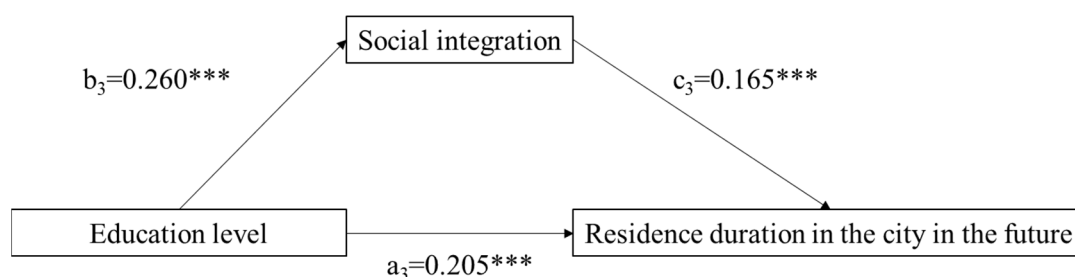


Figure 4. Unstandardized coefficients for the direct and indirect paths from education level to residence duration in the city in the future among migrants in China. *** $p < 0.01$.

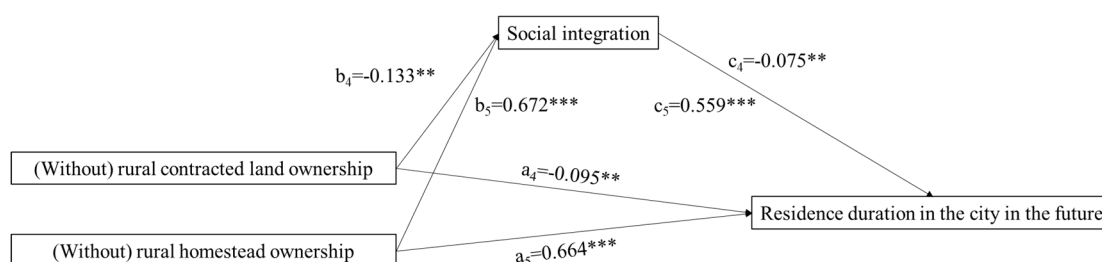


Figure 5. Unstandardized coefficients for the direct and indirect paths from rural land to residence duration in the city in the future among migrants in China. ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

5. Discussion

5.1. Residence Duration Dependence in Urban Settlement

Residence duration dependence is a neglected phenomenon in migrants' social integration and urban settlement. Residence duration dependence is primarily used to explain the fact that certain possibilities of migration accumulate over time [43,44]. In this study, we found that residence duration dependence exists in the social integration and urban settlement of migrants. Although migrants typically maintain close ties with their hometown, the longer they live in cities over time, the more likely they are to continue staying in the

city. In fact, during China's rapid urbanization in the past few decades, many migrants migrated from the countryside to cities in a one-way migration, with their hometown providing them with more support for better integration into the city; the city, rather than the countryside, is the destination of the migrants. In this study, we summarize this phenomenon of population mobility with Chinese characteristics as 'irreversible floating'. For most migrants, settling their families in cities is their greatest demand, and continued mobility is likely to be a desperate option, that is, they have no other choice.

It is also found that the social integration of migrants has a significant mediating effect between 'floating duration' and migrants' urban settlement intention. There are two ways of duration dependence to influence the urban settlement intention of migrants; one is directly affecting the urban settlement intention of migrants, and the other indirectly influences their urban settlement intention by affecting their social integration. The social integration of internal migrants in China is more influenced by economic and social status, rather than culture and customs. Therefore, the time variable is very important to understand the social integration of internal migrants, for many incompatibilities in social integration may decrease over time.

5.2. Meanings of Urban and Rural for Migrants' Social Integration and Urban Settlement

The impact and significance of urban and rural areas on social integration and urban settlement are different. For migrants, cities are full of development opportunities, which can enable them to earn higher incomes and live better in cities. However, at the same time, life in the city is also full of hardships [5,45]. The more they integrate into the city, the more difficulties migrants may face in life (such as bringing family members to the city). However, with each difficulty they overcome, migrants become more integrated into the city and are increasingly less likely to leave. For many migrants, they are unlikely to return to the countryside, especially those from economically disadvantaged areas. On the one hand, rural areas can provide economic support for migrants to integrate into cities. For example, owning contracted land in rural areas will provide an income and enable migrants to live better in cities. On the other hand, the countryside is also an alternative: when migrant families are unable to integrate into the cities after years of struggle, they can choose to return to the countryside. As a result, we see that the level of social integration and future urban settlement of migrants with a rural homestead is lower than that of migrants without a rural homestead, as migrants' families can be re-established back into the countryside. For migrants in China, rural contracted land reflects economic value, while a rural homestead reflects life security [46]. The former provides support for migrants to integrate into cities, while the latter provides them with a way out.

5.3. Policy Recommendations: Facilitate the Integration and Settlement of Migrants into Cities

Based on the above empirical research, we propose three suggestions for improving migrants' social integration and urban settlement. First, social policies related to the social integration of migrants should be based on increasing the number of migrants who successfully settle into a city. This study demonstrates that the longer the migrants live in the city, the less likely they are to return to the countryside. In the process of China's urbanisation, population movement is one-way from rural to urban areas, because the development gap between rural and urban areas is still too large to force migrants to return to the countryside. Lowering housing prices, providing equalized educational opportunities for migrant children, and providing migrants vocational education can enable migrants to better stay in the city. Second, improving the socio-economic status of migrants can promote social integration and the possibility of migrants settling in cities. Especially in large cities, most migrants face difficulties in city life due to the high cost of living (e.g., long working hours and long commutes), and their socio-economic status is relatively low. Therefore, social policies should focus on migrants in large cities, protect the rights of migrants, and provide public services for the physical and mental health of migrants. Third, the rural revitalization strategy currently being implemented in China

should guarantee the right of use of rural land for migrants and prevent them from losing this right due to the transfer of rural land. On the one hand, through land transfer and land consolidation, the utilization rate and output rate of arable land will be improved, so that rural migrants can get more income. On the other hand, it is necessary to explore a more diversified rural economy and narrow the gap in the public services between urban and rural areas to improve the quality of life of rural residents. When the attractiveness of the countryside increases, returning to the countryside will become one of the migration options for migrants, especially the elite groups. In addition, the rural land system reform and land management patterns must be designed from the development needs of the city and the potential urbanization risks that it may face in the future. And migration is the key link between China's urban and rural areas, and the adjustment of urban-rural relations should be considered from the perspective of migration.

6. Conclusions

In this study, we found that a duration dependence exists in the social integration and urban settlement of migrants. The longer migrants live in cities, the higher level of social integration they have and the more likely they are to settle in the city. Moreover, social integration has a significant mediating effect on the relationship between the length of floating duration away from the hometown and urban settlement intention, and on the relationship between the level of education and urban settlement intention. This study proposes that due to the duration dependence of migrants' social integration and urban settlement in the process of rapid urbanisation, the formulation of social policies should be based on encouraging migrants to improve the level of social integration and thus increase the possibility of migrants settling in cities. There are two main innovations in this research: First, this research proposes the irreversible problem of migration flows. In the process of urbanization in China, most migrants will never go back to the countryside. Even if migrants may not integrate well into urban society, they will continue to stay in the city. Second, this study proposes that the social integration of migrants is an intermediate variable and is variable. The social integration of migrants will affect their mobility choices. China's urbanization stage has undergone profound changes, and the level of urbanization has exceeded 60%. In the future research, we must combine new development stages and development issues to carry out research on migrant social integration and urban settlement. For example, after the outbreak of Covid-19, migrants at the bottom of society face more serious survival challenges. This will have a direct impact on their social integration and "floating choices". In addition, the implementation of rural revitalization strategy has increased the attractiveness of rural areas to migrants, and returning to the countryside has also become an important migration option for migrants. These new issues also deserve more in-depth research.

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