

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESIDENTIAL LOCATION AND LONG-TERM SETTLEMENT INTENTIONS: A STUDY OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN URBAN CHINA

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This study delves into the link between the residential locations of migrant workers in China and their intentions to settle, set against the backdrop of the household registration system's liberalization and the rise of a market economy. While migrant workers have significantly contributed to the societal development of China, research indicates their struggles with local community integration, leading many to eventually return to their hometowns. The influence of migrant workers' residential choices on their migration patterns has been underexplored in Chinese scholarly discussions, a stark contrast to the attention it has received in Western academia. Employing segmented assimilation theory and spatial assimilation theory as theoretical frameworks, the study scrutinizes the relationship between migrant workers' residential location and their long-term settlement intentions, utilizing questionnaire data collected in 2020. The empirical findings indicate that residential location is significantly related to their long-term settlement intentions, as migrant workers residing in urban centers exhibit a more pronounced intention to remain in their host cities compared to their suburban counterparts. Furthermore, the relationship is also shaped by the degree of their social integration. The study further emphasizes the importance of accounting for migration timing and homeownership status when examining this relationship, contributing to a deeper understanding of the factors that shape migration decisions in the context of China's rapid urbanization.

Keywords: Internal migration; social integration; residential location; segmented assimilation theory; spatial assimilation theory.

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1. Introduction

According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2022), the total number of migrant workers in 2021 reached 292.5 million in China. They have made a significant contribution to China's society development since the reform and opening up. For instance, they have played a vital part in China's economic growth by offering a flexible and movable workforce for various industries, including construction, manufacturing and services (Shi, 2008; Heckman and Yi, 2012; Wu *et al.*, 2019). Also, remittances from migrant workers as well as emotional support contribute immensely to poverty alleviation and social mobility in rural areas (Li *et al.*, 2013; Xiong, 2015). Culturally, migrant workers from different regions and backgrounds promote social diversity and cultural exchange within China and break down regional and cultural barriers (Wang and Fan, 2012; Li *et al.*, 2020).

Although migrant workers have contributed to the development of Chinese society, previous studies have revealed that migrant workers do not integrate well into the local community, and after a period of time, most choose to return home (Mohabir *et al.*, 2017; Duan *et al.*, 2020) and their investigations into the factors underlying their decision to return have produced valuable insights. In terms of traditional culture, the Chinese cultural value of "The fallen leaves return to their roots" (in Chinese: *Luo Ye Gui Gen*) may prompt migrant workers to consider returning to their hometowns after retiring, in order to spend their remaining years in a familiar and nostalgic environment (Teo, 2011; Lin, 2020). Moreover, economic factors also contribute to the decision of migrant workers to return to their hometowns, as employment or investment prospects in their hometowns which can serve as a significant pull factor. This, in turn, can result in the transfer of valuable skills and capital to their hometowns (Wang and Fan, 2006).

On the institutional front, the household registration system (*hukou*) in China has been a major barrier to the long-term settlement of migrant workers in urban areas, but the government has recently been pushing for reforms to address this issue (Chan *et al.*, 1999; Wang *et al.*, 2023). Previous studies on China's internal migration have found that *hukou* is the main reason for the weak social status of migrants, which affects their residence intention. China's *hukou* system significantly impacts residents' desire to settle through its functions of population registration, mobility restriction and competitive welfare restriction (Hao, 2022). Initially, the system not only identified population status and social standing but also stringently controlled migrations from rural areas to cities, particularly to welfare-rich major cities (Cai, 2011). By differentiating between agricultural and non-agricultural *hukou*, it essentially erected an invisible "welfare wall" in urban areas, imposing high barriers for non-local *hukou* holders in accessing public services such as education, healthcare and housing (*ibid*).

The comprehensive reform of the *hukou* system began in 2013 with the issuance of a reform agenda by the CPC Central Committee. In 2014, the State Council released guidelines for *hukou* reform, aiming to transform about 100 million migrant and other permanent residents into urban citizens by 2020. Recent years have seen further developments in *hukou* reform, moving toward a more open and inclusive system. Particularly, cities with populations under 3 million have eliminated *hukou* restrictions, offering

residents greater freedom in choosing where to live and work, thereby gradually diminishing the barriers to free population movement posed by the *hukou* system. These reforms are expected to reduce disparities between urban and rural welfare, promoting social equity and balanced economic development.

Since the late 2010s, scholars have expressed growing concern about the impact of housing on migrant workers' long-term settlement intention, including house prices, size and tenure choice (Gan *et al.*, 2016; Dang *et al.*, 2019; Chen *et al.*, 2020). However, limited research has been conducted to examine the potential correlation between the geographical location of migrant workers' residence and their inclination to stay in the long term in China. Spatial assimilation theory explains that when individuals migrate to a new location, they are required to adapt to the new cultural norms and values of the host society while retaining their own cultural identity. The location of their residence can affect their degree of exposure to the host culture, influencing their level of acculturation and eventually their long-term settlement intentions (Wessel *et al.*, 2017; Vogiazides, 2018). Additionally, living in a central area may provide migrant workers with greater access to employment opportunities, which are a key factor in their long-term settlement intentions.

Thus, this paper will therefore use the 2020 survey data to explore the relationship between the residential location of migrant workers and their willingness to stay long-term. This topic holds significance in the field of migration studies as it bears practical implications for policymakers and service providers who strive to facilitate the integration of migrants into host societies. By exploring the relationship between the location of a migrant's residence and their long-term settlement intention, it is crucial to comprehend the underlying factors that may aid or impede their integration and sense of belonging in the host society. Understanding this relationship can provide insights into how policymakers and service providers can better support migrants to integrate successfully.

2. Background

2.1. Housing behavior of migrant workers

There is a significant body of research indicating that migrant workers generally face poor housing conditions. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), migrant workers in urban areas have an average living space of 21.7 m², far below the national level of 41.8 m². This figure is further broken down into 17.0 m² of living space per person in large cities (with a population of over 5 million). Research found that their housing decision is primarily influenced by house price and income levels (Gan *et al.*, 2016). In order to reduce the cost of living, employer-provided accommodation such as cheap or free dormitories or sheds are often the most practical and cost-effective housing options for migrant workers (Tao *et al.*, 2014). However, for those who are not provided with employer-provided housing, a significant portion of migrant workers have to find alternative housing options on the market. However, due to their limited financial resources, most migrant workers have to rent private peasant housing in urban–rural areas or relatively inexpensive but substandard housing in the city center (Zeng *et al.*, 2019). Despite this, migrant workers still want to reduce their housing expenses, especially given the rising cost of

housing rents. According to [Duan and Martins \(2022\)](#), rent sharing is a common and effective strategy for migrant workers to save money for other expenses. When migrant workers opt to live in commercial housing, they are more likely to share accommodation with others in order to mitigate the higher costs of rent. Moreover, research found that income uncertainty significantly influences migrant workers' housing consumption and once their income increases, migrant workers are more likely to save or allocate the additional funds toward other expenditures such as their children's education ([Wang and Cheng, 2021](#)).

Previous research on housing and immigrants' willingness to stay in China has focused on house prices and housing conditions, which are summarized separately in the following two sections.

2.2. House price and settlement intention

The traditional view that high house prices discourage inward migration is based on the logic that rising house prices push up the cost of living in cities for workers and reduce their well-being, thus discouraging the movement and concentration of workers to higher-priced areas ([Gabriel et al., 1992](#); [Potepan, 1994](#); [Peng and Tsai, 2019](#)). The impact of house prices on the willingness of migrant workers to stay becomes more complex when migration has already occurred, i.e., when they have relocated to their destination.

On the one hand, higher house prices can have a positive effect on migrants' decision to settle in an area. They can reflect a strong local economy and job market, which can attract skilled workers looking for better opportunities. For instance, [Girouard and Blöndal \(2001\)](#) analyze the role of house prices in influencing private consumption and residential investment in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and find that house prices have a significant positive impact on economic development such as private consumption through wealth effects and/or an easing of liquidity constraints. House prices also influence the profitability of house building, which can stimulate residential investment. According to the new economic geography, these will foster further migration of skilled workers ([Krugman, 1998](#)). Moreover, for migrants who own a home locally, rising house prices increase the value of their property. They can use this extra wealth to boost their consumption by refinancing or selling their home ([Campbell and Cocco, 2007](#)). Even if they do not take these actions, they still feel richer and spend more ([Burrows, 2018](#)). Higher consumption can signal a desirable lifestyle and a sense of belonging, as well as economic stability and social status, all of which could increase settlement intentions for migrants ([Wang and Shen, 2023](#)).

Conversely, higher house prices will deter immigrants who do not own local property from staying for the long term. First, rent and mortgage payments as well as savings for home purchase are increased by higher house prices, making living in the city costlier for migrants ([Chen, 2018](#); [Garriga et al., 2021](#)). Alternatively, higher house prices will drive up the cost of goods and services and hence prices, making daily living costlier for households, deterring other consumption and reducing the living standards of residents. This will ultimately lower their intention to settle down in the long term ([Zhang and Yan, 2022](#)).

2.3. House condition and settlement intention

Besides house prices, researchers have also examined how housing features affect immigrants' intention to settle down for a long time. For instance, the housing tenure of migrants may reflect their settlement intention, which is influenced by various factors such as job availability, economic ability and housing accessibility (Huang and Tao, 2015). For migrants who seek better opportunities and living conditions in urban areas, owning a house may signify a deeper level of attachment and integration into the city (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Homeownership may also enhance migrants' sense of stability and security, which may positively affect their intention to settle permanently (Wang *et al.*, 2021a).

The quality of housing is a key social determinant of health and well-being for migrant workers (WHO, 2022) and further influencing their living intentions (Cheng *et al.*, 2016). Living in poor housing conditions can expose migrants to various health risks, such as inadequate heating and cooling systems, insufficient ventilation, dampness and mold (Baker *et al.*, 2020). These factors can cause discomfort, illness and respiratory problems for migrants. Moreover, substandard housing can also affect migrants' mental health by causing stress, anxiety, depression and social isolation (WHO, 2022). Conversely, living in comfortable and well-equipped housing can enhance migrants' well-being by reducing stress and promoting positive mental health. It can also increase migrants' sense of belonging and attachment to the area by facilitating social interaction and community engagement (Baker *et al.*, 2020; Huang *et al.*, 2023).

Besides housing quality, other factors that can affect a migrant worker's decision to stay in a particular area include access to transportation, healthcare and education. These factors can influence migrants' well-being, integration and opportunities in their new community. For example, access to transportation can enable migrants to travel to work, access services and participate in social activities (WHO, 2018). Access to healthcare can ensure migrants' physical and mental health needs are met and prevent health inequalities (GOV.UK, 2022). Access to education can provide migrants with skills, knowledge and qualifications that can enhance their employability and social inclusion (OECD/EU, 2018).

2.4. Theoretical framework and hypothesis

The preceding discussion has demonstrated that Western and Chinese research have yielded valuable insights into the link between housing and immigrants' propensity to remain in the destination. Nevertheless, Chinese academics have yet to explore the correlation between the spatial location of housing and the decision to stay, a topic that has been extensively examined in numerous other nations (Myles and Hou, 2004; South *et al.*, 2005; Vogiazides, 2018). Based on the spatial assimilation theory, immigrant settlement patterns often involve initial settlement in lower-status neighborhoods upon arrival to a new country or city, followed by a movement toward more affluent areas over time as they integrate into mainstream society (Massey and Denton, 1985). This transition is driven by a variety of factors, including income, education, language proficiency and the desire for improved access to quality housing and neighborhood amenities. As immigrants gain greater social and economic resources, they are more capable of navigating the housing

market and locating residences that align with their desired lifestyle and aspirations (Wright *et al.*, 2005). This relocation toward more affluent neighborhoods is viewed as an indicator of successful integration and upward mobility in the context of the theory. However, scholars contend that the theory assumes a uniform and linear path to integration that does not account for the diverse experiences of immigrant groups or the complex interaction between individual actions and structural constraints (Alba and Nee, 1997).

Segmented assimilation theory further explains how the spatial location of migrants' residence influences their migration behavior. The theory suggests that immigrant settlement patterns are a critical factor in determining assimilation trajectories (Zhou, 1997). Specifically, immigrants who settle in low-status neighborhoods with high levels of social problems may experience downward assimilation or incorporation into deviant subcultures, while those who settle in more affluent areas may experience upward assimilation or integration into mainstream society. Immigrants with lower socioeconomic status and limited social resources are more likely to settle in neighborhoods with high levels of social problems, leading to potential exposure to deviant subcultures and downward assimilation. In contrast, immigrants with higher socioeconomic status and greater social resources are more likely to settle in more affluent areas, where they may have greater access to resources, social networks and opportunities for upward assimilation (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). The theory also suggests that segmented assimilation is shaped by the interplay between structural factors, such as housing market dynamics, immigration policy and discrimination, and individual-level factors, such as immigrant background, education and social networks (Xie and Greenman, 2005; Valdez, 2006; Piedra and Engstrom, 2009). Therefore, the spatial location of immigrant settlement can significantly impact assimilation outcomes, depending on the broader socioeconomic and political context in which the settlement occurs.

Despite the fact that migrant workers represent a significant proportion of China's population and play an important role in its economic development, there is a dearth of research on the relationship between their residential location and social assimilation. This represents a critical gap in our understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by this vulnerable population, particularly as China undergoes rapid urbanization and socioeconomic transformation. As such, drawing on the theoretical framework of spatial assimilation and segmented assimilation, this study posits that the geographic location of migrant workers' residences is a critical determinant of their social integration and subsequent willingness to remain in their host communities.

The hypothesis of this study posits that *migrant workers residing in the suburbs are less likely to demonstrate a willingness to stay in the destination over the long term compared to their counterparts residing in the city center.*

3. Data and Methods

The survey used in this study was collected in April 2020 and focused on migrant workers in China. It was distributed randomly in 46 cities with a high concentration of migrant workers, including international cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and

Shenzhen, coastal cities such as Dongguan, Jiaxing and Nantong, provincial capitals and sub-provincial cities such as Chengdu, Nanjing and Qingdao, and prefecture-level cities such as Anyang, Heze and Zhoukou (see Figure 1). The survey collected a total of 23,381 responses coming from 304 prefecture-level cities, with 99.36% (23,232) of them being valid. The study uses two quantitative methods, descriptive statistical analysis and binary logistic regression modeling, to analyze the relationship between migrant workers' residence intention and residential location.

The dependent variable in the analysis is long-term residential intention, which is based on the question in the survey about the respondents' future long-term residence plans. The study assumes that respondents who choose to purchase commercial housing in their current residence, rent a house in their current place of residence, or stand in line to apply for affordable housing in the destination have a settlement intention in the destination in the long term, while those who choose to buy/rent a house in their hometown or elsewhere are defined as without settlement intention in the destination in the long term.

The main independent variable considered in this paper is *residential location*. The classification of residential location is based on the survey question *What is the location of your current place of residence?* The options for the question include four choices: the first is the city center, the second is the suburban area, the third is the county seat in the outer suburbs and the fourth is the town in the outer suburbs. For the convenience of the study, this paper defines the latter two (county seat and town) as outer suburbs.

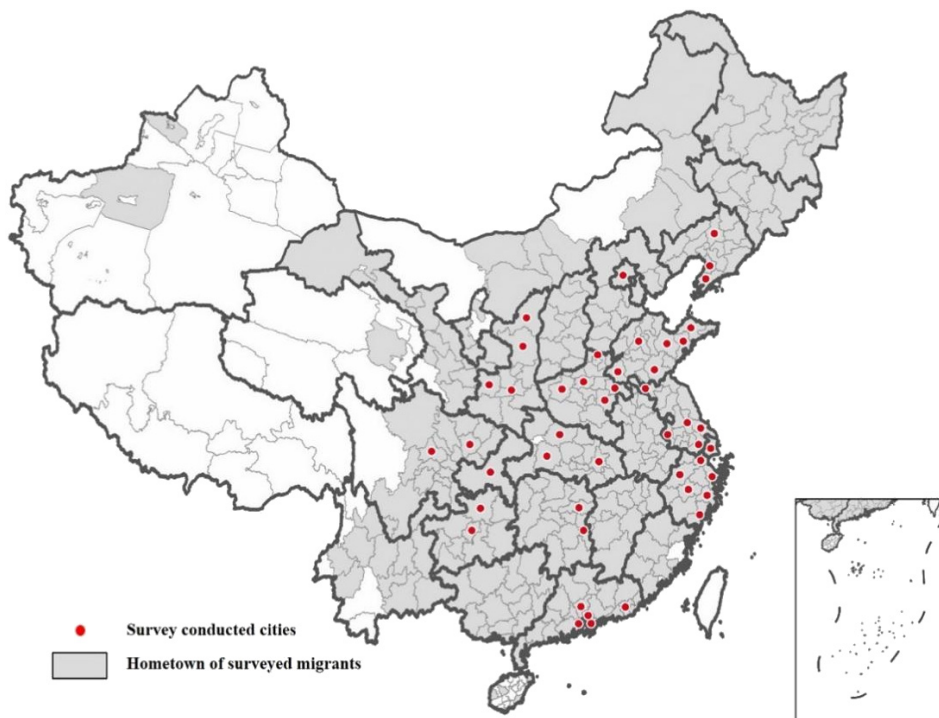


Figure 1. Distribution of Cities Surveyed and Where Surveyed Migrants Come From

In addition to our primary variables of interest, we have incorporated a range of control variables to account for factors that literature has consistently shown to influence migrant workers' residential intentions. These variables are categorized into three broad groups: personal characteristics, migration characteristics and destination characteristics

- (1) **Personal Characteristics:** We include gender, education, age and land rights in the hometown as control variables. Prior research indicates that these factors significantly impact an individual's migration decisions and residential preferences. For instance, studies by [Liu and Wang \(2020\)](#) have demonstrated the pivotal role of education in shaping migration outcomes, while land rights have been linked to rural migrants' decision-making regarding urban settlement ([Wang et al., 2021](#)).
- (2) **Migration Characteristics:** This category encompasses employment status, income level, duration of migration, social integration and homeownership status. The inclusion of these variables is supported by [Chen and Liu \(2016\)](#), who found that employment stability and income levels are crucial determinants of migrants' intentions to settle in urban areas. Additionally, the extent of social integration and the acquisition of homeownership have been positively associated with a stronger intention to remain in the destination city ([Wang and Shen, 2022](#); [Zhang and Yan, 2022](#)).
- (3) **Destination Characteristics:** We consider the size of the destination city and its economic development level, measured by the natural logarithm of GDP per capita. The influence of destination characteristics on migration patterns and settlement intentions has been well documented, with larger and more economically developed cities attracting more migrants due to better opportunities and living conditions ([Chen et al., 2020](#)). Additionally, the household registration system has long been considered a significant factor affecting the willingness of migrant workers to reside permanently. According to the *2013 Opinions on Further Reforming the Household Registration System* and the *2019 Urbanization Plan*, the direction of reform in the household registration system is to base adjustments on urban populations, with lower degrees of relaxation in larger cities and higher degrees in smaller cities. Based on this, this study introduces a control variable that categorizes cities into three sizes: large, medium and small, to assess the difficulty migrant workers face in settling in these cities.

These control variables are summarized in Table 1, alongside a brief rationale for their inclusion based on the referenced literature. By considering these factors, our study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing migrant workers' residential intentions, thereby enhancing the robustness and generalizability of our findings.

4. Analysis

4.1. Descriptive analysis

From Table 1, we found that over half of the respondents included in our sample expressed a preference for remaining in their local area for an extended period, which represents a statistically significant difference of 10 percentage points when compared to the remaining

Table 1. Socioeconomic Characteristics and Long-Term Settlement Intention of the Sample Studied

Variable	Description	Freq/ Observation	Mean/ Percentage	Std.Dev.	Min	Max
<i>Dependent Variable</i>						
Long-term settlement intention	Destination	12,793	55.07	—	0	1
	Elsewhere	10,439	44.93			
<i>Independent Variables</i>						
Residential location	City center	5,528	23.79	—	1	3
	Suburban area	9,112	39.22			
	Outer suburbs	8,592	36.98			
Gender	Female	9,641	41.5	—	1	2
	Male	13,591	58.5			
Respondent's age	Age	23,232	35	8.4	17	80
Respondent's education	Primary or middle school	14,358	61.8	—	1	2
	Collage and above	8,874	38.2			
Migration distance	Within city	11,107	47.81	—	1	3
	Intra-provincial (cross-cities within province)	4,444	19.13			
	Inter-provincial	7,681	33.06			
Migration duration	Less than 3 years	5,868	25.26	—	1	3
	3–10 years	7,903	34.02			
	Over 10 years	9,461	40.72			
Whether own land in hometown	Yes	11,451	49.29	—	1	2
	No	11,781	50.71			
Employment	General staff	3,320	14.29	—	1	3
	Senior manager/employer	15,512	66.77			
	Unemployed	4,400	18.94			
Wage level	Less than 3,500 yuan	9,883	42.54	—	1	3
	3,500–15,000 yuan	12,217	52.59			
	Over 15,000 yuan	1,132	4.87			
Homeownership in local	Without	15,477	66.62	—	1	2
	With	7,755	33.38			
Economic development	GDP per capita in log	23,232	11.43	0.46	10.34	12.15
<i>Hukou</i>	Large city	2,529	10.89	—	1	3
	Medium city	5,861	25.23			
	Small city	14,842	63.89			

respondents (elsewhere). The participants' places of residence are characterized by a varied spatial distribution, with 23.8% residing in the city center, 39.2% in suburban areas and 37.0% residing in outer suburbs (see Table 1).

Then, our initial approach involved the use of descriptive evidence to test the hypotheses. Table 2 presents the distribution of participants' settlement intentions by place of residence. The participants are categorized based on whether they prefer to settle locally or elsewhere and their place of residence in terms of three areas: city center, suburban areas

Table 2. Residential Location and Settlement Intention

Residential Location	Destination	Elsewhere
City center	54.2%	45.8%
Suburban area	48.0%	52.0%
Outer suburbs	35.7%	64.3%

Note: Pearson $\chi^2 = 525.7001$, Pr = 0.000.

and outer suburbs. The Pearson chi-square test was conducted to assess whether there is a statistically significant relationship between settlement intention and family structure. The chi-square value is 525.7001, with a probability (Pr) of 0.000, indicating that there is a statistically significant relationship between the two variables.

In terms of the distribution of settlement intention across place of residence, the results show that the majority of participants (55.07%) expressed a preference for settling elsewhere rather than locally. However, there are notable differences in settlement intention across different areas, with a higher proportion of participants residing in the city center expressing a preference for settling locally (54.21%) compared to those in the suburbs (48.04%) and far suburbs (35.67%).

4.2. Modeling

The descriptive analysis presented above provides evidence to support our hypothesis that the location of migrant workers' residences is associated with their inclination to stay permanently. However, it is possible that this relationship is influenced by other variables acting as mediators. Therefore, in order to further examine and refine our understanding of these relationships, this section will utilize a binary logit model to model the association between the residential location of migrant workers and the long-term settlement intention. The binary logit model is a commonly used statistical technique for analyzing the relationship between a binary dependent variable and one or more independent variables, and it will allow us to better capture and control for potential confounding factors that may mediate the relationship between residence location and permanent settlement intentions (Cakmakyapan and Goktas, 2013).

Before proceeding with the binary logit model, it may be necessary to first consider whether a multilevel model would be more appropriate for our data. A multilevel logit model considers the hierarchical structure of the data, which in this case would be the clustering of migrant workers within different cities. The computed value of the intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC) in the empty model is 0.035 (see Table 3). Statistically, a low ICC typically indicates that the variation between groups is minor, meaning that the variance at the individual level outweighs the variance between groups. In such cases, the advantage of adopting a multilevel model, which is designed to handle both between-group and within-group variance simultaneously, becomes less pronounced when the between-group variance is not significant. Second, our sample data cover 46 cities in China.

Table 3. Multilevel Model of Migrant Worker's Settlement Intention

Long-Term Settlement Intention	Multilevel Model (Null Model)
_cons	-0.180*** (-3.37)
var(_cons[City])	0.121*** (-4.4)
ICC	0.0355
N	23,232

Notes: T-statistics of the predictions in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Although this number might seem substantial at first glance, considering that there are over 300 prefecture-level cities in China, our sample coverage is relatively low. Under these circumstances, using a multilevel model could limit the generalizability and applicability of the model due to the limited sample coverage. Moreover, given the specific selection of our sample, it would be challenging to ensure that a multilevel model could accurately estimate and interpret variations at the city level across the country. As a result, it may not be imperative to employ a multilevel logit model and a conventional binary logit model could potentially be suitable for this analysis.

In order to mitigate the potential impact of mediating variables on our findings, this section will proceed with additional logistic regression analyses. Specifically, Model 1 will focus on investigating the relationship between a respondent's residential location and their long-term settlement intention in the destination cities. The reference category for residential intention is "elsewhere" and the result is shown in Table 4.

In Model 1, we did not introduce other control variables and the coefficients on the *residential location* variable are all negative and statistically significant. The results indicate that migrant workers residing in suburban and outer suburban areas are less likely to stay in their local area on a permanent basis compared to those living in urban centers. Drawing from the magnitude of the coefficients, it can be inferred that there exists a negative correlation between a migrant worker's distance from the city center and their likelihood of settling permanently. In other words, the greater the distance between the migrant worker's place of residence and the city center, the lower their likelihood to stay in the destination for a long term. This finding lends additional support to our initial hypothesis, which posits that migrant workers living in suburban areas exhibit lower levels of permanent settlement intentions compared to those residing in urban centers.

Models 2 and 3 are extensions of Model 1 in which additional independent variables representing personal and migration characteristics are gradually introduced to investigate the robustness of the association between the core variable, residential location and the long-term settlement intention of migrant workers. The results demonstrate that, despite the introduction of control variables, the coefficients on variables *suburban area* and *outer*

Table 4. The Effect of Residential Location on Their Settlement Intentions (Ref = Elsewhere)

Long-Term Settlement Intention	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Residential location (ref = city center)			
Suburban area	-0.248*** (-7.24)	-0.225*** (-6.47)	-0.157*** (-4.42)
Outer suburbs	-0.759*** (-21.58)	-0.707*** (-19.70)	-0.582*** (-15.72)
Gender (ref = female)			
Male		-0.0704* (-2.48)	-0.0887** (-2.95)
Age		-0.00683*** (-3.50)	-0.01167*** (-5.67)
Marital status (ref = unmarried)			
Married		0.256*** (7.08)	0.0793* (2.12)
Education (ref = low education)			
Higher education		0.697*** (23.61)	0.542*** (17.33)
Land right (ref = with land right in hometown)			
Without		-0.0204 (-0.70)	-0.0163 (-0.55)
Distance (ref = within city)			
Intra-provincial			-0.1301*** (-3.33)
Inter-provincial			-0.465*** (-12.48)
Duration (ref = less than 3 years)			
3-10 years			0.299*** (7.85)
Over 10 years			0.272*** (6.90)
Employment (ref = general staff)			
Professional or employer			0.143** (3.39)
Other			0.315*** (5.98)
Wage level (ref = less than 3,500)			
3,500-15,000			0.0124 (0.40)
Over 15,000			0.191** (2.66)

Table 4. (Continued)

Long-Term Settlement Intention	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Homeownership (ref = without)			
With			0.179*** (5.48)
Ln(GDP)			-0.144*** (-3.94)
<i>Hukou</i> (ref = large city)			
Median city			0.361*** (6.60)
Small city			0.173*** (3.16)
_cons	0.169*** (6.26)	-0.0284 (-0.39)	1.443*** (3.27)
<i>N</i>	23,232	23,232	23,232
AIC	31,443.53	30,738.47	30,142.49
Pseudo- <i>R</i> ²	0.0166	0.0389	0.0566

Notes: *T*-statistics of the predictions in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

suburbs continue to be negative and statistically significant. This suggests that the impact of the migrant workers' place of residence on their intention to stay remains robust, even after accounting for other factors such as personal and migration characteristics. This outcome is in line with our hypothesis.

The negative relationship between place of residence and permanent settlement intentions is consistent with prior research in this area. Studies have shown that living in suburban areas can lead to social isolation, limited access to services and opportunities and a weaker sense of community, all of which may negatively impact migrant workers' intentions to stay in the area over the long term (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 1991; Adams and Serpe, 2000; Parisi *et al.*, 2019). In contrast, residing in urban centers may provide greater access to amenities, social networks and employment opportunities, leading to a stronger attachment to the area and a greater likelihood of permanent settlement intentions.

This finding is consistent with several theoretical perspectives on immigrant settlement and integration, such as segmented assimilation theory and spatial assimilation theory. According to segmented assimilation theory, immigrant groups can experience upward mobility and integration into mainstream society, or they can become entrenched in marginalized, disadvantaged positions (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). In the context of our finding, migrant workers living in suburban areas may be experiencing a form of segmented assimilation, whereby they are excluded from the economic and social benefits of urban centers, and instead experience marginalization and a lack of opportunities for upward mobility.

Spatial assimilation theory (Wright *et al.*, 2005), on the other hand, posits that the spatial distribution of immigrants can affect their integration into mainstream society. According to this theory, immigrants who live in segregated areas with high concentrations

of co-ethnics may have limited exposure to the host society and experience difficulty integrating. In contrast, migrants who live in areas with greater diversity and interaction with the host society may have greater opportunities for integration. In the context of our finding, migrant workers living in suburban areas may be experiencing a form of spatial assimilation, whereby their isolation from the economic and social networks of urban centers limits their opportunities for integration and permanent settlement.

Subsequently, we will analyze the remaining control variables. In regard to personal characteristics, the findings from both Models 2 and 3 indicate that gender has a statistically significant association with the willingness to stay among migrant workers. Specifically, the results suggest that women exhibit a higher level of long-term settlement intentions compared to their male counterparts. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have demonstrated the influence of gender on migration decision-making. For instance, women tend to prioritize social and familial considerations when making migration decisions, which may contribute to their greater willingness to settle permanently in the destination area (Blackstone, 2003; Marks *et al.*, 2009). Additionally, research has shown that women may be more likely to form social networks and establish connections within the host community, which can increase their attachment to the area and their intention to stay (Benenson, 1990; Mazman and Usluel, 2011). Therefore, the results of this study provide further evidence of the influence of gender on migration outcomes.

Furthermore, married migrant workers exhibit a stronger desire to stay than unmarried ones. This may be because that marriage serves as a stabilizing factor in the lives of migrant workers, providing them with a sense of social support and emotional security (Shanas, 1979; Adams *et al.*, 1996). This is consistent with the segmented assimilation theory, which suggests that social and cultural factors can impact the assimilation experiences of immigrants in the host society. In addition, migrant workers with higher education levels (college or above) have a stronger desire to stay than those with lower education levels. One possible explanation for this relationship is that individuals with higher levels of education may have better access to job opportunities and higher paying jobs in their destination cities, which in turn may contribute to their greater willingness to stay. Additionally, individuals with higher education levels may possess greater cultural and social capital, which may help them to navigate the challenges of adjusting to a new cultural environment and forging social connections with members of the host society (Portes and Zhou, 1993). According to the results, land right in the hometown does not seem to have a significant impact on the migrant workers' intention to stay in the local area.

The final set of control variables was migration characteristics. The results of Model 3 suggest that the distance of migration is inversely related to the migrant workers' intention to stay in the destination city. This finding can be attributed to several factors. First, these individuals may experience greater difficulty in adapting to the new environment due to language barriers and cultural differences, which may create a sense of social isolation and reduce their willingness to remain in the area (Belot and Ederveen, 2012; Jaeger *et al.*, 2019). Second, longer distance migration may result in a disruption of social support networks, as migrant workers may have limited access to family, friends and other forms of

social capital (Ryan *et al.*, 2008). This lack of social support can make it challenging for them to settle and integrate into the local community. Third, longer distance migration may also entail greater financial and logistical challenges, such as higher transportation costs and longer commuting times, which can increase the strain on migrant workers and reduce their motivation to stay in the area.

In Model 3, the length of stay variable was introduced and the results indicate that the coefficient on the length of stay variable is positive and statistically significant, indicating that the longer a migrant worker stays in the local area, the more likely he or she is to stay there permanently. This observation suggests that as migrant workers spend more time in the host society, they are more likely to develop a sense of connection to their new environment. This positive relationship can also be attributed to the formation of social networks and the accumulation of social capital, which can strengthen migrant workers' sense of belonging and attachment to the local area (Huang, 2017).

The findings from Model 3 indicate that migrant workers who hold professional or managerial positions are more inclined to stay in the destination for a prolonged period of time. This may be attributed to their relatively stable economic and social status, which provides them with a greater sense of security and attachment to the local area. In addition, they may have access to better employment opportunities and social networks that facilitate their integration and adaptation to the host society. In addition, migrant workers with high wages (over 15,000 RMB per month) have a higher propensity to stay than those with middle and low incomes. To further elaborate, the higher income level may provide more financial security and stability, making it easier for the migrant worker to adjust to the new environment and establish a foothold in the local area.

In addition, the results of Model 3 show that migrant workers who own a house locally have a stronger intention to stay, compared to those who do not own a property. The ownership of a local property can be seen as an indication of a migrant worker's commitment and investment in the local community, as well as a source of financial stability and security. Furthermore, owning a property can provide migrant workers with a sense of pride and belonging, as they become stakeholders in the local community and feel a greater responsibility to contribute to its development in terms of local economic development (GDP per capita). The results show that the higher the level of economic development, the lower the willingness of migrant workers to stay in the area. This may be due to the fact that the cost of living in economically developed areas is so high that it discourages them from taking up permanent residence. Finally, the results demonstrate that migrant workers in medium and small cities exhibit a greater inclination toward long-term residency compared to those in larger cities, where obtaining local household registration is more difficult.

4.3. Mediation analysis

Building upon the prior hypotheses posited in this paper, the relationship between migrant workers' place of residence and their residential intention in the destination is postulated to be mainly mediated by the degree of their social integration. Hence, it can be postulated that there exist two distinct pathways through which the residential location of migrant workers exerts influence on their proclivity to establish permanent residency (see Figure 2).

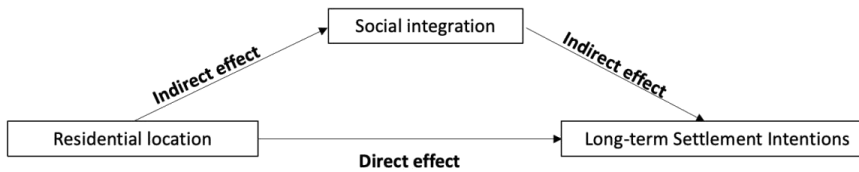


Figure 2. Two Distinct Pathways by Which Residential Location Influences Long-term Settlement Intentions

The initial pathway entails a direct effect, whereby the selection of residential setting, encompassing city centers or suburban areas, intrinsically impacts migrant workers' predisposition to reside permanently. This direct association can be attributed to a myriad of factors, such as the availability of employment prospects, cost of living, accessibility to essential services and perceived security within the respective residential domains. The subsequent pathway encompasses an indirect effect, mediated by the extent of social integration experienced by migrant workers in their residential milieu. This mechanism posits that the influence of residential location on the intention to establish permanent residency is contingent upon the degree of social connectedness fostered by workers within their communities. As migrant workers achieve greater social integration, cultivating meaningful relationships and assimilating into the local cultural landscape, their propensity toward permanent residency may be positively affected.

In this section, the study will build upon Yang's (2009) conceptualization of using respondents' self-perception of identity, specifically whether they perceive themselves as locals, as a proxy for measuring social integration. Initially, regression analyses were conducted with social integration as the dependent variable and the respondents' place of residence as the primary explanatory variable (see Model 4 in Table 5). The findings indicate a significant relationship between these two variables, suggesting that as migrant workers reside farther from the city center, their level of social integration decreases. This observed relationship aligns with the study's theoretical expectations.

Subsequently, this research incorporates social integration into Model 3 (Model 5 in Table 5). The findings reveal that the sign of the coefficient pertaining to the primary explanatory variable, place of residence, remains unchanged and is statistically significant. Furthermore, the coefficient associated with the social integration variable is positive and statistically significant. These results indicate that both direct and indirect pathways are at play. This implies that the residential location of migrant workers directly influences their long-term settlement intentions, while social integration serves as a mediating factor, shaping the relationship between place of residence and the intention to establish permanent residency.

Additionally, to enhance the assessment of social integration's mediating effects, this study incorporates two new variables, social participation and social networks. This decision stems from both the multidimensional perspective on social integration proposed by scholars such as Chen and Wang (2015), Tian *et al.* (2019) and Yang *et al.* (2020), and the limitations posed by the survey data. These variables were measured based on responses to two specific survey questions: (1) *Have you participated in community activities at your*

Table 5. Modeling the Mediation Effect

Social Integration	Model 4	Long-Term Settlement Intention	Model 5
Residential location (ref = city center)		Residential location (ref = city center)	
Suburban area	-0.332*** (-8.40)	Suburban area	-0.118*** (-3.29)
Outer suburbs	-0.593*** (-14.44)	Outer suburbs	-0.519*** (-13.84)
		Social integration (ref = not integrated)	
		Integrated	0.652*** (20.67)
Control	×	Control	×
<i>N</i>	23,232	<i>N</i>	23,232
AIC	25,863.08	AIC	29,714.36
Pseudo- <i>R</i> ²	0.1967	Pseudo- <i>R</i> ²	0.0718

Notes: *T*-statistics of the predictions in parentheses. **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < 0.001.

current residence? and (2) Are locals from your current place of residence a major part of your social network? The analysis reveals that the direction and significance of the “residential location” variable’s coefficient remain consistent, thereby affirming our hypothesis (the model results are not presented here due to space constraints).

Additionally, this research will delve deeper into the disentanglement of direct and indirect effects by employing the Karlson–Holm–Breen (KHB) method. The KHB method is a statistical technique developed to decompose total effects in logistic and probit regression models into direct and indirect effects, particularly when analyzing mediation effects (Breen *et al.*, 2013). This approach enables a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between the variables of interest, specifically the role of social integration as a mediator in the association between place of residence and intention to stay permanently. The effect derived from the reduced model signifies the total effect, the effect resulting from the full model represents the direct effect and the difference between these two effects constitutes the indirect effect in the analysis (see Table 6). The coefficients observed in all three models are statistically significant, which suggests the existence of both direct and indirect pathways. This finding indicates the presence of a mediating effect, thereby highlighting the role of social integration in the relationship between place of residence and intention to stay permanently.

The summary of confounding offers further insights into the proportion of the mediated effect within the relationship under investigation (Table 7). The confounding ratio (Conf_ratio) of 1.415 and 1.173, representing the ratio of the total effect to the direct effect, indicates that the total effect is larger than the direct effect. Moreover, the confounding percentage (Conf_Pct) reveals that 29.35% and 14.82% of the total effect are mediated. Lastly, the rescaling factor (Resc_Fact) at 0.994 and 0.996 serves to address the rescaling

Table 6. Decomposition Using the KHB-Method

Long-Term Settlement Intention	Coefficient	$P > z$
Residential location (ref = city center)		
Suburban area		
Reduced	-0.174	0.000
Full	-0.123	0.000
Diff	-0.051	0.000
Outer suburbs		
Reduced	-0.622	0.000
Full	-0.530	0.000
Diff	-0.092	0.000

bias encountered when comparing coefficients across distinct models, ensuring an accurate representation of the direct and indirect effects. The KHB method results indicate that there is a statistically significant direct effect and a statistically significant indirect effect mediated through social integration. This result is in line with our expectations.

4.4. Robustness tests

While the previous models have provided evidence to support the hypothesis that migrant workers' place of residence is a key factor relating to their intention to stay in the destination, they have overlooked an important aspect of the migrant experience: the transitory nature of migrant workers' residence. Migrant workers often face housing instability due to the temporary and precarious nature of their employment. As the survey only captures the residential location of migrant workers at a specific point in time, it may lead to biased results. For instance, they may have recently moved from the suburbs to the city center, and their expressed willingness to stay permanently may be influenced by their prior integration into the local community when they lived in the suburbs, thereby leading to biased outcomes. To mitigate potential bias in the results, this paper will implement two strategies.

The first strategy employed in this study to reduce bias in the results is to limit the analysis to respondents who have purchased property in the local area. This is because migrant workers who own property locally are considered to have a more stable residence compared to those who rent, and thus can better reflect the relationship between residential location and willingness to stay (see Model 6 in Table 8). The results of the regressions in Model 6 show that migrant workers living in suburban area and outer suburbs have a weaker intention to stay

Table 7. Summary of Confounding

Variable	Conf_ratio	Conf_Pct	Resc_Fact
Suburban area	1.415	29.35	0.994
Outer suburbs	1.173	14.82	0.996

in the destination in the long term than those in the city center. This result is consistent with the previous model and further supports our hypothesis that *migrant workers residing in the suburbs are less likely to demonstrate a willingness to stay in the destination over the long term compared to their counterparts residing in the city center.*

To avoid bias in the results, another strategy employed in this study was to consider only a sample of migrant workers who had recently arrived in the local area (less than 1 year). This approach allows for a more accurate assessment of the relationship between residence location and settlement intentions among newly arrived migrant workers, as they are less likely to change their residential location in that short term. Model 7 presents the regression results for the strategy of considering a sample of recently arrived migrant workers (Table 8). The findings indicate that residential location of migrant workers is still significantly associated with their intention to stay, supporting our previous findings. Specifically, migrant workers residing in suburban areas have a weaker intention to stay permanently than those living in the city center.

Moreover, in conducting robustness checks in research, accurately assessing causal relationships is paramount. This study examines the assumption that migrants generally

Table 8. Modeling the Relationship between Residential Location and Their Settlement Intentions (Ref = Elsewhere)

Long-Term Settlement Intention	Model 6	Model 7
Residential location (ref = city center)		
Suburban area	-0.124* (-2.27)	-0.414*** (-3.70)
Outer suburbs	-0.386*** (-6.36)	-0.982*** (-8.43)
Gender (ref = female)		
Male	-0.084* (-1.66)	-0.033 (-0.34)
Age	-0.011** (-2.96)	0.0123* (2.09)
Marital status (ref = unmarried)		
Married	-0.0899 (-1.07)	-0.361** (-3.22)
Education (ref = low education)		
Higher education	0.289*** (5.68)	0.767*** (7.80)
Land right (ref = with land right in hometown)		
Without	-0.048 (-0.99)	0.021 (0.22)
Distance (ref = within city)		
Intra-provincial	0.075 (1.13)	-0.497*** (-3.97)

Table 8. (Continued)

Long-Term Settlement Intention	Model 6	Model 7
Inter-provincial	-0.063 (-0.38)	-0.691*** (-6.21)
Employment (ref = general staff)		
Professional or employer	0.175** (2.06)	0.349*** (3.34)
Other	0.203 (2.07)	0.219 (1.32)
Wage level (ref = less than 3,500)		
3,500–15,000	0.098* (1.88)	-0.105 (-1.11)
Over 15,000	0.127 (1.08)	-0.110 (-0.48)
Ln(GDP)	-0.237*** (-4.02)	-0.172 (-1.53)
<i>Hukou</i> (ref = large city)		
Median city	-0.165 (-1.15)	0.184 (1.06)
Small city	-0.415*** (-2.91)	0.076 (0.43)
Homeownership (ref = without)		
With		0.230** (2.58)
Duration (ref = less than 3 years)		
3–10 years	0.175** (2.05)	
Over 10 years	0.166** (2.01)	
Ln(GDP)	-0.237 (-4.02)	-0.172 (0.126)
_cons	3.397** (4.65)	1.457 (1.09)
<i>N</i>	7,755	2,754
AIC	10,540.47	3,233.963
Pseudo- R^2	0.0177	0.0907

Notes: *T*-statistics of the predictions in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

prefer permanent settlement in their local area, an assumption that may simplify the complexities of migration decisions. Based on this, the study infers that migrants living in suburban areas are less inclined toward permanent settlement, potentially due to factors such as isolation or segmented assimilation. However, a critical possibility that has been overlooked is the mechanism of self-selection, where migrants' preferences for permanent settlement might relate to their choice of residential area. Migrants with varying degrees of

preference for permanent settlement might self-select into different areas. Those with a stronger preference for permanent settlement may be more willing to spend more on rent or mortgage to live closer to the city center. Thus, the observed results could be a manifestation of selection outcomes rather than the causal impact of either segmented or spatial assimilation processes.

To address this issue, the study re-adjusts its sample to only include respondents in “non-voluntary” housing situations, specifically those living in company-provided dormitories and migrant workers residing with relatives. Consequently, the number of respondents is reduced to 6,561. The results of the regression are presented in Table 9. By focusing on migrants whose housing choices are limited by external factors rather than personal preferences for permanent settlement, we can more accurately isolate the effects of living conditions on migrants’ inclinations toward permanent settlement. This approach allows for a clearer examination of whether factors such as isolation or segmented assimilation have a direct impact on migrants’ settlement intentions, independent of their self-selection into residential areas.

The regression results continue to support our hypothesis, revealing significant insights into the settlement patterns of migrant workers. Specifically, they show that migrant workers living in suburban and outer suburban areas are significantly less likely to remain in their local area on a permanent basis compared to their counterparts in urban centers. The magnitude of the coefficients highlights a clear negative correlation between the distance of a migrant worker’s residence from the city center and their propensity for permanent settlement. Put simply, the further a migrant worker lives from the city center, the less likely they are to settle permanently in their destination. This evidence strengthens our initial hypothesis, suggesting that migrant workers residing in more distant suburban areas are less inclined toward permanent settlement intentions than those living in closer, urban environments. This pattern underscores the pivotal role of geographical location in influencing migrant workers’ long-term settlement decisions, aligning with theories of spatial assimilation and segmented assimilation in migration studies.

Table 9. The Effect of Residential Location on Their Settlement Intentions (Ref = Elsewhere)

Long-Term Settlement Intention	Model 8
Residential location (ref = city center)	
Suburban area	-0.235** (-3.10)
Outer suburbs	-0.638*** (-8.33)
Gender (ref = female)	
Male	-0.0475 (-0.77)
Age	-0.0114** (-2.88)

Table 9. (Continued)

Long-Term Settlement Intention	Model 8
Marital status (ref = unmarried)	
Married	0.0365 (0.53)
Education (ref = low education)	
Higher education	0.768*** (12.59)
Land right (ref = with land right in hometown)	
Without	0.074 (1.25)
Distance (ref = within city)	
Intra-provincial	-0.551*** (-7.24)
Inter-provincial	-0.833*** (-11.78)
Duration (ref = less than 3 years)	
3-10 years	0.305*** (4.58)
Over 10 years	0.259** (3.50)
Employment (ref = general staff)	
Professional or employer	0.217* (2.71)
Other	0.480*** (4.83)
Wage level (ref = less than 3,500)	
3,500-15,000	-0.035 (-0.57)
Over 15,000	0.006 (0.05)
Ln(GDP)	0.0106 (0.15)
<i>Hukou</i> (ref = large city)	
Median city	0.523*** (4.98)
Small city	0.414*** (3.90)
_cons	0.564 (0.65)
<i>N</i>	6,561
AIC	7,957.441
Pseudo- <i>R</i> ²	0.0801

Notes: *T*-statistics of the predictions in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

5. Conclusion

The liberalization of the household registration system and the subsequent emergence of a market economy in China following the reform and opening-up policy have facilitated the mass migration of rural individuals to urban centers, in pursuit of better economic prospects and improved living standards. This population of migrant workers has played an instrumental role in fostering China's socioeconomic progress. Nevertheless, owing to difference in *hukou*, education and cultural backgrounds, migrant workers face challenges integrating into the host society, leading to a significant proportion of them eventually returning to their rural homes after a temporary stay in the urban regions. The Chinese literature on migration behavior has far not placed significant emphasis on the role of residential location, despite the fact that this has been extensively researched in Western studies. Drawing on segmented assimilation theory and spatial assimilation theory, this study examines the association between migrant workers' place of residence and their intention to stay in the long term using questionnaire data from 2020. The study aims to fill the gap in the Chinese literature, which has overlooked the impact of residential location on migration behavior. Based on the findings, this study draws two conclusions.

The findings of this study suggest that residential location plays an important role in shaping the migration behavior of migrant workers in China. Specifically, the study has shown that migrant workers who reside in the city center have a stronger intention to stay in the local area for a longer time compared to those living in the suburb areas. This could be attributed to the fact that migrant workers living in the city center have greater access to job opportunities, social networks and public services, which can enhance their sense of belonging and attachment to the local area. Moreover, the relationship between residential location and long-term settlement intentions is mediated by the extent of social integration experienced by migrant workers in their residential milieu. In theory, the study provides empirical support for the segmented assimilation theory, which emphasizes the role of context, particularly the neighborhood, in shaping migrant outcomes.

This study underscores the significance of taking into account the timing of migration and the homeownership in exploring the link between residential location and migration behavior. By limiting the sample to migrant workers who have owned the house in the destination and newly arrived in the local area, the study has been able to mitigate potential biases that may emerge from the transience of residence. The findings suggest that the residential location of migrant workers has a bearing on their willingness to integrate and that urban neighborhoods may offer greater prospects for social capital formation and upward mobility than suburban areas. The study has also shed light on the economic factors that drive internal migration in China, highlighting the crucial role of economic disparities between urban and rural areas in shaping migration patterns.

There are many differences and distinct patterns between migrant workers in China and those in other countries. For instance, migrants might move to join relatives or to regions with established ethnic or cultural communities that provide a sense of belonging and identity (Shumaker and Stokols, 1982). This contrasts sharply with China, where cultural norms and the pressures of economic survival often lead to solo migrations or couples

moving without their children (Chan, 2013). This pattern is influenced by the cultural expectation of self-sacrifice for the broader family's economic well-being, coupled with the rigid *hukou* system that restricts access to public services like education and healthcare for non-local residents in urban areas (Chan, 2013). Moreover, economic factors play a crucial role in migration decisions but manifest differently across contexts. In Western countries, while economic motivations such as job promotions and better salaries are significant, these often come with considerations for overall life quality improvements, including housing, environment and services (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009). In contrast, Chinese migrants are primarily driven by the sheer necessity of economic survival and improvement. The drastic economic disparities between rural and urban areas in China create a compelling force for rural inhabitants to move to cities, even if it means facing harsh living conditions and limited access to public services due to the *hukou* restrictions. Migrant workers with poor living conditions tend to struggle with social integration in the local area, which negatively affects their desire for long-term residency, according to the findings of this study.

Overall, the results of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on migrant workers' migration behavior and provide valuable insights into the factors that shape their willingness to stay in the local area. Given the nuanced findings regarding the settlement patterns of migrant workers, particularly their varying inclinations toward permanent settlement based on geographic location, it becomes crucial to explore the policy implications of these insights comprehensively. To improve outcomes for migrants and facilitate their smoother integration into host societies, an integrated approach to policy-making is essential. This includes the development of inclusive housing policies that aim to provide affordable housing options in urban centers, thereby reducing the spatial isolation experienced by many migrants. By ensuring migrants have access to essential amenities, public services and employment opportunities, urban centers could become more attractive for permanent settlement. Spatial planning policies that encourage the development of mixed-use communities can also play a significant role in reducing geographic segregation. Such policies should aim to create diverse neighborhoods that cater to a range of socioeconomic groups, thereby creating environments conducive to migrant success. Additionally, regularization programs that offer a pathway to residency and citizenship for migrants facing legal and administrative barriers are essential. These programs should be complemented by support services to assist migrants through the process.

It should be noted that this study has several limitations that should be taken into consideration. Although this study is based on the current central *hukou* policy, using the population size of cities as a variable to measure the difficulty of settlement, it is important to note that in terms of *hukou* system reform, some cities are still in the exploratory stage and have not fully liberalized as required. Therefore, in future research, it would be worthwhile to further investigate the impact of the *hukou* system on the desire to settle. Moreover, the data used in this study are cross-sectional, meaning that the causal relationship between residential location and the intention to stay long term cannot be accurately confirmed. This study also lacks in-depth qualitative research that would provide a better understanding of how the location of residence of migrant workers affects their

social network formation, access to public services and overall willingness to stay in the destination city. Given these limitations, future research endeavors should not only seek to enrich the current findings with qualitative data but also delve deeper into the relationship between social integration and residential intentions. Exploring this relationship further could provide valuable insights into how social integration mechanisms and residential choices mutually influence each other, contributing to a more holistic understanding of migrant workers' settlement processes. This comprehensive approach will enable a more nuanced exploration of the dynamics at play, ultimately enhancing our understanding of the factors that drive migrant workers' intentions to remain in their destination cities.

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