

## *Settlement Intention and Split Households: Findings from a Survey of Migrants in Beijing's Urban Villages\**

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### *Abstract*

For almost three decades, millions of rural–urban migrants in China have continued to circulate between their urban migrant work and their

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rural home, maintaining a split-household arrangement where some family members are left behind. Based on a survey of migrants in Beijing's urban villages conducted in 2008, this article focuses on migrants' settlement intention. Consistent with recent studies, this research shows that the majority of rural migrants do not intend to stay permanently in cities. Having more family members in the city facilitates the earning of urban wages but is not necessarily indicative of a long-term plan to stay. Rather, the author's empirical analysis highlights migrants' labor market and social futures in the city as important factors of their settlement intention. These results underscore circular migration and split households as long-term practices among rural Chinese, in contrast to the conventional assumptions that those arrangements are temporary.

China's "floating population" (*liudong renkou* 流动人口) stood at 221 million in 2010 and is projected to increase to 350 million by 2050.<sup>1</sup> The bulk of the floating population is from rural areas, and many left the place of origin years ago and have lived and worked in urban areas for a long time. But they are still considered "floaters" because they are not living in the place where they are registered. Indeed, numerous articles and books addressing the relationship between the floating population and the household registration (*hukou* 户口) system have been published.<sup>2</sup>

"Floating" and "floaters" connote also a state of fluidity and of not settling down. Rather than settling down permanently in the place of migrant work, the vast majority of rural-urban migrants in China circulate between the city and their home village, many for years and even decades. It is the long-term circulation of veteran migrants, along with a new generation of migrants who grew up fully immersed in the notion that migrant work is the only way to make a living, that contributes to the growing size of the floating population.<sup>3</sup>

Given the large and persistent rural-urban differences in job opportunities and standards of living, it is not unreasonable to expect that rural migrants have a strong desire to leave the countryside for good and stay permanently in urban areas. However, many studies have found that rural migrants' settlement intention is not as strong as expected.<sup>4</sup> One of the objectives of this article, based on a recent survey in Beijing, is to document migrants' settlement intention and to highlight considerations that underlie their intention to or not to settle down.

Another objective of this article is to advance a rethinking of two conventional assumptions about migrants and families. The first assumption is that migrants move in order to settle down. Zelinsky defined circulation as “a great variety of movements, usually short-term, repetitive, or cyclical in nature, but all having in common the lack of any declared intention of a permanent or long-lasting change in residence.”<sup>5</sup> Linking migration change to economic change, Skeldon argues that during the process of urbanization rural–urban circulation will give way to permanent migration to cities. But others question the inevitability of permanent migration.<sup>6</sup> Hugo’s work in Indonesia, for example, finds that many migrants in Java do not perceive their mobility as a preliminary stage leading to an ultimate permanent relocation of themselves and their families.<sup>7</sup> Rather, they “exhibit a strong and apparently long-term commitment to bilocality, opting for the combination of activities in both rural and urban areas that a nonpermanent migration strategy allows them.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Chapman and Prothero argue that circulation, “rather than being transitional or ephemeral, is a time-honored and enduring mode of behavior, deeply rooted in a great variety of cultures and found at all stages of socioeconomic change,”<sup>9</sup> and thereby draw attention to the fluidity of permanent migration. Recent studies on skilled international migrants, likewise, highlight migrants who respond to the global market for human capital rather than being committed to any particular society or national labor market over the long term.<sup>10</sup>

In the Chinese case, circular migration is often described as a reluctant option for rural migrants because their access to opportunities and resources in the city is constrained by the *hukou* system. This is a valid and strong explanation because socialist control instruments such as *hukou* continue to be used as regulatory mechanisms by governments at all levels in China. But a second explanation, one that centers on household strategies and migrants’ agency, offers a new perspective. In this view, migrants are motivated to maintain and invest in their social support system (immediate and extended family, fellow villagers) and economic security (farmland, house) in the countryside because their social and economic futures in the city are uncertain.<sup>11</sup> By straddling the city and the countryside, migrants can earn urban wages as long as they have jobs, support the rest of the family at a rural and lower cost of living, and return to the home village or rural town if migrant jobs dwindle. In this light, circulation, rather than permanent migration,

allows the migrants to obtain the best of both worlds. To them, therefore, settling down in the city is not inevitable and may not be the best choice. In the broader literature, there is indeed increased scholarly and policy attention on the bi- and multipolar nature of migration.<sup>12</sup>

The second assumption is a family lives together in the same place most of the time. Such a norm reflects an ideal type of social organization rooted in the “modern family” discourse.<sup>13</sup> In this organization, if migration takes place it usually involves one or more of the following forms: sojourners leave for a short duration and then return, individual migrants motivate the entire family to follow, or the family simply migrates as one unit.<sup>14</sup> Whichever is the case, splitting of the family is temporary rather than long term. However, this modern family model draws heavily from certain segments of society and certain societies, such as middle-class families in the United States, and is not sufficient for analyzing situations where circular migration of one or more family members is the rule rather than the exception. Research on rural–urban migration in Africa, Asia, and Latin America has indeed noted the prevalence of temporary circular migration between home and the place of migrant work.<sup>15</sup> Along the same vein, Bustamante and Aleman argue that another discourse, one that centers on the split household and takes into account the spatial and temporal disruption of migration, is necessary.<sup>16</sup>

Among rural Chinese, split households are common. For example, Zhu’s survey in Fujian reports that 47 percent of migrants prefer a split-household arrangement, suggesting that they are hesitant about permanent settlement in the city.<sup>17</sup> To those migrants, what the home village offers is important, so much so that they would leave some family members behind—to farm, raise children, and look after the elderly—and would not easily give up the idea of returning. The dominant form of split households during the 1980s and 1990s involved one member of the family, usually the husband or an adult unmarried child, leaving home for migrant work while other family members stay behind. Since the 1990s, increasingly both spouses are working as migrants, bringing their children along or leaving some or all of their children behind. It is not clear whether the shift in household arrangement from an inside–outside (wife staying behind and husband migrating) to an outside–outside (both spouses migrating) model reflects an increase in migrants’ desire to stay in cities because very few studies have considered the social organization of migrants’ households and even fewer have linked that to settlement intention.<sup>18</sup>

In the following, I first review the literature on settlement intention, focusing on China's rural–urban migrants and on measuring and explaining settlement intention. This is then followed by an empirical analysis of migrants' settlement intention based on a 2008 survey of migrants in Beijing's urban villages.

## Settlement Intention of China's Rural–Urban Migrants

The literature on migrants' settlement intention in China is relatively small but growing. In particular, an increasing number of Chinese-language publications are focusing on this question. Two themes in this literature are especially relevant to this research: What proportion of migrants intend to stay in the city? What explains whether migrants intend or do not intend to stay?

### Measuring Settlement Intention

Surveys in China that ask migrants whether they intend to stay in the city have yielded proportions ranging from 14.0 percent to 63.7 percent.<sup>19</sup> This large range reflects the fact that surveys use very different questions to inquire about settlement intention and that migrants' settlement intention may have increased over time.

At least four different types of questions have been used in surveys to inquire about settlement intention: (1) whether migrants are willing to give up or sell their land in the home village,<sup>20</sup> (2) whether migrants are willing to change their *hukou* to the city,<sup>21</sup> (3) whether migrants are willing to live in the city,<sup>22</sup> and (4) whether migrants have a long-term plan to stay in the city.<sup>23</sup> For example, Cai and Wang's survey reports that 56.2 percent of migrants are willing to give up their village land but only 39.6 percent are willing to change their *hukou* to the city.<sup>24</sup> In general, the more specific the question, the more likely it generates very high or very low proportions. For example, Cai and Xu show that 78.6 percent of migrants want to continue to work in the city but only 18.6 percent desire to live there during their old age.<sup>25</sup>

It seems that over time, migrants' settlement intention has increased. For example, based on similar surveys in Fujian conducted in 2002 and 2006, Zhu finds that migrants' intention to stay in the city had increased from 21 percent to 36 percent.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the varied results reported in the literature, they point to the advantages of (4) above—asking migrants if they have long-term plan to stay in the city—as an indicator of settlement intention. First, questions similar to (4) are direct but also sufficiently broad to encompass considerations such as land, *hukou*, and age. Second, findings from questions similar to (4) above are relatively consistent. Overall, the literature reports that the proportion of migrants who have a long-term plan to stay in the city is between 30 percent and 40 percent when two options—yes or no—are given and is in the range of 15 percent to 30 percent when a third “undecided” or “haven’t decided” option is also given.

It is important to note several caveats about the measurement of settlement intention. First, there is not yet sufficient research on settlement intention to inform the selection of a universal measure. Second, underlying settlement intention is a bundle of structural, social, demographic, and psychological processes that may be difficult to tease out. Finally, intention represents an inclination and may or may not be translated into action.<sup>27</sup> Despite the above, a better understanding of rural and urban transformations in China demands that greater attention be paid to documenting migrants’ settlement intention and their rationale for wanting or not wanting to stay.

### **Explanations for Settlement Intention**

In the broader literature on migration, studies on settlement intention are relatively few, and most focus on international migration. And researchers tend to approach settlement intention by examining migrants’ settlement process rather than asking migrants directly their intention to stay.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, research on migrants’ settlement has highlighted family and kinship ties, duration of residence, and social and economic structures at the destination as factors conducive to permanent settlement. Khoo’s study, for example, shows that immigrants to Australia who had sponsored at least one other family member for migration are more likely to settle permanently than those who had not.<sup>29</sup> Other studies such as Pinger’s research on migrants from the Republic of Moldova and Khraif’s work on rural migrants in Saudi Arabia underscore the importance of family ties but also show that individuals with longer migration experience are more likely to stay permanently than those with shorter experience.<sup>30</sup> Finally, economic opportunities and social and community support at the destination are shown to motivate migrants to stay rather

than return to their origin.<sup>31</sup> Conversely, Korinek et al. find that rural–urban migrants in Thailand opt to return to their villages because of their weak social relations and organization in the city.<sup>32</sup>

Studies on China have highlighted five types of explanations for why rural migrants intend or do not intend to stay in the city: institutional factors, demographic characteristics, marital status and household arrangement, migration experience and work, and social factors.

The institutional explanation is perhaps the most straightforward, namely, the lack of local (urban) *hukou* makes it difficult for migrants to settle down permanently, as discussed earlier. Some surveys point directly to *hukou* barriers as a factor impeding permanent settlement.<sup>33</sup> Others show that migrants seeking *hukou* change to the city do so in order to improve their opportunities and experiences in the city.<sup>34</sup>

Some studies have highlighted age, gender, educational attainment, and other demographic variables as factors affecting settlement intention. With few exceptions,<sup>35</sup> most have found that younger migrants are more likely than older migrants to intend to stay.<sup>36</sup> Findings about gender are not as clear-cut, but in general more studies have highlighted female migrants as having stronger settlement intention than male migrants.<sup>37</sup> As for education, there is overwhelming evidence of a positive relationship between educational attainment and settlement intention: migrants with higher levels of educational attainment have stronger settlement intention than migrants with less education.<sup>38</sup>

Regarding migrants' marital status, the findings are mixed. Some studies find that singles have stronger settlement intention,<sup>39</sup> while others report that married migrants have stronger settlement intention.<sup>40</sup> Studies that examine migrants' household arrangement show that having the spouse and/or family members also living in the city increases the likelihood of migrants to stay.<sup>41</sup> These findings seem to suggest that household arrangement—whether a migrant's spouse and family members have joined him or her in the city—is indicative of the transition from circular migration to permanent migration. This reasoning seems to resonate with studies on other parts of the world described earlier. However, very little attention has been paid to the specific ways in which households are split, such as whether the children are left behind or are themselves migrants,<sup>42</sup> a point I shall return to when discussing the empirical analysis.

Research has consistently found that the longer the migration experience—usually measured by how long it has been since the migrant left

his or her origins or how long he or she has worked in the destination city—the stronger the settlement intention,<sup>43</sup> again resonating with findings in other parts of the world. Regarding the work that migrants do, very few studies have examined how the job itself affects settlement intention. But, as expected, when the income difference between the city and migrants' origin is larger, their settlement intention is also stronger.<sup>44</sup> A few studies note that benefits such as retirement insurance increase migrants' likelihood to stay,<sup>45</sup> but others find that those are not significant factors.<sup>46</sup> Besides income and benefits, most studies have not considered other aspects of migrant work, such as whether migrants have developed skills and improved their human capital, attributes that would be useful if they were to stay permanently and seek to advance in the labor market.

Given the inferior social positions of migrants, a theme widely discussed in the literature, one would expect that their social interactions and network in the city would foster a stronger intention to stay. Indeed, research on other countries reviewed earlier also supports such an expectation. But the findings in China are mixed. Although some studies note that migrants' sense of inferiority undermines settlement intention while their interactions with urban locals increases it,<sup>47</sup> other studies find that neither the feeling of inferiority nor the social network is related to settlement intention.<sup>48</sup>

### Survey of Beijing's Urban Villages

The empirical analysis for this research is based on a questionnaire survey of migrants who live in *chengzhongcun* 城中村 in Beijing. The Chinese term *chengzhongcun* literally means “village in the city,” but it has also been translated as “village amid the city,” “village encircled by the city,” and “urban village.”<sup>49</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I chose the term “urban village.”<sup>50</sup> Urban villages used to be farming villages but have over time been absorbed into the city. Institutionally, urban villages are rural entities that are administered by village collectives rather than city governments.<sup>51</sup> Geographically, they tend to be found at city fringes—spaces with a mix of urban and rural activities and rapid urban growth—referred to variously as the urban outskirts, peri-urban areas, and suburban areas.<sup>52</sup>

I chose urban villages for this study for two reasons. First, they are popular places for migrants to stay. Having lost their farmland to urban



expansion, many native residents in urban villages have resorted to renting out their houses, including expanded spaces and even illegally constructed spaces, to migrants at low cost.<sup>53</sup> Rules about land administration are complex and not always consistent, but suffice it to say that village collectives rather than city governments have control over *zhaijidi* 宅基地 (rural land for housing purpose), thus ensuring that native residents of urban villages can rent out houses to migrants as a source of income. According to Hsing, urban villages in Guangzhou and Shenzhen make up more than 20 percent and 60 percent, respectively, of their planned areas, providing homes to 80 percent of migrants in those cities.<sup>54</sup> It is not uncommon to find hundreds of urban villages in large cities.

The second reason for choosing urban villages for the study is that they tend to have self-contained rental units that are appealing to migrants who have brought along their family members. Migrants living in factory dorms and employers' homes, in contrast, are more likely to be single or those who have left their spouse and children behind. In other words, a survey of urban villages is more likely than a survey done elsewhere to reach a range of split households.

The survey (hereafter Beijing Urban Village Survey), conducted in September 2008, was administered by the Beijing Municipal Institute of Urban Planning and Design and Tsinghua University's Institute of Real Estate Studies.<sup>55</sup> In the first stage of sampling, 50 urban villages were selected randomly from the total of 867 in the Beijing metropolitan area.<sup>56</sup> In most of the sampled urban villages, migrants outnumber natives. In the second stage, for each of the 50 urban villages, 15 to 20 migrants were selected from different parts of the village so that they were approximately evenly distributed spatially, and they were asked to complete a questionnaire. With the assistance of trained interviewers, a total of 988 questionnaires were collected. Of those, 100 were dropped because of errors or inconsistencies in the answers,<sup>57</sup> leaving 888 cases for the analysis.

Given the location of the survey, namely urban villages, the sample inevitably misses migrants who reside elsewhere. But, since the "population" of migrants is difficult to determine because many migrants do not register with local authorities and because their mobility is high, it is never a straightforward matter to assess how representative or unrepresentative a sample is. Fortunately, a random sample of migrants in Beijing is available from a survey conducted in 2007 and independent of the Beijing Urban Village Survey.<sup>58</sup> Comparison of the two samples

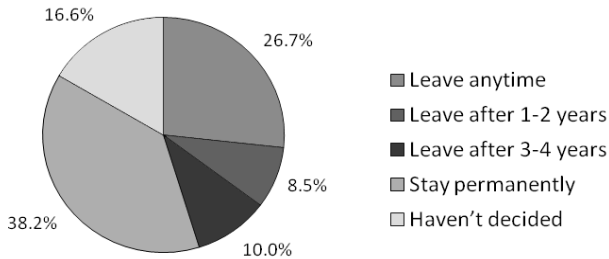
shows that respondents to the Beijing Urban Village Survey are about three years older, slightly less educated, 1.5 years more experienced in migration, and 14 percent more likely to be married than the average migrant in Beijing. All the above differences are expected precisely because rental units in urban villages attract migrant households of all types, especially those consisting of married migrants and their family members.

### **Settlement Intention**

For the question “Do you intend to stay in Beijing,” respondents were given five choices: *leave anytime*, *leave after 1–2 years*, *leave after 3–4 years*, *stay permanently*, and *have not decided*. The first three are collapsed to form the “leave” group; and those who selected “stay permanently” constitute the “stay” group. As discussed earlier, the above categories do not necessarily represent the best measures of settlement intention. Nonetheless, migrants’ selection of *stay permanently* connotes a strong desire to stay and perhaps even a concrete plan toward that goal.

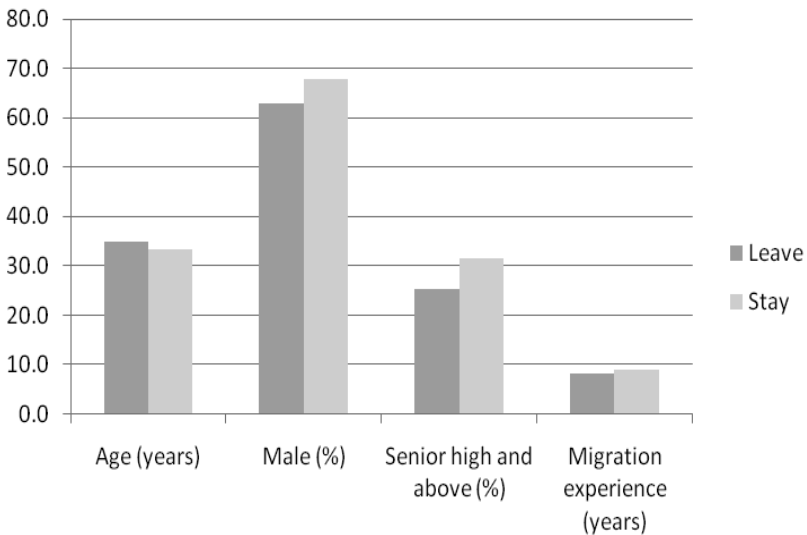
Despite the fact that respondents in the survey have done migrant work for an average of 8.3 years and have worked in Beijing for an average of 6.9 years, a large proportion of them (45.2 percent) belong to the “leave” group and only a minority—38.2 percent—plan to stay in Beijing permanently (see Figure 1). Among leave migrants, almost 60 percent indicate that they would like to leave anytime, reflecting a strong desire to leave. But 16.6 percent of the respondents are neither stay migrants nor leave migrants—they have not decided whether to stay or leave. This is a significant proportion, which suggests that the decision to stay or leave is not an easy one and that it is not uncommon for migrants to want to postpone that decision.

Figure 1: Settlement Intention



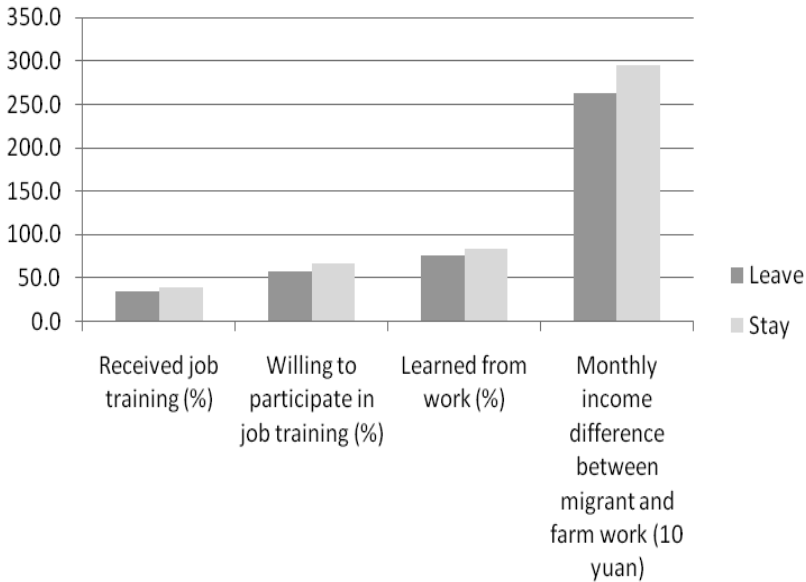
Stay migrants are younger, are more highly represented by men, have higher levels of educational attainment, and have longer migration experience than leave migrants (see Figure 2). Those demographic characteristics tend to be associated with a newer generation of migrants who have a stronger desire to stay in the city than older and earlier migrants.

Figure 2: Demographic Characteristics and Migration Experience



Experiences of migrant work also distinguish stay migrants from leave migrants (see Figure 3). Stay migrants are more likely than leave migrants to have received job training, to be willing to participate in job training, and to have learned skills from their migrant work. All three types of experience indicate that stay migrants, relative to leave migrants, consider their jobs in Beijing not only a source of income but also an investment in their future. At the same time, the difference in household income between migrant work and farm work is bigger among stay migrants than leave migrants, which underscores stay migrants' economic motivation to continue to benefit from working in Beijing.

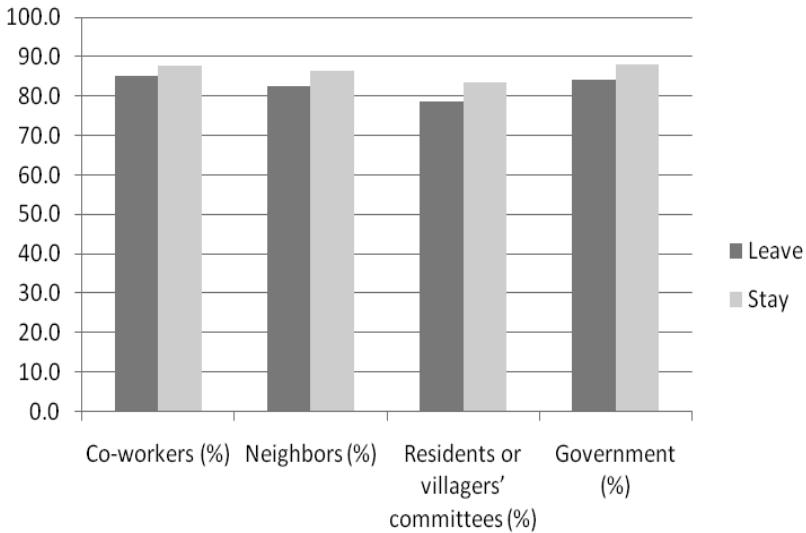
**Figure 3: Migrant Work**



Trust is an indicator of migrants' integration into the host society. I selected four aspects of migrants' possible interactions—coworkers, neighbors, residents or villagers' committees, and the government (see Figure 4). Coworkers are the people migrants interact with at work and may include both urban natives and migrants, including those from the same origin community; neighbors include natives of urban villages and

migrants; but residents or villagers' committees and the government refer to institutional and governance structures that represent the city rather than the home village. As a whole, migrants' levels of trust in their coworkers, neighbors, residents or villagers' committees, and the government are quite high. In almost all cases, more than 80 percent of the migrants reply yes rather than no to the question, "Do you trust . . . ?" But across all four categories, higher proportions of stay migrants than leave migrants select yes, suggesting that trust in the urban society, as expected, contributes to a desire to stay.

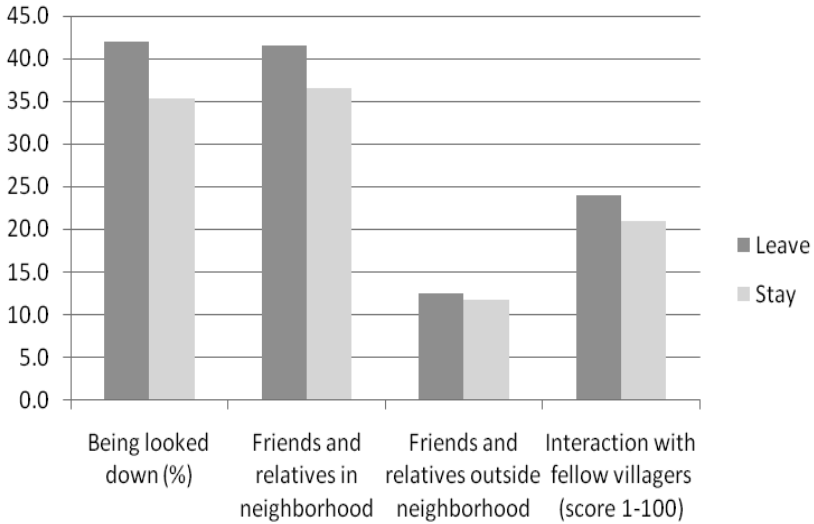
**Figure 4: Level of Trust**



Overall, 39.3 percent of migrants report that they have often or occasionally felt looked down on, which underscores migrants' disadvantaged social positions in the city. The percentage is higher among leave migrants (42.0 percent) than stay migrants (35.4 percent), which suggests that a decreased feeling of inferiority increases migrants' desire to stay (see Figure 5). But the three "interaction" indicators show somewhat contradictory results. Stay migrants are at lower levels than leave migrants in terms of the number of friends and relatives in the neighborhood, the number of friends and relatives outside the neighborhood (in

Beijing), and interaction with fellow villagers in the community.<sup>59</sup> Putting the above together, it appears that feelings of inferiority is a more important factor than social interactions to explain migrants' settlement intention.

**Figure 5: Social Position and Network**



### Split Households

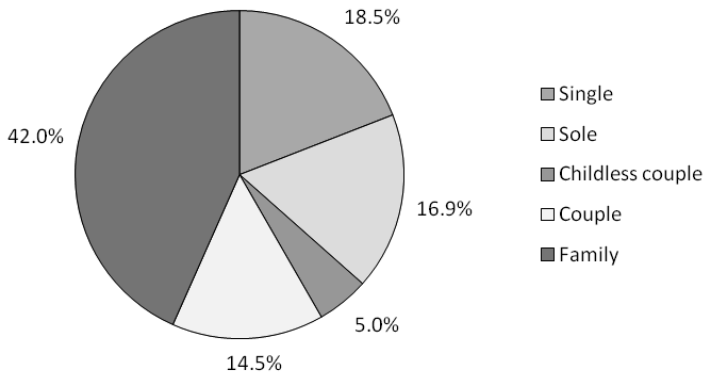
Based on migrants' marital status and household arrangement, I categorize them into five types, including one single type and four married types (see Table 1 and Figure 6). Singles account for 18.5 percent of the migrants in the survey. The four types of married migrants are sole migrants, childless couple migrants, couple migrants, and family migrants. Sole migrants are those who are in Beijing by themselves and are separated from the rest of the nuclear family—the spouse and all children, or just the spouse if the migrant does not have children. They account for 16.9 percent of the sample. Childless couple migrants are those who do not have children and whose spouse is in Beijing, representing only 5 percent of all migrants. Couple migrants are migrants whose spouse is in Beijing but all their children are not in Beijing,

accounting for 14.5 percent of the sample. Finally, 42.0 percent of the migrants are family migrants, referring to those whose spouse and some or all of their children are in Beijing. Research has consistently found that left-behind children are taken care of by other left-behind family members, most commonly migrants’ parents who are physically capable.<sup>60</sup> Studies have also shown that even when migrants have brought along all their children to the city, it is very common that their rural house and farmland are looked after by the left-behind elderly.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, it is likely that a large proportion of family migrants, as defined above, continue to maintain a split-household arrangement with left-behind children and/or elderly.

**Table 1: Types of Split Households**

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Single           | Single   |
| Sole             | Married, spouse not in Beijing, all children not in Beijing or no children |
| Childless couple | Married, spouse in Beijing, no children                                    |
| Couple           | Married, spouse in Beijing, all children not in Beijing                    |
| Family           | Married, spouse and some or all children in Beijing                        |

**Figure 6: Household Arrangement**

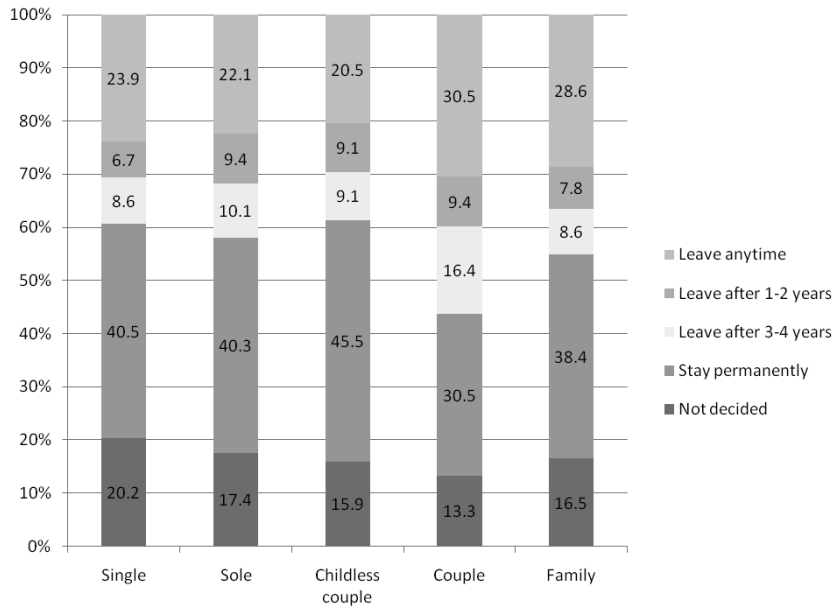


Although the breakdowns in the sample should not be taken as quantitative measures of the overall prevalence of each type of split households—because urban villages, more so than housing types such as factory dorms, tend to accommodate migrants living with family

members—the fact that childless couple, couple, and family migrants together constitute 61.5 percent of the sample lends support to the importance of examining different forms of split households.

The proportion of stay migrants is the highest among childless couple migrants (45.5 percent) and the lowest among couple migrants (30.5 percent) (see Figure 7). Conversely, childless couple migrants have the lowest (20.5 percent) and couple migrants have the highest (30.5 percent) *leave anytime* proportion. As a whole, *leave anytime*, *leave after 1–2 years*, and *leave after 3–4 years* account for 38.6 percent of childless couple migrants—the lowest—and 56.3 percent of couple migrants—the highest. The fact that those two groups are at the opposite ends of the spectrum suggests that children is a key factor. Couples who are childless and who are both in Beijing have the strongest intention to stay, whereas couples who are both in Beijing but whose children are all elsewhere have the weakest intention to stay.

**Figure 7: Settlement Intention and Household Arrangement**



Among the other three groups, single migrants (40.5 percent) and sole migrants (40.3 percent) are more likely than family migrants (38.4



percent) to intend to stay. It is not surprising that single migrants, who are not as affected by family ties as married migrants, have a relatively strong settlement intention. But it is puzzling that a higher proportion of sole migrants (40.3 percent) than family migrants (38.4 percent) intend to stay. The latter suggests that having more family members as part of the migration stream is not necessarily associated with stronger settlement intention.

### Modeling Settlement Intention

Informed by the summary statistics described above, I test the statistical significance of the differences between leave migrants and stay migrants via a logistic regression. The dependent variable is coded 0 for leave migrants and 1 for stay migrants. I included five groups of independent variables: demographics, split household, migrant work, social, and village resources (see Table 2). Overall, the model is reasonably successful, as indicated by the chi-square statistic of 55.57, a pseudo- $R^2$  of .0568, and its correct classification of 61.5 percent of the observations.<sup>62</sup> Although the percentage correctly classified is not overwhelming, the focus of the analysis is on the significant independent variables more so than the overall predictive power of the model. I tested for multicollinearity by running an ordinary least squares regression using the same dependent and independent variables, which yielded variance inflation factors that are satisfactory, suggesting that correlations among independent variables have not unduly biased the estimates for the model.

Demographic variables include *age*, *gender*, *education*, and *migration experience*. Leave and stay migrants are not significantly different in terms of *age*, *gender*, and *education*. Contrary to expectations, younger migrants are not more likely than older migrants, and migrants with higher education are not more likely than those with less education, to intend to stay, when other variables are held constant. But *migration experience* is positive and significant. Migrants with a longer migration experience are more likely to choose to settle down in the city, compared to those with shorter migration experience. An one-year increase in *migration experience* increases the odds of choosing to stay by 3.7 percent.

Split household is represented by four *household arrangement* dummy variables: “single migrants,” “sole migrants,” “childless couple

migrants,” and “family migrants.” Couple migrants constitute the reference group. Model estimates show that when holding other variables constant the results are still consistent with those described by the summary statistics earlier. Single migrants, childless couple migrants, and family migrants are all more likely than couple migrants to intend to stay. This suggests that even when both spouses are migrants, the fact that all their children are left behind—as opposed to all children in Beijing, some children in Beijing, or no children at all—discourages the migrants to stay permanently in the city.

Migrant work variables include *insurance*, *training*, *time for training*, *learning from work*, and *income difference*. Insurance refers to the amount of social insurance (including medical insurance, unemployment insurance, retirement insurance, work-related injury insurance, and family planning insurance) a migrant has. *Training* refers to whether a migrant has received training. *Time for training* refers to whether a migrant is willing to spend time on free training provided by the government. *Learning from work* describes the extent to which the respondent agrees that he or she has learned from the current job. “Nothing” or “little” constitutes the reference group (as opposed to “some,” “quite a bit,” and “a lot”). *Income difference* is the difference in monthly household income between migrant work and farm work.

*Insurance* is not significant, which may be due to the fact that most migrants have minimal insurance coverage—the average number of insurance policies in the sample is 0.4. Neither is *training* significant, which suggests that the training migrants have received may be relevant to their current job but is not a catalyst for a long-term stay in the city. However, *time for training*, *learning from work*, and *income difference* are all significant. Migrants who are willing to attend training and those who think that they have learned from their jobs are more likely than other migrants to intend to stay. The willingness to attend training increases the odds of intention to stay by 54.9 percent. The odds of intending to stay of migrants who are learning from their work are 1.4 times the odds of those who have not learned from their work. The income difference between migrant work and farm work motivates migrants to stay: a 1,000 yuan increase in monthly income difference increases the odds of staying by 10 percent.

The social category includes eight variables. Four are dummy variables on trust, *trust in coworkers*, *trust in neighbors*, *trust in committee*,

and *trust in government*, all with “do not trust” as the reference group. None of the four trust variables are significant. In other words, migrants’ level of trust in the urban society makes little difference in their intention to stay, when all other variables are held constant. However, looked down is significant and has a negative coefficient. The odds of intending to stay for migrants who have occasionally or often felt looked down on are 25.3 percent less than the odds for migrants who have never felt looked down on.

The rest of the social variables are concerned with social network. *Network in community* refers to the number of relatives, fellow villagers, coworkers, and neighbors in the community whom migrants know. *Network in Beijing* refers to the number of relatives and friends migrants have in Beijing outside of their own community. *Interaction with villagers* refers to the frequency of migrants’ interactions with fellow villagers in their community over the past month.<sup>63</sup> *Network in community* and *interaction with villagers* are both significant, but their coefficients are, contrary to expectations, negative. Migrants who have a large social network in their community and those who have frequent interactions with fellow villagers are in fact less likely to intend to stay compared to other migrants. *Network in Beijing* is not significant. Put together, the above results suggest that migrants’ social interactions, contrary to expectations, actually discourage them from staying.

Village resources, which include *house* and *farmland*, constitute the last group of variables. *House* refers to the size of house in the home village and *farmland* to the amount of farmland allocated to the migrant’s household. Neither is significant.

Standardized coefficients reveal the relative importance of independent variables. Among all independent variables in the model, the three *household arrangement* variables “single migrants” (0.2366), “sole migrants” (0.2332), and “family migrants” (0.2072) have the largest standardized coefficients. How the family is split, therefore, is an important predictor of migrants’ intention to stay. Specifically, single migrants and married migrants whose children are staying with one or both parents are more likely to intend to stay in the city than spouses who both work in the city while all of their children live elsewhere. These results underscore the role of children in migrants’ settlement intention: left-behind children deter migrants from settling down permanently in cities.

**Table 2: Logistic Regression on Settlement Intention**

|  | Coefficient | Standardized coefficient | Z       | Odds ratio |
|--|-------------|--------------------------|---------|------------|
| <b>Demographics</b>  |             |                          |         |            |
| Age  | -0.0087     | -0.0706                  | -0.78   | 0.9914     |
| Gender (reference: female)                                 |             |                          |         |            |
| Male   | 0.1824      | 0.0745                   | 1.04    | 1.2001     |
| Education (reference: junior high and below)               |             |                          |         |            |
| Senior and above   | 0.0380      | 0.0148                   | 0.20    | 1.0388     |
| Migration experience                                       | 0.0362      | 0.1976                   | 2.53**  | 1.0369     |
| <b>Split household</b>                                     |             |                          |         |            |
| Household arrangement (reference: couple migrants)         |             |                          |         |            |
| Single migrants  | 0.7119      | 0.2366                   | 2.17**  | 2.0378     |
| Sole migrants  | 0.7193      | 0.2332                   | 2.49**  | 2.0530     |
| Childless couple migrants                                  | 0.5576      | 0.1065                   | 1.33    | 1.7464     |
| Family migrants  | 0.4873      | 0.2076                   | 2.01**  | 1.6279     |
| <b>Migrant work</b>  |             |                          |         |            |
| Insurance  | 0.0875      | 0.0673                   | 0.94    | 1.0914     |
| Training (reference: no training)                          |             |                          |         |            |
| Had training   | 0.0232      | 0.0096                   | 0.13    | 1.0235     |
| Time for training (reference: not willing to attend)       |             |                          |         |            |
| Willing to attend  | 0.4377      | 0.1815                   | 2.39**  | 1.5491     |
| Learning from work (reference: learned nothing/<br>little) |             |                          |         |            |
| Some, quite a bit, or a lot of learning                    | 0.3670      | 0.1248                   | 1.74*   | 1.4435     |
| Income difference  | 0.0001      | 0.1685                   | 1.96*   | 1.0001     |
| <b>Social</b>  |             |                          |         |            |
| Trust in coworkers (reference: do not trust)               | 0.0593      | 0.0173                   | 0.22    | 1.0611     |
| Trust in neighbors (reference: do not trust)               | 0.3082      | 0.0955                   | 1.22    | 1.3610     |
| Trust in committee (reference: do not trust)               | 0.2728      | 0.0907                   | 1.17    | 1.3137     |
| Trust in government (reference: do not trust)              | 0.1629      | 0.0481                   | 0.62    | 1.1770     |
| Looked down (reference: never)                             | -0.2918     | -0.1221                  | -1.75*  | 0.7469     |
| Network in community                                       | -0.0065     | -0.1793                  | -2.34** | 0.9935     |
| Network in Beijing   | -0.0025     | -0.0614                  | -0.85   | 0.9976     |
| Interaction with villagers                                 | -0.0648     | -0.1292                  | -1.74*  | 0.9373     |
| <b>Village resources</b>                                   |             |                          |         |            |
| Farmland   | -0.0006     | -0.0087                  | -0.13   | 0.9994     |
| House  | 0.0002      | 0.0248                   | 0.35    | 1.0002     |
| Model $\chi^2$   | 55.57***    |                          |         |            |
| Pseudo- $R^2$  | .0568       |                          |         |            |
| Percentage correctly classified                            | 61.5        |                          |         |            |

Note: Dependent variable = 0 for leave migrants and 1 for stay migrants. Significance levels: \*.10, \*\*.05, \*\*\*.01.

*Migration experience* (0.1976) and *time for training* (0.1815) have the next largest standardized coefficients. Both are related to the potential of migrants to gain from urban work. They are followed by *network in community* (−0.1793) and *income difference* (0.1685). Their opposite signs tell an interesting story: economic opportunities in the city encourage migrants to stay, but their social interactions do not. The latter is further reinforced by the negative coefficients of *interaction with villagers* and *looked down*, although their standardized coefficients (−0.1292 and −0.1221, respectively) are the smallest among those that are significant.

## Summary and Discussion

Through the lens of settlement intention, in this article I have sought to highlight migration as not only a process toward permanent migration but also one that involves long-term circularity where migrants do not have plans to settle down permanently. In the case of rural–urban migrants in China, recent studies have found that intention to settle down in the city is not as strong as expected. Nor do they reveal a simple trajectory of migrants leaving the countryside in favor of urban settlement. Based on a migrant survey conducted in 2008 in Beijing’s urban villages, this article has shown that the settlement intention of migrants involves a complex set of institutional, social, and household- and individual-level considerations.

Results from the empirical analysis support the observation that a large proportion of rural migrants do not intend to stay in the city permanently. They also highlight the notion that *hukou*—more precisely, not having a city or urban *hukou*—is but one of many reasons why rural migrants do not settle down. Cities are seen by migrants as a place to earn wages and augment household income rather than a place to take root. Migrants’ economic motivation underlies why they choose to circulate between urban work and the home village for a long period of time. Such circulation entails the family splitting between two or more places. The single or sole migrant arrangements used to be dominant, but couple and family migrants are increasingly common. It is unclear if more family members joining the migration stream is indicative of an increased desire for permanent migration. Sending both spouses to the city may simply be a strategy to maximize the household labor power devoted to urban earnings rather than a transition toward permanent

settlement in the city. This study finds that couple migrants who did not bring any of their children to Beijing have the weakest intention to stay compared to other migrants. This suggests that a split-household arrangement facilitates migrants' earning of urban wages, but the location of their migrant work may have little bearing on where they consider their permanent home to be.

My analysis also shows that a large gap in income between migrant work and farm work correlates with a stronger settlement intention. But it appears that immediate economic returns is only one of many considerations that underlie permanent settlement. Migrants who have more migrant work experience, have learned from migrant work, and are willing to invest their time in job training are more likely than other migrants to intend to stay. These results highlight future opportunities in the city as an important consideration in settlement intention. Socially, migrants who do not feel looked down on have stronger settlement intention, but those who have more frequent interactions with others in the city actually have weaker settlement intention, perhaps because those interactions reinforce migrants' marginalized positions.

Put together, the above findings suggest that a sense of place, one that is associated with a social and labor market future, must be present in the city before migrants will desire to settle down permanently. Until that time, the practices of long-term circular migration and split households are likely to continue. The results of this research lend support to the argument that temporary and circular migration is not merely a step toward permanent migration. Rather than simply opting for moving to the city, migrants demonstrate their agency and strategy via different forms of household arrangement, including splitting the household, and via their hesitancy toward permanent migration. The Chinese rural migrant family, while challenging the modern family model where members always stay in one place, also draws attention to the utility of a household approach for understanding migration decisions and settlement intention.

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41. Cai Ling and Xu Chuqiao, “Nongmingong liucheng yiyuan”; Gao Guanzhong, “Yingxiang nongmingong qianju chengshi yiyuan”; Li Zhenzhen and Chen Ling, “Nongmingong liucheng yiyuan”; Ren Yuan and Dai Xingyi, “Wailai renkou changqi juliu qingxiang”; Wang, “Organizing through Division and Exclusion”; Wang Chunlan and Ding Jinhong, “Liudong renkou chengshi juliu yiyuan de yingxiang yinsu fenxi” (Analysis of Factors Influencing Floating Population’s Living Inclination in the Urban), *Nanfang renkou* (South China Population), Vol. 22, No. 1 (2007), pp. 22–29; Wei Jianwen and Zhang Wangcheng, “Nongmingong liucheng yiyuan”; Zeng Xuhui and Qin Wei, “Zaicheng nongmingong liucheng qingxiang”; Zhao Yanzhi, “Wailai renkou.”
42. C. Cindy Fan, Mingjie Sun, and Siqi Zheng, “Migration and Split Households: A Comparison of Sole, Couple, and Family Migrants in Beijing, China,” *Environment and Planning A*, Vol. 43, No. 9 (2011), pp. 2164–2185.
43. Guo Jianyu, “Zhongshan shi liudong renkou”; He Pichan and Guo Jinfeng, “Zhidu yueshu xia”; Ren Yuan and Dai Xingyi, “Wailai renkou changqi juliu qingxiang”; Wang Chunlan and Ding Jinhong, “Liudong renkou chengshi juliu yiyuan”; Wang, “Organizing through Division and Exclusion”; Wu Xinglu, “Nongmingong dingjuxing qianyi juece”; Wu Lei and Zhu Guannan, “Jincheng wugong nongmingong dingju juece”; Yao Jun, “Nongmingong dingju chengshi yiyuan diaocha: jiyu sunan sanshi de shizheng fenxi” (Study on Migrant Workers’ Settlement Intention in the City: A Case Study of Three Cities in Southern Jiangsu), *Chengshi wenti* (Urban Problems), No. 9 (2009), pp. 96–101; Zhao Yanzhi, “Wailai renkou.”
44. Xiong Bo and Shi Renbing, “Lixing xuanze yu nongmingong yongjiuxing qianyi yiyuan: jiyu Wuhan shi de shizheng fenxi” (Rational Choice and Rural Migrant Workers’ Will of Permanent Migration: An Empirical Analysis on Wuhan), *Renkou yu jingji* (Population and Economics), No. 4 (2009), pp. 13–19; Wu Xinglu, “Nongmingong dingjuxing qianyi juece.”
45. Huang Qian, “Nongmingong dingju chengshi yiyuan”; Xu Tianceng, “Nongmingong dingjuxing qianyi.”
46. He Pichan and Guo Jinfeng, “Zhidu yueshu xia”; Yu Zhu and Wenzhe Chen, “Settlement Intention.”
47. Wang Chunlan and Ding Jinhong, “Liudong renkou chengshi juliu yiyuan”; Wu Lei and Zhu Guannan, “Jincheng wugong nongmingong dingju juece”; Xia Yiran, “Nongmingong dingjudi xuanze yiyuan.”
48. Huang Qian, “Nongmingong dingju chengshi yiyuan”; Wang, “Organizing through Division and Exclusion”; Wei Jianwen and Zhang Wangcheng, “Nongmingong liucheng yiyuan”; Yao Jun, “Nongmingong dingju chengshi yiyuan.”

49. For example, Li Zhang, Simon X. B. Zhao, and J. P. Tian, "Self-Help in Housing and Chengzhongcun in China's Urbanization," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (2003), pp. 912–937; Fulong Wu, "Beyond Gradualism: China's Urban Revolution and Emerging Cities," in *China's Emerging Cities: The Making of New Urbanism*, edited by Fulong Wu (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 3–25; Li Tian, "The Chengzhongcun Land Market in China: Boon or Bane? A Perspective on Property Rights," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2008), pp. 282–304.
50. My usage of the term is different from the post-1960s planning concept of "urban village" in Western cities that highlights self-containment, community interaction, and reduced reliance on automobiles as an alternative to urban sprawl. See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).
51. You-tien Hsing, *The Great Urban Transformation: Politics and Property in China* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009).
52. George C. S. Lin, *Developing China: Land, Politics and Social Conditions* (London: Routledge, 2009); T. G. McGee, George C. S. Lin, Andrew M. Marton, Mark Y. L. Wang, and Jiaping Wu, *China's Urban Space: Development under Market Socialism* (London: Routledge, 2007); Yixing Zhou and John R. Logan, "Growth on the Edge: The New Chinese Metropolis," in *Urban China in Transition*, edited by John R. Logan (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 140–160.
53. Wing-Shing Tang and Him Chung, "Rural–Urban Transition in China: Illegal Land Use and Construction," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (2002), pp. 43–62; Siqi Zheng, Fenjie Long, C. Cindy Fan, and Yizhen Gu, "Urban Villages in China: A 2008 Survey of Migrant Settlements in Beijing," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (2009), pp. 425–446.
54. You-tien Hsing, *Great Urban Transformation*.
55. Fan, Sun, and Zheng, "Migration and Split Households"; Zheng et al., "Urban Villages in China."
56. Because urban villages are not formally considered part of the urban economy—and thus excluded from regularly collected urban statistics—information about their number and spatial distribution is not publicly available. According to the Beijing Municipal Land Authority, as of 2008 there were 867 urban villages in the Beijing metropolitan area (BMA), mostly located in the city's fringes. As defined by the Beijing Municipal Commission of Urban Planning, BMA is 1,086 km<sup>2</sup> in size and consists of four urban districts (Dongcheng, Xicheng, Chongwen, and Xuanwu) and parts of five suburban districts (Chaoyang, Haidian, Fengtai, Shijingshan, and Changping).

57. For example, cases where answers to marital status or household composition were inconsistent were dropped. Also, migrants who reported missing or zero income or rent were dropped because it could not be determined if they were reluctant to reveal personal information or if their income or rent was actually zero.
58. C. Cindy Fan, "Rural–Urban Migration and Split Households in China: Diverse Forms of Migrant Household Arrangement" (paper, "Householding in Transition: Emerging Dynamics in 'Developing' East and Southeast Asia" workshop, National University of Singapore, 25–26 July 2011).
59. For all three "interaction" indicators, the data do not allow for distinguishing between migrants and urban natives. However, "interaction with fellow villagers" (over the past month) refers specifically to individuals from the same origin, who are by definition migrants. I use a composite score to summarize the frequency of migrants' interaction with fellow villagers. The score is between 0 and 100, 0 indicating no interactions and 100 indicating frequent interactions.
60. For example, Fan, "Flexible Work, Flexible Household"; Ye Jingzhong and Pan Lu, *Beiyang tongnian: Zhongguo nongcui liushou ertong* (Differentiated Childhoods: Children Left behind in Rural China) (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2008), p. 301.
61. For example, Biao Xiang, "How Far Are the Left-Behind Left Behind? A Preliminary Study in Rural China," *Population, Place and Space*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2007), pp. 179–191; Zhou Hao, "Zhongguo renkou qianyi de jiating hua qushi ji yingxiang yinsu fenxi" (The Analysis of the Trend and Factors of Family Migration), *Renkou yanjiu* (Population Research), Vol. 28, No. 6 (2004), pp. 60–67.
62. Missing values were handled using simple imputation, which uses the regression equation for non-missing-value cases to compute values for missing-value cases. The results are very similar to those without using simple imputation.
63. Also see note 59.