

## 2 The new-generation migrant workers in China

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### Introduction

On 13 June, 2012, a 23-year-old Chinese Foxconn worker jumped to his death in the inland city of Chengdu, renewing public attention on labor suicides in China (Reuters 2012). The blight of China's migrant workers received worldwide scrutiny when 13 young workers attempted or committed suicide at Foxconn plants in Shenzhen between January and May of 2010 (Li and Tian 2010; Chan and Pun 2010). All were between 17 and 25 years old, namely, members of the post-80s generation. In response, Foxconn, along with other manufacturing plants in China that also reported labor suicides around the same time, raised wages and promised to improve working condition. Foxconn also began an aggressive plan to move its production to inland locations in order to access cheaper workers. But the latest suicide in Chengdu suggests that extreme dissatisfaction by young migrant workers is far from over.

Chan and Pun (2010) argue that:

These better-educated-youths long for a life attuned to the times, and the city is where everything is happening. The higher their aspirations for a better future, the more obvious the contrast to their harsh reality becomes. Through various forms of protest, of which suicide is the most desperate expression, they are trying to reclaim their rights and dignity.

Similarly, Li and Tian (2010) found that the new generation of migrant workers feel more strongly than the older generation about rural – urban inequality and work safety issues. Stresses at work and personal troubles might have been conducive to extreme behaviors, but the series of suicides by young migrants highlight new-generation migrant workers as a group who are more aware of unfairness and more ready to aspire to improving their future than older migrant workers.

There is another reason to pay attention to the new-generation migrant workers – they are now the majority of migrant workers in China according to NPPPC (2008) (see also Demographic Characteristics). Both the number and proportion of new-generation migrants are expected to increase. These young migrants lack

farming experience and aspire to be part of the urban society but they continue to face obstacles similar to those confronting older migrants (Yang 2012). In this chapter, we aim to review, summarize and highlight the characteristics of the new-generation migrant workers in China and how they are different from and similar to the old-generation migrant workers.

### Definitions

"Migrant workers" (*nongmingong*), in the Chinese context, refers primarily to individuals who are from rural areas, have a rural registration (*hukou*), and are working outside their village and town (Li and Tian 2010). For the sake of simplicity, in this chapter we use the terms "migrants" and "migrant workers" interchangeably.

The research on migrants in China has increasingly paid attention to "new-generation" (*xinshengdai*) migrants as a group distinct from "old-generation" (*laoyidai*) migrants. The first paper that coined the term "new-generation migrant workers" might be Wang (2001). However, the usage, criteria and definitions of the terms are not consistent. To add to the confusion, other terms such as "first-generation" (*diyidai*) and "second-generation" (*di'er dai*) are also used and sometimes interchangeably with, respectively, the terms "old-generation" and "new-generation." A review of the literature shows that in general, three types of criteria have been used to delineate new-generation and second-generation migrants from old-generation and first-generation migrants, as summarized in Table 2.1.

The most widely accepted criterion is age. The year 1980 is the most commonly used dividing line (migrants born in 1980 and later are commonly referred to as the post-80s<sup>1</sup>); they constitute the new-generation migrants<sup>2</sup> while those born before 1980 are considered old-generation migrants.

Age as a criterion points to four factors that set new-generation migrants apart from the older cohorts: youth, familiarity, farming, and the economic reforms. The youth factor refers to the notion that younger migrants tend to be more concerned with their future and are more resourceful than older migrants. For example,

Table 2.1 Criteria for the "new-generation" and "second-generation" migrants.

	Old-generation or first-generation	New-generation or second-generation	Sample studies
1. Age	Born before 1980	Post-80s (born in 1980 and later)	Liu <i>et al.</i> (2012); NBS (2011); Ye (2011); Yin (2010)
2. Time of first migrant work	1980s	1990s and later	Wang (2001)
3. Migrant generation	First-generation in family	Second-generation or beyond in family	Liang (2011); Xie (2010)

Guan's fieldwork in Tianjin finds that the post-80s depend more heavily on smart phones and the Internet to get information, and they believe more strongly than older cohorts that "mastering knowledge and skills" is "extremely important in life" (Guan 2011). The second factor is the degree of familiarity with migrant work. Unlike the older cohorts, many of whom were pioneer migrants who tended to view migrant work as a short-term solution, the post-80s grew up already knowing and seeing migrant work as an established way of life among rural Chinese. Rather than carving out new paths, the new-generation migrants could follow the footsteps of more experienced migrants in the family and in the village. Third, the post-80s in general lack farming experience, as they typically join the migrant labor force immediately after finishing school, at a younger age than the older cohorts when they started migrant work. The fourth factor refers to China's economic reforms. The post-80s were born and grew up during a period when China pursued a path of development distinctly different from before, when rapid economic growth driven by globalization was the norm as opposed to the Maoist inward-looking development that the older cohorts experienced.

The second type of criteria for defining different generations of migrants is the timing of one's first migrant work. For example, Wang (2001) considers individuals who began migrant work in the 1980s as first-generation (*diyidai*) and those who began in the 1990s as new-generation (*xinshengdai*) migrants. Using this criterion, the old-generation and new-generation may not have a large age difference; in fact, some who began migrant work in the 1990s could be older than those who began in the 1980s. Nevertheless, regardless of one's age, prospective migrants in the 1990s had much more information about migrant work and operated in an economically more vibrant and open environment than those in the 1980s.

The third type of criteria refers to whether an individual belongs to the first generation in the family to do migrant work. That is, children of first-generation migrants who engage in migrant work can be considered second-generation migrants (Liang 2011; Xie 2010). This definition is akin to one used in the literature on international migration, namely, second-generation immigrants are children of first-generation immigrants (Portes *et al.* 2009). But that literature considers individuals born in the destination country to first-generation immigrants as the second-generation, whereas in the Chinese context being born in the destination is usually not part of the definition of the second-generation.

There are certainly overlapping characteristics among new-generation and second-generation migrants defined using the three criteria described above. For example, both the post-80s migrants and the children of first-generation migrants are younger, lack farming experience, and grew up being familiar with migrant work as a concept and practice and with the economic reforms. In addition, children of first-generation migrants have observed and experienced first-hand, from their parents, migrant work as a way of life.<sup>3</sup>

Since age seems to be the most commonly accepted criterion, much of the following discussion focuses on the post-80s as the general definition for the new-generation migrants and does not specifically make a distinction between new-generation and second-generation migrants.

### Size

Table 2.2 highlights a sample of studies that report the size of the new-generation migrants defined by age.

Despite the different definitions for migrant workers and the different age criteria used in the above studies, most report that the new-generation migrants are already accounting for more than half of all migrant workers in China. According to a survey issued by the Policy Research Office of the State Council in 2006, of the 120 million migrant workers in China, 61 percent were aged 16–30, 23 percent were 31–40 years old, and 16 percent were 41 years old and above (NPPFC 2008). The 2009 Migrant Worker Monitoring Survey, carried out by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS 2011) with a sample of 68,000 rural households across all 31 provinces, shows that migrant workers, defined as those who had done migrant work for more than six months in 2009, totaled 145 million (see Figure 2.1). Of those, 58 percent were aged 16–29. These numbers have been cited in many government reports (e.g., NBS 2011; ACWF 2011; ACFIU 2010). In addition, the 2009 NBS report shows that the older the age, the less is the number of migrant workers and the smaller is the proportion of migrant workers relative to

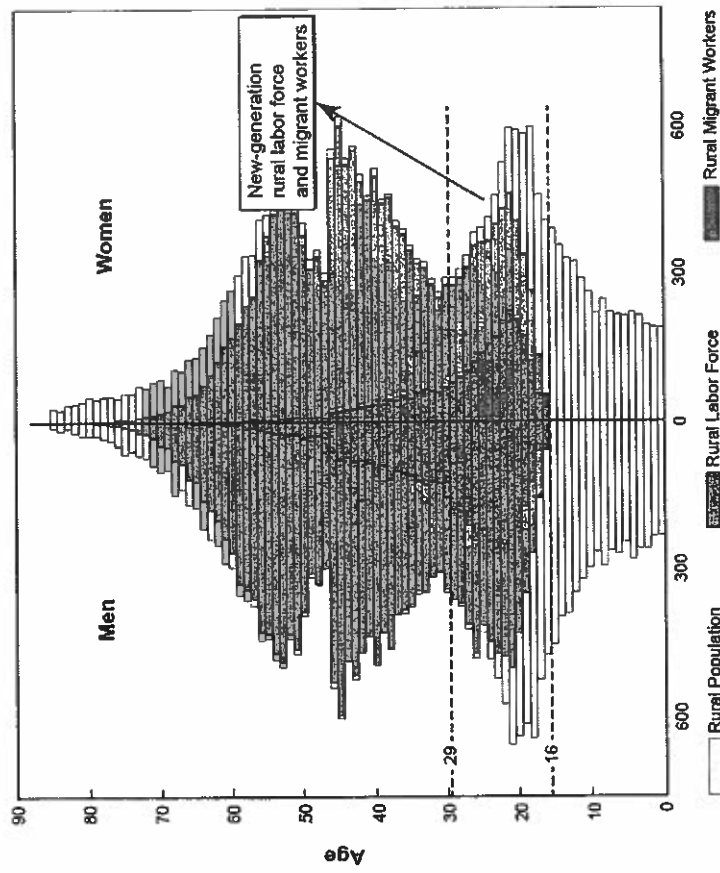


Figure 2.1 Age structure of rural population, rural labor force, and rural migrant workers. Source: NBS (2009).

total rural labor force, reinforcing the NPPFC report's findings. The decline in number and proportion of migrant workers with increasing age suggests two phenomena. First, the younger the rural Chinese, the more likely he or she participates in migrant work. In other words, a larger proportion of the post-80s than the older cohorts have engaged in migrant work. Second, some of the old-generation migrants have retired or left the migrant labor force, thus disappearing from the category of migrant workers.

In the same vein, the younger the rural Chinese, the less likely they choose to remain in agriculture in their home village and the more likely they choose non-agricultural migrant work. As shown in Figure 2.2, among the 20–29 age group, the percentage of agricultural work locally, non-agricultural work locally, and non-agricultural migrant work is respectively 37.6 percent, 13.2 percent, and 49.3 percent. The respective percentages for the 30–39 age group are 51.8 percent, 20.8 percent, and 27.4 percent.

More recently, in February of 2010, Tang Renjian, the Vice Minister of the Office of the Central Leading Group on Financial and Economic Affairs,

Table 2.2 Sample studies on the new-generation migrant workers.

Age	Size	Proportion (of all migrant workers)	Definition of migrant workers	Sample studies/sources	Year
16–30 (born between 1976 and 1990)	73 million	61%		Survey by the Policy Research Office of the State Council (NPPFC 2008)	2006
16–29 (born between 1980 and 1993)	85 million	58%	Migrated for more than six months	Migrant Worker Monitoring Survey by NBS (2011)	2009
Post-80s	100 million	60%		Vice Minister Tang Renjian (Zhao 2010)	February 2010
16–30 (born between 1980 and 1994)		47%	Agricultural hukou; employment status is “employed,” “housework” or “unemployed”	Survey by the National Population and Family Planning Commission (NPPFC) (Duan and Ma 2011)	May 2010

According to Wang *et al.* (2011) and drawing from the 2005 One-Percent Population Sample Survey, the proportion of men among the old-generation migrants is 20 percent points higher than that of women. However, in Wang's own survey conducted in 2010 in four major destination cities in Shandong, the percentage of women is 6.8 points higher than men among the new-generation migrant workers (Wang *et al.* 2011). Based on the Special Survey on the New Generation Migrant Workers in 10 Provinces conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS 2011), respectively 26.9 percent and 40.8 percent of the old-generation migrants and the new-generation migrants are female. According to the All-China Women's Federation's 2011 survey on the new-generation migrant workers, 45.2 percent are male and 54.8 percent are female (ACWF 2011). Drawing from the 2000 census data on the floating population in Guangzhou, the number of women in the 15–24 age group was significantly larger than the number of men, as reflected by a very low sex ratio of 67.17 (Ye *et al.* 2003).

The increased proportion of women among the new-generation migrants underscores changes in migrants' household structure. As migrant work has become a way of life in rural China, it is increasingly acceptable for wives to join their migrant husband, even entailing leaving their children behind to be raised by grandparents. Studies have shown that "sole migration" involving one spouse used to be the dominant model among older migrants but that "couple migration" is increasingly practiced among the younger generation of migrants (Fan 2011; Fan *et al.* 2011).

commented in a press conference that the post-80s accounted for 60 percent of the 150 million migrant workers (Zhao 2010). In May 2010, the National Population and Family Planning Commission (NPPFC), which defined migrant workers as individuals who have agricultural *hukou* and whose employment status is "being employed," "housework," or "unemployed," conducted a national-level survey of migrant workers. Among the sample of 102,596 migrant workers in that survey, those aged between 16 and 30 accounted for 47 percent (Duan and Ma 2011); still a large proportion that deserves special attention.

## Demographic characteristics

### Sex

The findings on gender balance among migrant workers vary considerably because studies tend to focus on certain age groups and certain specific locations. Nonetheless, it is generally agreed that there were more men than women among older migrants. For example, Yue *et al.*'s survey in Shenzhen conducted in 2005 shows that 66 percent of the old-generation migrant workers (born before 1975) are male. Also, most studies find that the sex ratio among migrants has declined over time. In other words, female migrants have increased in number at a rate higher than male migrants. In fact, some studies have found that women outnumber men among the new-generation migrants.

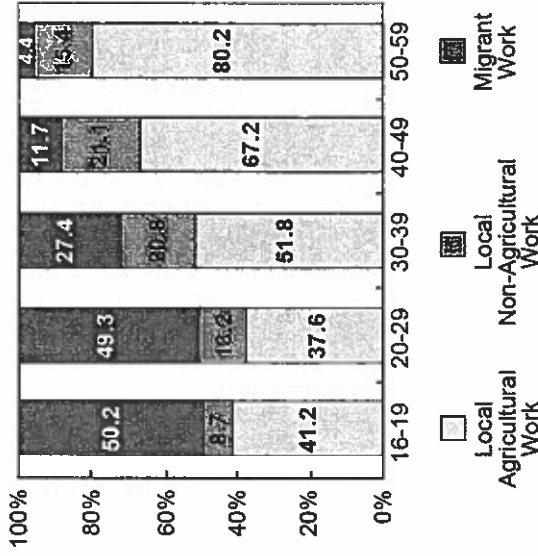


Figure 2.2 Choice of work among rural labor force of different ages.  
Source: NBS (2011).

### Educational attainment

As expected, the new-generation migrants are better educated than the old-generation migrants. Table 2.3 summarizes the findings from several recent studies. The new-generation migrants received on average 1–2.2 more years of education than their old-generation counterparts. The average years for the new-generation migrants vary between 8.9 and 10.9, suggesting that most of them have attended senior high (including vocational school) or beyond the officially mandatory nine years of education. This is in contrast to the old-generation migrants whose average years of 7.6–8.8 suggest that junior high rather than senior high was their norm.

Liu and Cheng's (2008) survey in Wuhan provides some specifics about the range of educational attainment. They find that while the average years of schooling of the first-generation migrants is 7.6 years, 31 percent of them are illiterate or semi-illiterate, suggesting a large range of educational attainment. Although the second-generation migrants' average education level is only 1.3 years higher than that of the first-generation migrants, nearly 90 percent of the former have attended junior high or above, 25 percent have attended senior high and 10 percent have finished it. In other words, not only do the second-generation migrants have higher levels of educational attainment, their range is smaller than that of the first-generation migrants, suggesting increased equity of educational opportunities over time.

Table 2.3 Average number of years of education among old-generation and new-generation migrants.

Old-generation	New-generation	Sample studies	Year of study (region)
9.1 (entire floating population in Guangdong)	10.9	Wu and Xie (2006)	2006 (Dongguan)
7.6	8.9	Liu and Cheng (2008)	2008 (Wuhan)
7.8	9.9	Li and Tian (2010)	2009
8.8	9.8	NBS (2011)	2009
7.6 (old-generation: 45+)	9.8	Duan and Ma (2011)	2010
8.4 (middle-generation: 31–45)			

National level studies by Li and Tian (2010) and NBS (2011) produce similar findings. Based on the Chinese General Social Survey conducted in 2009 by the Institute of Sociology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, which interviewed 7,100 households from 28 provinces, Li and Tian (2010) report 7.8 years and 9.9 years as the average years of education of, respectively, old-generation and new-generation migrants. Respectively, 8.8 years and 9.8 years of education for the old-generation and new-generational migrants (NBS 2011). Among the new-generation migrants, 9 percent have attended vocational schools and 6.5 percent have attended college; while the respective percentages for old-generation migrants are only 2.1 percent and 1.4 percent.

Dividing migrant workers into three age categories, Duan and Ma (2011) found that the average educational attainment for the old-generation, middle-generation, and new-generation is, respectively, 7.6 years, 8.4 years, and 9.8 years (see Table 2.3). Among the new-generation migrants, illiteracy is basically eradicated, and 5 percent have gone to college.

Yet, despite the improved educational attainment from the old-generation to new-generation migrants, the latter still lag significantly behind urban residents and lack the skills that enable career development in cities (Duan and Ma 2011). Moreover, most urban jobs require educational levels and skills beyond what an average new-generation migrant affords. According to All China Federation of Trade Unions, 60.2 percent of jobs in the urban labor market in 2009 require education levels at or above senior high, but only 30 percent of the new-generation migrants have received equivalent levels of education (ACFTU 2010). In addition, 56.6 percent of urban jobs require vocational and professional skills that only 20 percent of the new-generation migrants have. ACFTU (2010) estimates that only 30 percent of the new-generation migrants will have the capacity to have stable and long-term employment in the city. The mismatch between migrants' skills and urban labor demand is clearly a factor in their (in)ability to settle down.

### Marital and household structure

Unlike the old-generation migrants many of whom were married and had older children when they first did migrant work, the new-generation migrants are more likely to be faced with issues of dating, marriage, reproduction, and raising young children than the old-generation migrants (Duan and Ma 2011). By virtue of their younger age, the new-generation migrants are more likely single than the old-generation migrants. According to NBS's 2009 Migrant Worker Monitoring Survey, only about 30 percent of the new-generation migrants are married. Yin (2010) finds that despite the long duration that the new-generation migrants spend in cities, their marriage radius is similar to the rural norm, namely, within the home county.

Among the new-generation migrants who are married and have children, their children tend to be young. The 2010 Floating Population Monitoring Survey conducted by NPPPC reports that among the married new-generation migrants, 85 percent have children younger than 15 years of age. Duan and Ma (2011) illustrate further the differential burdens of supporting children among married migrants of different ages: the new-generation migrants have the youngest children; but the middle-generation migrants (aged 31–45) have more children to support; while migrants older than 45 are less concerned with supporting children than their own need in old age.

Although it is generally assumed that the new-generation migrants are more likely to migrate with their spouse and children than to leave them behind, compared with the old-generation migrants, very few studies produce findings on how the two generations differ in terms of family and household structure. Yue et al.'s (2010) survey of migrants in Shenzhen is an exception, which reports that, respectively, 24 percent and 50 percent of the old-generation migrants leave behind their spouse and children, compared with, respectively, 6 percent and 19 percent of the new-generation migrants. The percentages are small in part because the survey did not distinguish between singles and married.

Two studies focused on the married new-generation migrants highlight their tendency to bring the spouse and children to the city. Based on a special survey on new generation migrant workers, NBS reports that 59.4 percent of the married new generation migrants are engaged in so called couple migration where both husband and wife are migrant workers (NBS 2011). According to the 2011 Migrant Workers Survey conducted by All-China Women's Federation (ACWF 2011), 78.1 percent of the married new-generation migrants work in the same city as the spouse. The same survey shows that 42.7 percent of the children of the married new-generation migrants live with both migrant parents; 15.5 percent live with one of the migrant parents; and 39.5 percent live with the left-behind elders in the home village. The sum of the first two (58.2 percent) suggests that the majority of the married new-generation migrants have brought their children to the city. The high proportions of couple migration and migrant children hint that the new-generation migrants have greater desire and capacity than the old-generation to settle down in cities.

In short, the old-generation and new-generation migrants differ in terms of gender balance, education, and marital and household structure. Most of the old-generation migrants are men, but among the new-generation migrants, women are accounting for increased shares. The old-generation migrants typically have not finished junior high, whereas most of the new-generation migrants have finished junior high. The new-generation migrants are younger and more likely single than the old-generation migrants. Among the married migrants, the new-generation is more likely than the old-generation to bring their spouse and children to the city.

### Migration characteristics

#### Age of first migration

The new-generation migrants tend to start migrant work at a much younger age than the old-generation migrants. According to NBS's 2010 survey, the average age at which the old-generation first started migrant work is 33.7, compared with 20.6 among the new-generation migrants, and 17.2 among the post-90s migrants (NBS 2011). Starting migrant work at such different points in one's life cycle is clearly related to differences in farming experience and migration characteristics.

#### Farming experience

Studies have found that nearly a quarter of the new-generation migrants have never farmed (Wang 2001; Liu and Cheng 2008; NBS 2011). By virtue of the relatively early age at which the new-generation migrants start migrant work, their farming experience is much more limited and much shorter than that of the old-generation migrants. Typically, the new-generation migrants start migrant work immediately or shortly after they finish school. Unlike the old-generation migrants who typically worked for years as a farmer before doing migrant work, the new-generation migrants practically skip the full-time farming phase of the life cycle. In fact, it is quite common for the old-generation migrants to return to the village for an extended period of time in order to farm before pursuing migrant work again (Fan 2009), a practice less frequently seen among the new-generation migrants.

The new-generation migrants' lack of farming experience has raised some concerns. Wang (2001), for example, points out that they are "farmers without farming experience." Here, the term "farmers" refers to their status as rural Chinese (*nongmin*) without urban *hukou* rather than their occupation. But of greater significance is the sustainability of their livelihood. Given that the new-generation migrants have limited farming experience and skills, and that they have little desire to farm (see Leaving or Staying, below), what will happen to them if migrant jobs dwindle?

#### Motivation for migrant work

Because agriculture is a poor source of livelihood and because of the lack of non-

and new-generation migrants, the primary goal of migrant work is to increase income. The old-generation migrants count on migrant work to improve their living standard and enable them to "earn some money, build a house, marry a wife, and raise children" (ACFTU 2010). At the same time, research has noted that, in addition to economic gain, the new-generation migrants are also motivated and attracted by the urban lifestyle and potential for development in the city (Wu and Xie 2006).

### Industry and occupation

While most migrant workers continue to concentrate in low paid, less prestigious, labor-intensive and manual jobs, the old-generation and new-generation migrants differ in their industries and occupations (Duan and Ma 2011). The old-generation migrants are engaged in a variety of jobs – agriculture, wholesale, retail, catering, construction, and manufacturing – whereas the new-generation migrants are heavily concentrated in manufacturing (Duan and Ma 2011; Liu and Cheng 2008; Cheng and Yao 2005; NBS 2011). In particular, fewer new-generation migrants work in agriculture and construction. Generally, the younger the migrant, the more likely he or she is working in manufacturing versus other sectors (Cheng and Yao 2005).

As discussed earlier, it is not uncommon for the old-generation migrants to continue to farm, through returning home for planting and/or harvesting or even for an extended period of time. According to NBS (2011), in 2009, 29.5 percent of the old-generation migrants participated in farming, versus only 10 percent among the new-generation migrants. While it may be appropriate to refer to some of the old-generation migrants as farmer-cum-migrant, most of the new-generation migrants are far from being a farmer from an occupational point of view.

There is also evidence that the new-generation migrants are more selective about jobs. According to NPPFC's 2008 New Generation Migrant Workers Report (NPPFC 2008), while jobs that are physically demanding, low-paid, socially inferior and lacking career developments were the norm for the old-generation migrants, they are no longer attractive to the post-80s migrants. Instead, the new-generation migrants are asking for equal economic opportunities and equal pay as urban residents, various kinds of insurance, education opportunities for their children, and vacation time, all unimaginable demands only a few years ago. Moreover, the new-generation migrants may organize to quit jobs as a group, resulting in a massive shortage of non-skilled workers (*mingonghuang*) in some industries. According to the Shanghai Labor and Social Security Bureau, labor-intensive enterprises in clothing processing, hotel, and the catering industry, which require low-skilled workers for their labor-intensive jobs, have faced recruitment problems as a result (NPPFC 2008).

### Job search and changes

While social networks through fellow-villagers, relatives and friends continue to



are also increasingly using formal channels such as advertisements and employment agencies (Liu and Cheng 2008; Cai *et al.* 2009).

What set the old-generation and new-generation migrants apart are job changes – the new-generation migrants change jobs more often than the old-generation migrants. Yue *et al.* (2010) report 1.99 and 1.71 as the average number of jobs held by, respectively, the old-generation migrants and new-generation migrants. Given the difference in age and migration experience between the two groups, those numbers suggest that the new-generation migrants change jobs more readily than the old-generation migrants. It seems that job-hopping reflects the new-generation's strategy to get better jobs, perhaps at the expense of stability, a quality lacking among migrant jobs to begin with (Zhou and Sun 2010).

Wu and Xie (2006) find that the most common reasons for the new-generation migrants to change jobs are, in order of importance, “better pay” (87 percent), “conflict with management” (53 percent), and “closer to spouse and partner” (35 percent). Among those who change jobs, only 31 percent remain in the same line of work; and, “higher income” (98 percent) is a much more powerful motivation than “the same line of work” (55 percent). Yet, frequent job changes across industries and occupations may disrupt skill and human capital accumulation. Fu and Tang (2009) note an inverted-U relationship: the initial job changes result in improvement in social mobility, but such improvement has decreasing marginal returns such that after a certain number of job changes the migrant will experience negative selectivity in destination, occupation, migration reason and job search. They argue that while job changes reflect migrants' agency and capacity in the labor market, a high frequency of job changes adversely affects their economic return.

### Destination

The new-generation migrants tend to move over longer distances and be more engaged in inter-provincial (as opposed to intra-provincial) migration than the old-generation migrants (NBS 2011). According to NBS (2011), in 2009, respectively 53.7 percent and 46.8 percent of the new-generation and old-generation migrants participated in interprovincial migration. The new-generation seem to have a stronger preference than the old-generation for large cities: their respective percentages for working in cities at or above the prefecture level are 67.4 percent and 57.5 percent. In terms of geography, Cheng and Yao (2005) report that the new-generation migrants most commonly work in the eastern or coastal region.

### Working hours and pay

Despite the differences between the new-generation and old-generation migrants described above, the amount of time they spend on work is similar. NBS (2011) reports 26 days per month and nine hours per day of work for both generations. Based on the “Floating Population Monitoring Survey” conducted by NPPFC in 2010, Duan and Ma (2011) find that both old and new generations work more than

six days a week and more than 10 hours a day. In other words, the new-generation migrants are as hard working as their old-generation counterparts.

Despite the younger age and shorter migrant work span of the new-generation migrants, their wages are not significantly lower than those of the old-generation migrants. According to NBS (2011), the average monthly income of the old-generation and new-generation migrants is, respectively, 1,543 Yuan and 1,328 Yuan. Li and Tian (2010), on the other hand, report 1,088 Yuan and 957 Yuan as the respective average monthly income of the new-generation and old-generation migrants in 2009.

Categorizing migrants into three generations, Duan and Ma (2011) find that the average monthly income for the new-generation, middle-generation and old-generation migrants is, respectively, 1,660 Yuan, 1,800 Yuan and 1,550 Yuan (see also Table 2.3). What is notable from the above studies, is that migrant wages do not necessarily increase with age. Far from it, age may even be an adverse factor, given the labor-intensive and manual nature of most migrant jobs. To better explain wage differentials, education, work experience, industry and occupation must be taken into consideration. For example, the middle-generation migrants in Duan and Ma's (2011) study have the highest income because they have better work experience than the new-generation migrants and are more highly educated than the old-generation migrants. But the wage differentials vary by sector. In the manufacturing and hotel and restaurant sectors, the middle-generation migrants have the higher income. Among wholesale and retail jobs, the old-generation migrants have the highest income. In services, the new-generation migrants receive the highest wages.

### Remittances and consumption

Most studies find that the new-generation migrants send back less remittances than the old-generation migrants (Liu and Cheng 2008; NBS 2011). NBS (2011) reports that in 2009 the new-generation migrants send on average 5,564 Yuan annually or 37.2 percent of their income while the old-generation migrants send 8,218 Yuan or 51.5 percent of their income. The large discrepancy is quite consistent across income groups and begs the question if the new-generation migrants have significantly different consumption patterns than the old-generation.

According to NPPFC (2008), the first-generation migrants are thrifty and they save up as much as they could in order to support their children, whereas the new-generation migrants tend to spend as much as they earn – sometimes referred to as “the moonlight group” (*yueguangzu*). NPPFC cites a survey conducted by the Guangdong Youth and Juvenile Research Centre which shows that 68.5 percent of the second-generation migrants spend most of their income on food, clothing, housing and transportation in the city but seldom send remittances home. Another survey conducted by the China Youth and Children Research Centre reports that the post-80s spend a large proportion of their earnings on social expenses (NPPFC 2008).

On the other hand, the new-generation migrants' expenditures do not necessarily suggest that they are irresponsible spenders. Liu and Cheng (2008) argue that

those expenditures are driven by the rising cost of living in the city. Also, compared with the old-generation migrants, the new-generation migrants return to the home village less frequently and for shorter durations. Duan and Ma (2011) observe that the new-generation migrants' greater expenses on clothing, grocery, leisure and entertainment as compared to the old-generation migrants reflect not only the former's youth but also their adoption of the urban lifestyle. Nevertheless, the amount that they spend on leisure and entertainment, averaging 116.5 Yuan a month, is still significantly lower than urban residents of a similar age.

In summary, the migration characteristics of the new-generation and old-generation migrants are quite different. The new-generation begin migrant work at a younger age, usually immediately or shortly after finishing junior high, having had little or no farming experience. They pursue migrant work for both economic and self-development reasons. They are more likely than the old-generation to move across provincial borders and work in manufacturing rather than agriculture and construction. They change jobs often and work as hard as the old-generation. Their migrant income is similar to the old-generation but they send back less remittances, taking on to a certain degree an urban lifestyle while still not spending irresponsibly.

### Living in the city and the countryside

#### Housing

Since the new-generation migrants are more likely than the old-generation migrants to be single and work in manufacturing, it is not surprising that a larger proportion of the former live in factory dorms (Yue *et al.* 2010). The old-generation migrants, on the other hand, tend to live in the "community," mixed with urban residents and other migrants, where housing units for couples and families are more readily available. Despite the shorter duration of migrant work among the new-generation migrants, their living conditions are better than the older-generation (Duan and Ma 2011).

Citing NBS, ACFTU (2010) reports that 20.1 percent of migrants in 2006 were living in rented or owned homes, and the percentage increased to 37.7 percent in 2010, suggesting a growing desire for better housing. However, low migrant wages render the vast majority of migrants incapable of owning a home in cities and towns. ACFTU estimates that less than 10 percent of migrants may ultimately be able to afford purchasing a home in the destination city, provided that their income increases at a rate similar to that of housing price.

#### Social protection

Compared with the old-generation migrants, who are less aware of their rights and are more tolerant of exploitation, the new-generation migrants have a stronger sense of and desire for protecting their rights and labor safety (ACFTU 2010). Duan and Ma (2011) report that the proportion of the new-generation migrants

who have a signed contract with the employer is slightly higher than the old-generation migrants but is still lower than 50 percent. Their participation in social security is as low as the old-generation migrants and their participation in retirement plans and health insurance designed for migrants in the city is still less than 10 percent. Their participation rate in rural-based health and retirement insurance is in fact lower than the old-generation and middle-generation migrants, suggesting a weaker rural identity with decreasing age of the migrants.

#### Assimilation and integration

The new-generation migrants' social identity and integration into the city is one of the burning questions in China. For example, scholars have used various indices to measure the level of integration of the new-generation migrants (Liu and Cheng 2008; Wang *et al.* 2011; ACWPF 2011). From a policy-making perspective, attention on young migrants' identity and integration may highlight situations where the lack of community support and the feeling of insecurity and unfairness result in extreme behaviors such as the Foxconn suicides (Wu and Xie 2006; Wang 2001).

Migrants' social network is a useful indicator of their adjustment to city life (Liu *et al.* 2012). Zheng *et al.* (2011) found that after controlling for other factors, the new-generation migrants who are more highly educated can better adapt to the city, whereas the *hukou* status does not significantly impact how well migrants adjust to city life. In general, research has found that the new-generation migrants have a stronger desire than the old-generation migrants to integrate into the city. For example, the new-generation migrants usually master the local dialect – an important step toward integration – better than the old-generation migrants. Wu and Xie's (2006) survey in Dongguan shows that all the new-generation migrants can speak Mandarin without heavy accents and they sometimes even speak their fellow-villagers (*laoxiang*) in Mandarin, instead of their native dialect. Among the new-generation migrants in that survey, 58 percent can speak Cantonese, 66 percent understand it, and everyone wants to learn it; a sign of their desire to integrate into Dongguan and the Guangdong province where Cantonese is the local dialect. In a study of urban villages in Guangzhou, Liu *et al.* (2012) found that the new-generation migrants are more likely than the old-generation migrants to draw on networks across class, kin, and place of origin, although the native place and the urbanite–migrant dichotomy remain central to defining their social networks.

#### Leaving or staying?

It is commonly believed that the new-generation migrants have stronger desire than the old-generation migrants to stay permanently in the city. However, evidence to support this notion is scant. Yao's (2010) survey in the Yangtze River Delta area shows that 70 percent of both the new-generation and old-generation migrants want to eventually return to their hometowns. But they differ in the job



preference after returning: 63.5 percent of the new-generation migrants want to work in non-agricultural sectors, 13 percent points higher than the old-generation migrants; whereas the proportion of the old-generation migrants who want to work in agriculture is 12 points higher than the new-generation migrants. In a similar vein, Yue *et al.* (2010) find that the younger the migrants, the more likely they intend to return to non-agricultural work (versus agriculture). Given that non-agricultural work is mostly not available in the migrants' home village, it is not surprising that Duan and Ma (2011) find that most of the new-generation migrants who desire to "return" want to return to their region of origin (*jiaxiang*) but not the rural village (*xiangxia*). In the towns near the home village, for example, these returnees can continue working in non-agricultural jobs such as manufacturing.

### Summary and conclusion

Since the 1980s, China has transformed itself from a relatively immobile society to one where migrant work has become the way of life for rural families and where migrant workers are part of the urban everyday life. The new-generation migrants, most commonly defined as migrant workers born in 1980 or after, are now accounting for the majority of the migrant population. In this chapter, we have highlighted the ways in which the new-generation migrants are distinct from their older and earlier counterparts.

Due to the increase of the share of women among migrants, the new-generation migrants have a more balanced sex ratio than the old-generation migrants. The new-generation migrants are more highly educated than the old-generation migrants and most have finished junior high. Still, the former are not sufficiently skillful for the urban labor market other than the manual, labor-intensive and less desirable jobs, and their wages remain low. Compared with the older generation, the new-generation migrants are younger and more are single. Among those who are married, the new-generation are more likely than the old-generation to bring the spouse and children to the city.

Growing up observing migrant work as a way of life in the village and for their parents, the new-generation tend to start migrant work at a younger age, typically immediately or shortly after finishing junior high. As a result, they have had little or no farming experience. The new-generation are more likely than the old-generation to work in manufacturing than other sectors, perhaps because the former are younger. The young-generation migrants also have stronger aspirations compared with their previous generation migrants. They move longer distances than the old-generation migrants and are more likely than the old-generation to move across provincial borders. They change jobs frequently in pursuit of better pay, and they work as hard as the old-generation, with long working days and weeks.

The new-generation migrants earn about the same as the old-generation migrants but they send home less remittances. This difference begs the question whether the new-generation are increasingly assuming an urban lifestyle. Several other observations support this notion. Compared with the old-generation, the

new-generation tend to pursue migrant work, not only for the purpose of economic return but also for self-improvement and the urban experience. Their expenses are increasingly accounted for by consumption such as food, clothing, housing, transportation, leisure and entertainment, although their spending is still much lower than the average urbanite. The new-generation migrants are also less tolerant of low pay and poor working conditions and are more ready to express their frustration, including resorting to protests and even suicides.

All the above suggests that the new-generation migrants are more ready and have a larger capacity than the old-generation migrants to chart out a more promising future. It is not clear, however, if such a path entails settling down permanently in the city. The skill level and income of the new-generation migrants remain low; the cost of living in big cities is not within reach. The new-generation migrants are more aware of their rights but their participation in health and retirement insurance is low. They have wider social networks in the city than the old-generation migrants but they continue to rely heavily on native-place ties. Compared with the old-generation migrants, many of whom plan to return to farming in the rural village, the new-generation migrants' preference is more likely "returning" to towns near their native place, where they can engage in non-farm work.

### Notes

1. In the Chinese language "post-80s" or "after 1980" usually also includes individuals born in the year 1980.
2. Yin (2010) and Ye (2011) refer to them as second-generation migrants.
3. Some studies have focused on the impact of parents' migration experience on how new-generation migrant workers integrate into cities, e.g., Liang (2011).

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