

# Residential Choice among Rural–Urban Migrants after *Hukou* Reform: Evidence from Suzhou, China

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## ABSTRACT

The reform of China's socialist residential registration system (*hukou*) led to a shift in the residential preferences of rural–urban migrants, whereby the meaning of 'home' has also been changing. Data from a 2009 survey conducted in Suzhou City in Jiangsu Province highlight some emerging strategies for residential choice. Compared with 'first-generation' migrants who grew up under socialism and migrated before the *hukou* reform, members of the 'new generation' born after 1980 attach less value to *hukou* benefits. Instead, their choice of a future place of residence appears to be related to the institutional reforms that are gradually separating social welfare provisions from the *hukou* system. As the draw of a local *hukou* declines, the strategies of a migrant's family to leverage their financial resources are found to play a bigger role in one's aspirations to establish a home in Suzhou. Copyright © 2016 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Accepted 07 April 2016

**Keywords:** rural–urban migration; residential choice; *hukou* reform; new-generation migrants; family support; China

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## INTRODUCTION

China's ongoing economic reforms have produced far-reaching regional and urban–rural disparities, thereby enticing millions of people to migrate from the countryside to urban areas where they find work as low-paid manual labourers (Shen, 2002). After years of saving up, a dilemma looms for some: where should their home be in the future? On the one hand, the need to care for elderly family members induces migrants to go back to their old home. On the other hand, they are tempted by the better pay and public services in the city to stay on permanently in their place of work (e.g. Zhu & Chen, 2010).

The decision 'to set up a new home' is widely recognised as a commitment to stay in a place (Mallett, 2004). But the meaning of 'home' is culturally charged and is thus susceptible to change in the course of any social transition. In traditional Chinese culture, home ('家') is analogous to 'family', more specifically to a place of habitation where a family's universe lies (Liu, 2013). In that culture, individual migration trajectories are subject to the will of the family, and the migrant will eventually return to the old rural home (Yang, 2012). Starting in the mid-20th century, however, that 'family-first' value has been challenged by the Socialist regime, which emphasised a person's responsibilities to the State rather than the family (Shek, 2006). A strict residential registration system with attached social benefits was imposed, purportedly to free people from the traditional family bonds so they could contribute to the development objectives of the State (Bonnin, 2009). But since the late 1970s, with the adoption of an 'open-door' policy, people have come under the influence of modern thought in another

cultural transition (Faure & Fang, 2008). Nowadays, as the migration motive shifts towards self-actualisation, a move usually entails permanent departure and the search for a new domicile (Ahmed, 1999). Under this transition, the meaning of 'home' to migrants is diversifying, but in general, the intention of where to make a future home is expected to depend largely on the individual's guiding values, life course, and opportunities.

The relocation decision has another, more objective dimension. Even when an individual migrant decides to establish a permanent home at the destination, she or he will face an institutional barrier – the household residency registration system (*hukou*) (Wang et al., 2010). In spite of the measures adopted to promote economic reform, China's rural migrants rarely had access to the *hukou* system at their destination on which social welfare and political participation are based (Treiman, 2012). Without these institutional benefits, migrants are reluctant to settle permanently in the city. Starting in the late 1990s, however, to accelerate the development of the real estate industry, a national *hukou* reform allowed municipal governments at the destination to adopt a new *hukou* access policy: an applicant who owns an urban dwelling of a certain size can obtain the local *hukou* status (e.g. Suzhou Municipal Government, 2003). This policy created a new challenge for migrants; indeed, such a major acquisition would exceed the purchasing power of most migrant labourers (Wang, 2012). Because access to a mortgage loan is linked to having an urban *hukou* (Wu, 2004), the prospective homeowners would still have to rely on family support to take advantage of the opportunity (Taormina & Gao, 2010).

This paper deals with the implications of the evolving meaning of 'home' in China. We expected to find that the diverging meaning across generations corresponds to differences between 'first-generation' and 'new-generation' migrants in their residential choice. Furthermore, we explored how family support may influence rural migrants' aspirations. To our knowledge, the impacts of the affective and financial components on the migrants' housing ambitions have not yet been subjected to empirical investigation. In an effort to bridge that gap, we posed the following research questions: (1) What is the difference between first-generation and new-generation rural

migrants in their understanding of the meaning of 'home'?; (2) How is this difference related to their motives to choose their future domicile?; and (3) Does family support matter in a migrant's aspirations to settle permanently at the destination?

The paper starts with a review of the literature on migrants' residential choice. Then it sketches the meaning of 'home' in three periods of Chinese history: Imperial China, Socialist China before 1978, and contemporary China. Using data from a 2009 survey of more than 900 rural migrants in Suzhou City in Jiangsu Province, the empirical part of this paper first summarises the rural migrants' motives to consider their options for a future place of residence. The paper then applies a series of binary regression models to explore the determinants of each motive according to demographic characteristics, highlighting cross-generational differences among the migrants. Thirdly, to explore the role of family, we present a multinomial regression analysis that models the explanation of variations in the migrants' aspirations.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

### Migrants' Residential Choices and the Relevance of 'home'

From the angle of Neoclassical Economics, Todaro (1969) proposed a model explaining rural–urban migration whereby rural labourers migrated for high-paying urban jobs; migrants were viewed as risk-loving venturers. This approach has been criticised in the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM), countering with the view of migrants as risk-averse. Implicit in the NELM approach is that decisions to migrate could occur in the absence of a significant wage gap between rural and urban areas but were motivated by a desire to minimise the risks attached to agricultural income variability (e.g. Stark, 1982). In light of these divergent views, a debate subsequently erupted over migrants' residential choices. The Neoclassical Economics model casts return migrants as losers who are unable to earn more money in urban areas. In the NELM approach, conversely, they are viewed as winners as they escape from the risks of agriculture and come back with savings (Cassarino, 2004).

However, both explanations fall short in explaining migrants' intentions when

institutional and cultural factors are taken into account, as is patently clear for China. There, even if rural migrants want to stay permanently in the city and eventually bring their families too, they must deal with institutional barriers (Fan & Wang, 2008). Given that context, migrants' residential choices are much more complex than either of these two economic approaches would suggest. In that light, the institutional/cultural contexts in which the migrants are embedded warrant more attention (cf. Bailey, 2009; Findlay *et al.*, 2015).

Several scholars have therefore introduced more comprehensive concepts of 'home' to frame migrants' residential choices. Taking a wider perspective can help researchers understand how people experience their migration and conceive of their possible future movements (e.g. Mallett, 2004; Liu, 2013). Essentially, migration involves a departure from the old home and the attempt to establish a new one (Ahmed, 1999). This 'home-making practice' usually has two components: affectively, a new home is supposed to meet migrants' need to belong in a new place; and financially, it has to provide them with sustenance (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). And the pathway to establishing a new home is forged by attempts at self-actualisation (Mallett, 2004).

In the process, migrants usually attach distinctive meanings to different places and related territories (Ahmed, 1999). A 'home' is thereby a product of contestation for space – what becomes someone's home may at the same time become non-home to others (Feng *et al.*, 2014). The different meanings can be linked to a variety of categorisations, such as gender, race, ethnicity, wealth, or class (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). In contemporary China, because of the *hukou* system, the key differences in the meaning of home contain an additional dimension by being linked to the rural versus the urban realm (Feng *et al.*, 2014).

In the next section, the transformation in the meaning of 'home' is sketched from the perspective of an individual in China in order to elucidate how the concept is constructed in that cultural and institutional context.

### Conceptualising 'home' in China: Rural Home versus Urban Home

Chinese traditional culture, with its roots in Confucianism, regards farming as the cornerstone of

the country (Yang, 2012). The basic organisational unit of farming activity is the family, in that culture. So members of the same clan would live together to share the risks of agriculture and provide for one another. In that light, the family comes first in the construction of 'home' in that tradition (Shek, 2006). Its primacy explains the strong emphasis on the individual's loyalty to family, especially to the parents (Fei, 1983). But migration forces people to leave their parents behind, and they can thus no longer fulfil the expectations of filial piety. In that culture, therefore, a person's intention to migrate had to be approved by the parents, and migrants were required to return home when they were needed to support their elderly family members (Yang, 2012). In addition, traditional culture places great value on the hometown of the family clan (Oakes, 2000). This local identity also encourages a migrant to eventually return, as in the old saying *Yeluo Guigen* [Fallen leaves return to the roots].

This social allegiance to place of origin frames an individual's idea of 'home' as a place where one belongs, and it regulates social relations through 'family-first' values (Liu, 2013). People take family benefit, family future, filial piety, and hometown identity into account when conceptualising an ideal 'home'.

Ever since the Maoist regime was established in 1949, this traditional culture has been challenged. Chinese socialists emphasised the overriding importance of collectivism, and the interests of the State always took precedence over those of the family (Shek, 2006). The role of the family agriculture was replaced by the collective farm. The imposition of this new mode of organising agriculture required strong mechanisms to prevent a rural exodus, one of which was the new residential registration system (*hukou*) instated in the 1950s. Every person was henceforth registered at a specific place, and newborns inherited their parents' *hukou* status, no matter where the mother gave birth or where the family was actually living (Chan, 2009).

Furthermore, the State opted for rapid industrialisation centred on heavy industry in cities. To stimulate urban industrial development, nationally financed social welfare benefits were given to people with an urban *hukou* status (Selden & You, 1997). A person with an urban *hukou* might be working for the government or a state-owned enterprise in a work unit. Each work unit

was provided with state-owned land where it could build free housing for its workers (Huang, 2004). Having an urban *hukou*, workers were entitled to social services like health care, pensions, and education (Treiman, 2012). Rural people working on collective farms, in contrast, were excluded from this welfare system (Selden & You, 1997). A rural *hukou* only gave a peasant land-use rights, in line with the ancient tradition of reliance on agriculture (and grown children) for security in old age. Peasants built their housing on the collectively owned land of the village (Chan, 2009).

The result was a marked rural–urban disparity in wellbeing, which might well encourage peasants to leave the countryside. To head off an impending rural exodus, the State imposed severe restrictions in its *hukou* access policies. Any change in a migrant's *hukou* had to be approved by the authorities at both the place of origin and the destination. The main avenues to urban residency status were to obtain a civil service job after completing higher education or to enlist in military service (Chan, 2009). Under this restrictive policy, it was difficult for peasants to meet the requirements for an urban *hukou*. And if they stayed in a city for more than 3 months without an urban *hukou* status, they would be sent back to their village by the police (Hand, 2009). In this way, the State effectively held back rural-to-urban migration.

Only by obtaining an urban *hukou* could peasants gain access to the welfare provisions attached to it in Socialist China. This means that in the socialist concept of 'home', an institutional dimension was added to the affective and financial components (cf. Liu, 2013). 'Home' became a 'state-sponsored home', closely related to *hukou* status and the implied institutional benefits.

### Understanding Cross-generational Differences among Migrants

After the Cultural Revolution, the economic crisis made the Party rethink its policies, resulting in the 1978 reform. The new policy was to 'open up' the economy to foreign investment, initiated by the 1992 spring tour of Party leader Xiaoping Deng of the southern provinces (Wong & Zheng, 2001). At first, this new policy was selectively implemented. The result was uneven regional development with more developed municipalities

in coastal regions and less developed municipalities inland (Fan, 2002).

To provide the labour for newly built factories, the national government allowed rural–urban migration towards coastal regions (Fan, 2002) but still kept the migrants locked out of the possibility of *hukou* transfer. The first-generation of rural migrants went to the cities alone and took menial jobs; intra-municipality migration began during the 1980s, while inter-municipality and inter-province migration took off in the 1990s. Other family members stayed back home to take care of young children and the elderly (Fan & Wang, 2008). The migrants had to send them money to cover these costs (Cai, 2003). These remittances, which served as a contract between the migrant and the family, typically absorbed around 40% of a migrant's income (e.g. Li *et al.*, 2008). Migration of multiple members of the family could reduce the amount, but few migrants managed to take the whole nuclear family along because of the barriers to *hukou* access. Therefore, successful migrants usually returned in due time to invest in consumption goods, but particularly in new cottages (De Brauw & Rozelle, 2008).

By the late 1990s, as foreign investment declined, the national government tried to sustain economic growth by fueling domestic consumption (Logan *et al.*, 2009). This generated a private housing market. People were encouraged to purchase the housing assigned to them, and work units no longer built housing for new employees. A more aggressive policy led to *hukou* reform after 2000 – the national government expected that the new urban population, mostly migrants, could be enticed to purchase market-rate housing (Wang, 2010). At the same time, provincial and municipal governments offered *hukou* access through a housing qualification. When purchasing a dwelling, the new owner could exchange the origin-municipality *hukou* for a destination-municipality *hukou* (e.g. Jiangsu Provincial Government, 2003).

Initially, only a small fraction of first-generation migrants transferred their *hukou*. They did not take this opportunity because they feared losing their use rights on farmland – their security in old age (Fan & Wang, 2008). Therefore, some municipal governments allowed people to purchase commercial insurance policies (e.g. Jiangsu Provincial Government, 2007). These contracts promised a secure livelihood at the destination. But they also separated welfare provisions



from the *hukou* status (Wang, 2010). Thus, housing and social welfare provisions were gradually transferred to the private sector. That decreased the institutional benefits of an urban *hukou* and hollowed out the notion of ‘the State-sponsored home’. Instead, migrants now have to rely on their own ingenuity, energy, skills, and resources to set up a new home at the destination. Thus, the purchase of a dwelling became part of the drive towards ‘self-actualization’.

Governments expected the new policy to attract a new generation of migrants after 2000, namely, the cohort of rural labourers born after 1980 (Chinese Communist Youth League, 2001). Their parents had returned, so it was the youngsters’ turn to leave for the city (Pun & Lu, 2010). This distinguishes them from the notion of ‘second-generation migrants’ in Western literature, which refers to migrants’ children who were born at the destination or moved there at a young age (Chen & Wang, 2015). Since the *hukou* reform, these new-generation migrants have become the focus of policy in China. They had received the benefits of the newly established educational system after the Cultural Revolution. Presumably, they would embrace modern thought after the ‘opening-up’ of China, and they would not carry on in traditional agriculture as the first-generation migrants did (Chinese Communist Youth League, 2001). Instead, they were thought to pursue self-actualisation through migration (Zhou, 2010).

It might be stretching the point of intergenerational differences to assume that a change in the meaning of home would in itself change the migrants’ residential choices. However, we should bear in mind that both first-generation and new-generation migrants are under the influence of the same effects of the *hukou* reform. It means that, for first-generation migrants, the notion of ‘the State-sponsored urban home’ has also been undermined by the *hukou* reform.

Besides, migrants’ residential choices might be also affected by their stage in the life course and their household conditions. Settling in the city is not only an issue of values but also a practical affair (Liu, 2013). Obviously, migrants need assistance from the family; an urban dwelling costs more than 20 times their average annual income (Wang, 2012), and access to mortgage loans remains limited (Wu, 2004). Therefore, the family needs to ease their burden by allowing a reduction of remittances if the migrants have

self-sufficient parents and no school-age children (Zhou, 2010). The family might even agree to sell the rural cottage or to pass on the compensation they receive if their cottage is demolished for the sake of urbanisation (Wang *et al.*, 2012). Hence, if the new-generation migrants follow their path to self-actualisation in the practice of home-making, they have two options to overcome the financial constraints: they might wait for the financial services of the market to be unlocked by future *hukou* reform or they can return to tradition to rely on ‘family’.

The argument couched in the aforementioned discussion is that the concept of ‘home’ emerged from its context of ‘family-first’ to play a role in ‘building socialism’ and has now evolved in an individualistic direction in the drive towards ‘self-actualization’. Nevertheless, the individual migrant would expect the ideal situation to emanate from each of these tributaries: to have the benefit of ‘family-first’ as well as any ‘state-sponsored’ *hukou* advantages while pursuing ‘self-actualization’ in the practice of home-making. The emphasis might be different in each instance but would also depend on conditions in the life course. The key to understanding the contrast between the two generations of migrants is to link the life course to institutional transformations (cf. Findlay *et al.*, 2015).

This argument is depicted in our conceptual model in which we link life course to social change. That model recognises that the aspiration to settle in the city by purchasing a dwelling has affective and financial components. Furthermore, it incorporates the institutional considerations, specifically access to the welfare entitlements that may come with the transfer of the *hukou* (Fig. 1).

The affective component relates to the anticipated merits and drawbacks of settling in the city. We would expect to find a cross-generational difference in this component in two respects: the lifestyle derived from the migrants’ guiding values and the responsibility within the family. Regarding lifestyle, first-generation migrants were born and educated in socialist China, whereas the new generation was raised after the ‘opening-up’. Moreover, the former migrated before the *hukou* reform after 2000, the latter afterwards. The introduction of market-led principles in the structuring of society and the increased freedom to migrate resulting from *hukou* reform offer the rural migrants choice to shape their

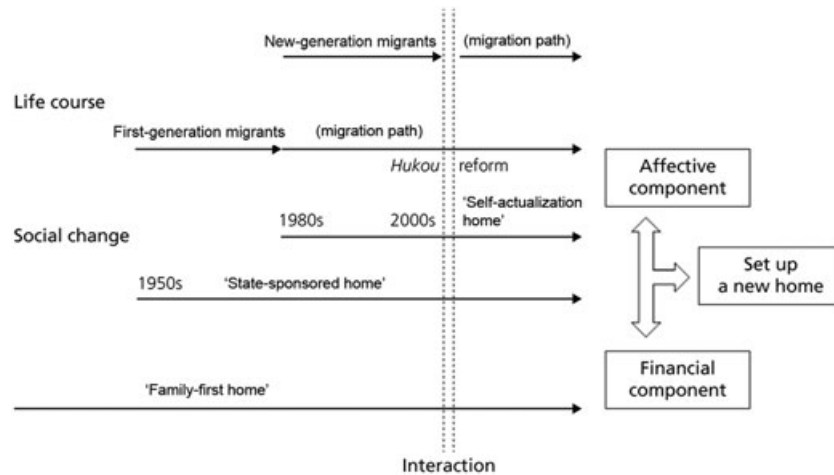


Figure 1. Rural migrants' aspiration to choose a new home.

lifestyle and form the context in which they consider their options for their future domicile. With regard to the position within the family, first-generation migrants were typically the heads of their family, which entailed a wide range of responsibilities. Notably, they had to provide for their children's education and security in old age for their parents. In contrast, most new-generation migrants are not married and their parents are generally self-sufficient – they bear fewer responsibilities. Thus, *new-generation migrants may be expected to attach less value to the benefits of their hukou status when they choose their future domicile*. This is our first hypothesis.

With respect to the financial components of the aspiration to settle in the city, it is crucial for the migrants to secure the family's support to be able to purchase urban housing. This support may take various forms: the family might decide to send more members along with the migrant to work at the destination; the amount of the remittance can be reduced; or they may decide to sell the rural cottage to contribute to the investment in urban housing. In this light, we pose our second hypothesis: *rural migrants who can count on support from their family are more likely to aspire to urban residency by purchasing a home in the city*.

## CASE STUDY, DATASET, AND RESEARCH DESIGN

### The Suzhou Case Study

Our dataset comes from a 2009 survey of rural migrants' expectations for their future in the city

of Suzhou in Jiangsu Province, China. This survey was part of a national survey commissioned by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China (MOHURD).

Jiangsu Province has been selected by the national government to test the effects of relaxing constraints on *hukou* access since the reforms began in 2000 (Zou, 2006). In other two model areas (Hebei province and Fujian province), the effects had not met the expectations (Zhu, 2007): too many migrants feared the effect of the loss of their use right of farmland for their security in old age (Fan and Wang, 2008). But in Jiangsu, rural migrants were allowed to purchase commercial insurance policies regardless of their *hukou* status (e.g. Jiangsu Provincial Government, 2007). Nearly 9% of the rural migrants there had become homeowners by 2009 (Huang et al., 2014), much more than the average of 1% nationwide (National Statistics, 2010). The MOHURD used Jiangsu as a case study to evaluate the housing aspirations of rural migrants who had not purchased an urban dwelling after the *hukou* reform. For that case study, Suzhou was selected as the representative city.

Suzhou is located in the southeast of the province (Fig. 2). It experienced an economic boom that attracted large numbers of migrant workers. Of the 4.2 million people in Suzhou City in 2008, about 1.8 million were migrants, including intra-municipality, intra-province, and inter-province migrants (Lu & Jiao, 2010).

The MOHURD commissioned the Institute of Urban Planning and Housing of the Chinese



Figure 2. The location of 10 survey sites in the fieldwork in Suzhou.

Academy of Urban Planning and Design to conduct the survey in cooperation with the Suzhou municipal government. Using the census of the urban population, the Chinese Academy of Urban Planning and Design selected 10 typical migrant neighbourhoods (Fig. 2). Potential respondents were approached on the basis of the place where they lived. This was an

efficient way to create a sampling frame, given that rural migrants are concentrated in certain areas of the city (Lu & Jiao, 2010). At each site, a probability proportionate to size sampling method was employed to approach a number of rural migrants based on the estimated population of rural migrants in each neighbourhood.



### Dataset and Research Design

In total, 917 migrants were included in the survey, and 694 respondents (392 new-generation and 302 first-generation migrants) gave complete information, including their motives. Table 1 lists all relevant variables. The questionnaire asked, 'Do you want to stay permanently in Suzhou in the future?' If the answer was affirmative, the next question was, 'What are your housing aspirations in Suzhou?' All respondents were asked, 'What are the major motives for your choice?' More than one-third (267) aspired to stay permanently by purchasing a dwelling in Suzhou, while 32% (223) did not. The rest (30%, 204) remained undecided. Respondents in each group provided their motives to either set up home in Suzhou or not to do so.

The average age for the entire sample was about 30 years, and 55% of the respondents were male. Only 12% of the respondents had completed higher education. On average, the respondents' annual income was 33,000 Yuan, and they had lived in Suzhou for around 4 years (7 years of rural-urban migration journey in total). Nearly 40% were intra-provincial migrants, while the rest came from another province and did not have a Jiangsu *hukou*.

In view of their migration phases and household conditions, different types of households were identified: (1) a single migrant, and other family members stayed back home (42%); (2) one of several family members migrating, and the rest stayed back home (27%); (3) one of an entire family migrating to Suzhou (21%); or (4) a single person migrating to Suzhou, and other family members moved elsewhere (10%). Five percent of all respondents had sold rural housing, and 38% no longer sent remittances home.

In our analysis of the backgrounds for the ambition to purchase a dwelling in the city, we first searched for cross-generational differences in the rural migrants' motives. Secondly, we analysed the role of family support in shaping their ambition.

### THE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

#### Determinants of Rural Migrants' Motives and Values

A total of 694 respondents provided 1,431 motives for their future residential choices (Table 2).

Roughly half of those answers fall under seven reasons to choose to settle in Suzhou. In light of the context presented earlier, we classified these reasons in terms of the three realms of the meaning of home: 'family-first', 'state-sponsored', or 'self-actualization'. Some motives are connected to more than one realm, as the meaning of an ideal home is context-sensitive (Mallett, 2004). For instance, 'family future' can be interpreted as reflecting Chinese traditional culture. It might also apply to migrants under the influence of modern thought if they think primarily of their nuclear family. Some scholars even consider modern Chinese thought essentially as a fusion of modern Western thought and traditional Chinese culture (cf. Faure & Fang, 2008). However, we should bear in mind that the *hukou* status is the precondition to realise this aspiration – migrant children need a local *hukou* to attend a good public primary school (Chen & Feng, 2012). Such blurred boundaries may also apply to the motives of 'advanced public services' and 'higher social status' (cf. Treiman, 2012). Motives like 'adaptation to life in Suzhou', 'opportunities and professional training', and 'other personal reasons' are independent of the *hukou* status and are viewed as generally representing modern Chinese thought. The motive of 'higher income' reflects migrants' financial concerns, and we do not directly connect it to people's values.

Of the motives in that list, 'higher income', 'advanced public services', 'family future', and 'adaptation to life in Suzhou' comprise the four main reasons to want an urban home. Each of these four was alluded to by around 20% of respondents. In contrast, only about 10% of respondents sought 'opportunities and professional training', while less than 5% were motivated by 'higher social status' or 'other personal reasons'.

The rest (726 answers) fall into eight groups of reasons why the respondent would not want to settle in Suzhou. The motives summarised as '*Yeluo Guigen*' and 'care of elderly family' are closely related to traditional Chinese culture. The motive of 'rural housing and farmland' also reflects a thousand-year-old tradition of relying on agriculture for one's security in old age. But to claim that security, rural migrants have to maintain their rural *hukou*, so they can retain the use right of farmland (Chan, 2009). The motive of 'discrimination from urban citizens' derives from the socialist rural/urban *hukou* division



Table 1. List of variables in the empirical study.

	Variables in empirical model	Categories of variables	<i>n</i>	Percent or mean
Demographics	Aspiration to settle in Suzhou	Choose for an urban domicile	267	38.5
		Against an urban domicile	223	32.1
		Remain undecided	204	29.4
	Generation	New generation (30 years old or less; start migration after 2000)	392	56.5
		First generation (31 years old or more; start migration before 2000)	302	43.5
	Gender	Male	375	54.0
		Female	319	46.0
	Education	12 years and less	611	88.0
		More than 12 years (higher education)	83	12.0
	Average annual income		694	34,000 Yuan
Hukou status	Jiangsu <i>hukou</i>	273	39.3	
	Non-Jiangsu <i>hukou</i>	421	60.7	
Employment type	Construction work (at building sites, interior finishing, or decoration), and manufacturing work (operative worker)	Service work (waiters, waitresses, cooks, and cleaners in restaurants or hotels; children's nurses and domestic cleaners; street cleaners and street repairmen; day labourers)	217	31.3
			246	35.4
			231	33.3
	Average residency duration in cities	Before migrants went to Suzhou, they might have been other cities. That is particularly manifest among first-generation migrants (164 of 302 vs. 134 of 392 for new generation)	694	7 years
			694	4 years
Family characteristics	Average residency duration in Suzhou		694	4 years
	Family migration, no family left behind in hometown	Respondent lives with family members in Suzhou and no family members live in hometown	144	20.7
	Single migration, no family left behind in hometown	Respondent migrated to Suzhou and other family members migrated to other city	70	10.1
	Incomplete family migration, some family left behind in hometown	Respondent lives with some family members in Suzhou and other family members live in hometown	190	27.4
	Single migration, some family left behind in hometown	No family members live with respondent in Suzhou and some family members live in hometown	290	41.8
	Whether the family sold rural housing	No sale of rural housing	662	95.4
		Sale of rural housing	32	4.6
Whether the respondent remits	No remittance	260	37.5	
	Remittance	434	62.5	

wherein peasants are excluded from nationally funded public amenities and social services. Because of that exclusion, their educational level

and socioeconomic status are much lower than those of their urban counterparts (Treiman, 2012). Rural migrants can only do lowly labour

Table 2. Rural migrants' motives for the choice of a future home.

	Motives selected	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents
To select an urban home	'Higher income': The income from the job in Suzhou is higher than the income of farming in the hometown.	178	25.6
	'Family future': Children's education in Suzhou is better than in the hometown or rural area; the choice for an urban home is good for the future of the family.	131	18.9
	'Advanced public services': Citizens with a Suzhou <i>hukou</i> can enjoy more advanced public services than peasants with a <i>hukou</i> of the hometown.	156	22.5
	'Higher social status': Citizens with a Suzhou <i>hukou</i> enjoy more social and political rights than peasants with a <i>hukou</i> of the hometown.	30	4.3
	'Adaptation to life in Suzhou': Respondents became used to life in Suzhou and do not want to change.	126	18.2
	'Opportunities and professional training': Suzhou City can provide migrants with more professional training and opportunities, which benefits their future careers.	78	11.2
	'Other personal reasons': Respondents are motivated by personal motives.	6	0.9
	To not select an urban home	' <i>Yeluo Guigen</i> ' (Fallen leaves return to the roots): Chinese traditional culture encourages people to return to their hometown in old age.	147
'Creating a business in the hometown': Successful respondents intend to set up a business in their hometown.		143	20.6
'Care of elderly family': In Chinese traditional culture, filial piety ranks at the top of all benefactions.		134	19.3
'Rural housing and farmland': Rural housing and farmland are viewed as basic survival guarantees by peasants.		94	13.5
'Discrimination from urban citizens': Respondents suffer from the discrimination from native people.		44	6.3
'Low cost of living in hometown': The cost of living in the home city or rural area is much lower than in Suzhou City.		74	10.7
'Bad renting experience in Suzhou': Informal rental contracts are easily terminated by landlords, so that migrants suffer from their renting experience.		78	11.2
'Other personal reasons': Respondents are motivated by personal motives.		12	1.7
Total	694 respondents provided 1,431 distinct motives		

in the destination cities, and they are often perceived as unhygienic and uneducated and looked down upon. They are also likely to be poor (Chen & Pryce, 2013). In contrast, there are no direct relations between the *hukou* status and the motives of 'creating a business in the hometown', 'bad renting experience in Suzhou', and 'other personal reasons'. These can be placed under the heading of 'modern Chinese thought'. 'Creating a business in the hometown' reflects the migrants' contribution to the development of their place of origin, which is encouraged by the

traditional culture (Murphy, 2002). The reason of 'low cost of living in hometown' reflects migrants' financial concerns, so we do not connect it directly to people's values.

Among these eight categories, '*Yeluo Guigen*' (21%), 'creating a business in the hometown' (21%), 'care of elderly family' (19%), and 'rural housing and farmland' (14%) rank as the top four. About 10% of the respondents are motivated by 'low cost of living in the hometown' or 'bad renting experience'. Less than 7% mentioned 'discrimination from urban citizens' or 'other personal reasons'.

Subsequently, we addressed the divergence in the values that might be attributed to cross-generational differences. We applied binary logistic regression to model each motive (Table 3). The dependent variable refers to whether a certain motive is selected: ‘selected’ equals 1 and ‘not selected’ equals 0. Independent variables include annual income, generation, gender, education level, and provincial-level *hukou* status, with five degrees of freedom. Yet the categories of ‘higher social status’, ‘other personal reasons (to choose for a Suzhou residence)’, ‘discrimination from urban citizens’, and ‘other personal reasons (to not choose for a Suzhou residence)’ occur less than 50 times (‘selected’). To guarantee that there are at least 10 cases assigned to each degree of freedom in the model, we excluded those last four categories from the regression analysis. We also excluded ‘employment type’ from the set of independent variables, as it showed significant covariation with ‘annual income’. To avoid possible impacts of continuous variables on these models, we standardised them through the function ‘Z score’ in the logistic regression analysis.

In most of the estimated models, the value of Nagelkerke *R* square is no more than 0.100. That is probably because people’s motives are so complex that demographic characteristics can only explain them partly. Nonetheless, the variable ‘generation’ has strongly significant effects in six models. First-generation migrants assign more importance to ‘higher income’, ‘advanced public services’, ‘family future’, and ‘rural housing and farmland’, while new-generation migrants emphasise ‘opportunities and professional training’ and ‘creating a business in the hometown’.

This result shows that first-generation migrants attach more value to urban *hukou* benefits (public facilities and children’s education). But it also shows that they are more concerned about retaining their farmland by hanging on to a rural *hukou* – to provide old-age support for their elderly parents and themselves. This contradiction explains migrants’ hesitation with respect to *hukou* transfer (cf. Zhu, 2007).

In contrast, new-generation migrants are more attracted by the social insurance system operated by the market than by the prospect of relying on traditional sources of financial security (Nielsen *et al.*, 2005). Besides, to promote their future careers, they place more value than first-generation migrants on opportunities to improve their

professional skills at the destination. And after receiving such training, new-generation migrants are interested in setting up a business of their own. They become entrepreneurs in their hometown when they return (Démurger & Xu, 2011). That entrepreneurial attitude may also explain the difference in the motive of ‘higher income’. After returning, first-generation migrants continue to carry on farming, with the consequence of a lower income than from an urban job. Conversely, new-generation migrants tend to start businesses.

It is also important to note the absence of significant cross-generational difference with respect to ‘*Yeluo Guigen*’ and ‘care of elderly family’, motives that align with the traditional Chinese culture. It seems that the new components (e.g. *hukou* benefits and self-actualisation) do not totally replace the ‘family-first’ notion (cf. Shek, 2006). In most cases, the individual would take all these aspects into account, as these traditional forms of benevolence are shared across generations.

With respect to other demographic characteristics, having a higher income is significantly positive in the models of ‘advanced public services’ and ‘family future’. Compared with the hometown, the destination city can provide advanced public services and better schools. However, to enjoy these amenities, rural migrants without a local *hukou* are usually required to pay extra fees (Chen & Feng, 2012). To a large degree, the expense tempers the enthusiasm of lower-income migrants to make use of these services, but higher-income people are less influenced by the cost. Thus, the latter are more likely to pay for advanced services and tend to view them as merits of living in the city. Highly educated migrants were less likely to endorse the traditional stereotype ‘*Yeluo Guigen*’ than their counterparts without higher education. That outcome is consistent with previous findings (cf. Zhou, 2010).

As for the difference between inter-provincial migrants (with a non-Jiangsu *hukou*) and intra-provincial migrants (with a Jiangsu *hukou*), the former are more motivated to ‘take care of elderly family’. If the inter-provincial migrants set up a home at the destination, it would be both inconvenient and expensive to pay regular visits to their elderly family back home (Poncet, 2006). As a result, inter-provincial migrants take their filial duties more into account in their

Table 3. Binary logistic regression model on rural migrants' motives in the choice of a future home.

	'Higher income' (178 selected)		'Family future' (131)		'Advanced public services' (156)		'Adaptation to life in Suzhou' (126)		'Advanced professional training' (78)			
	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)		
Motives to choose an urban home: 'Selected' equals 1; 'non-selected' equals 0												
Annual income (Z-score)	0.024	1.024	0.223***	1.250	0.237***	1.268	0.104	1.110	-0.245	0.782		
New generation (30 years old and less) ('31 years old and more' = ref) (dummy)	-0.841***	0.431	-1.089***	0.337	-0.708***	0.493	-0.281	0.755	1.388***	4.007		
Female (male = ref) (dummy)	-0.108	0.897	0.134	1.144	-0.298	0.742	0.126	1.135	-0.219	0.804		
Higher education (more than 12 years) ('12 years and less' = ref) (dummy)	-0.394	0.674	-0.229	0.796	0.296	1.345	0.441	1.555	0.438	1.549		
Jiangsu hukou (dummy) (non-Jiangsu hukou = ref)	0.133	1.142	-0.105	0.901	0.316	1.372	0.074	1.077	-0.267	0.765		
Nagelkerke's R square	0.061		0.100		0.084		0.017		0.102			
Motives to not choose an urban home: 'Selected' equals 1; 'non-selected' equals 0												
'Nostalgia' (147)	B	Exp(B)	'Care of elderly family' (134)		'Rural housing and farmland' (94)		'Low cost of living in hometown' (74)		'Bad renting experience' (78)			
	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)		
Annual income (Z-score)	-0.027	0.973	-0.099	0.905	-0.098	0.907	-0.025	0.976	0.060	1.062	-0.203	0.816
Younger generation (30 years old and less) ('31 years old and more' = ref) (dummy)	0.037	1.037	0.831***	2.295	0.172	1.188	-0.611**	0.543	0.381	1.463	0.362	1.437
Female (male = ref) (dummy)	0.050	1.051	-0.346	0.707	-0.146	0.864	-0.185	0.831	-0.187	0.830	0.127	1.135
Higher education (more than 12 years) ('12 years and less' = ref) (dummy)	-0.999**	0.368	0.182	1.199	-0.371	0.690	-0.650	0.522	-0.215	0.807	-0.768	0.464
Jiangsu hukou (dummy) (non-Jiangsu hukou = ref)	-0.169	0.844	-0.012	0.988	-0.578***	0.561	-0.388	0.678	-0.003	0.997	-0.007	0.993
Nagelkerke's R square	0.022		0.054		0.031		0.032		0.008		0.025	

Significance levels:  
 \* $p \leq 0.10$ .  
 \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ .  
 \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .



deliberations on their future home than intra-provincial migrants do.

Based on the results of these models, our first hypothesis appears plausible: compared with the first-generation, new-generation migrants attach less value to the benefits based on the *hukou* status in their choice of their future domicile. It expresses the connection we have made between their life course and the institutional transformation. They grew up after China ‘opened-up’, and they went to the cities after the *hukou* reform. The link between their life course and institutional transitions forms the context of values in which rural migrants consider their options for their future place of residence. Furthermore, because most new-generation migrants are not married and their parents are generally self-sufficient, they have fewer family responsibilities than first-generation migrants. The latter should take account of the links between the *hukou* status and other family members’ social welfare, including their children’s education and the security in old age for their parents.

### Relation between Family Support and Rural Migrants’ Aspirations for an Urban Home

Our second hypothesis concerns the impact of family support on a migrant’s aspiration to settle permanently in the city by purchasing a dwelling. That relation is analysed by way of multinomial logistic regression (Table 4). The dependent variable consists of three categories: ‘set up an urban home’, ‘not set up an urban home’ (reference category), and ‘remain undecided’. The independent variables include demographic characteristics (annual income, generation, gender, education level, and *hukou* status); the migration experience (duration of residency in Suzhou); and family support (family accompanying the migrant to the destination, not having to send remittances, and the sale of rural housing). We excluded ‘duration of residency in cities’ from the set of independent variables. It showed significant co-variation with ‘generation’, as first-generation migrants migrated before 2000 and therefore have a longer duration in cities than new-generation migrants.

Two models are compared to highlight the effects of family support. The set of independent variables in the model on the left in Table 4 does not include the variables with respect to the

family support, while the model on the right does. The outcome of the regression shows the Nagelkerke *R* square to equal 0.169 in the left model, with 12 degrees of freedom; the Nagelkerke *R* square equals 0.198 in the one on the right, with 22 degrees of freedom.

It is important to notice that when ‘family support’ is not taken into account, compared with the first-generation, new-generation migrants are more likely to remain undecided about their residential choice intentions (Table 4). The previous section has argued that first-generation migrants have to choose between the *hukou* benefits that come with staying at the destination and those of a return to the countryside (Table 3); it really is an issue of timing (cf. Elder *et al.*, 2003). They are usually married with school-age children, and their parents are not or will not be self-sufficient. These responsibilities related to the life course induce them to return to their rural home to take care of their parents or, alternatively, to settle in the city where they set up an urban domicile that can benefit their children’s future. New-generation migrants, in contrast, not only shoulder fewer responsibilities but they also expect to encounter more opportunities and more changes in their migration path (cf. Zhou, 2010). Thus, they are in no hurry to make a decision.

Indeed, when more family factors are taken into account, the effect of generation is dispersed. Being part of the new generation is then not statistically significant for predicting ‘remain undecided’ (Table 4). That finding provides empirical evidence to back up the argument of Fan and Wang (2008) that an individual’s residential choice would be mediated by arrangements with the family.

Table 4 further demonstrates an evident correlation between family support and the migrant’s aspirations to settle in Suzhou. With respect to ‘household conditions’, the category ‘single migration, no family left behind in the hometown’ denotes migrants to various cities who would have multiple options for a future home. However, the choice for the other three groups is usually just between Suzhou and the hometown, so ‘single migration, no family left behind in the hometown’ is set as reference category. Compared with this, respondents in the other three types of family group migration are more likely to want to acquire a home in Suzhou (Table 4). Notably, the values of the odds ratio for ‘single

Table 4. Multinomial logistic regression model of rural migrants' aspiration for an urban home.

Independent variables	Model without family support characteristics				Model including family support characteristics			
	Set up an urban home		Remains undecided		Set up urban home		Remains undecided	
	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)
'No urban domicile' as reference								
Annual income (Z-score)	0.349***	1.417	0.204	1.227	0.354***	1.425	0.248	1.282
Duration of residency in Suzhou (Z-score)	0.425**	1.529	-0.235	0.791	0.312**	1.366	-0.254	0.775
Younger generation (30 years old or less) ('31 years old or more' = ref) (dummy)	-0.115	0.891	0.445*	1.560	0.015	1.015	0.407	1.502
Female (male = ref) (dummy)	0.088	1.092	-0.299	0.742	-0.016	0.984	-0.307	0.735
Higher education (more than 12 years) ('12 years and less' = ref) (dummy)	0.681**	1.977	-0.295	0.745	0.672**	1.958	-0.307	0.721
Jiangsu <i>hukou</i> (dummy) (non-Jiangsu <i>hukou</i> = ref)	0.151	1.163	-0.259	0.772	0.060	1.062	-0.219	0.803
Family support (single migration, no family left behind in hometown = ref)								
Family migration, no family left behind in hometown (dummy)					0.971**	2.640	0.664	1.943
Incomplete family migration, some family left behind in hometown (dummy)					0.928**	2.528	0.108	1.114
Single migration, some family left behind in hometown (dummy)					0.529	1.697	0.472	1.603
Sale of rural housing (dummy) (No sale = ref)					1.427**	4.168	-0.345	0.708
Remittance (dummy) (non-remit = ref)					-0.376*	0.687	-0.255	0.775
Constant	-0.029		-0.155		-0.510		-0.332	
df	12				22			
Nagelkerke R square	0.169				0.198			

Significance levels:

\* $p \leq 0.10$ .\*\* $p \leq 0.05$ .\*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

migration, other family left behind at hometown' (1.697), 'incomplete family migration, other family left behind in hometown' (2.528), and 'family migration, no family left behind in hometown' (2.640) show that as more family members accompany the respondent to the destination, she or he more strongly aspires to establish an urban domicile.

Financially, the variable 'sale of rural housing' plays a significantly positive role, while the effect of remittances is negative (Table 4). If the family decides to support the migrant's aspiration to

acquire an urban home, it will become more lenient about the migrant's remittances. The amount this migrant sends to the village is less than sent by those who tend to return: 6,040 vs. 8,990 Yuan per year, in our survey. Getting a break allows these rural migrants to save up more for urban homeownership. If their savings are still not enough, the family might go so far as to sell the rural cottage to help out. Thus, in view of this analysis, our second hypothesis seems plausible: rural migrants who gain family support (family members accompanying the

migrant to the destination; not having to send remittances; and selling rural housing) are more likely to aspire to an urban domicile by purchasing a home in the city.

In addition, our model confirms previous findings that higher education and higher income play significantly positive roles in predicting migrants' aspiration to acquire a home in the city (Table 4). Because of the low-tech nature of agriculture in China, highly educated people are inclined to choose to live in urban areas, where they can find jobs that conform to their educational attainment level (cf. Zhou, 2010). Regarding the effect of income, higher-income migrants are more capable of purchasing urban housing than lower-income migrants. Given their greater buying power, they are more motivated to establish an urban domicile (cf. Hu *et al.*, 2011).

Regarding the variable of migration experience, a long duration of physical presence at Suzhou is a positive predictor (Table 4). Rural migrants seem to gradually adapt themselves to urban life (Zhu & Chen, 2010). This adaptation might strengthen their intent to establish an urban domicile.

It is interesting that being female and having a Jiangsu *hukou* do not play significantly positive roles in predicting the migrant's aspirations (Table 4). These factors were shown to have a positive influence on the actual homeownership rates in previous studies (Huang *et al.*, 2014). That weak influence is probably a result of two sets of relationships. Firstly, there might be a mismatch between rural migrants' aspirations and the actual rates of homeownership to be attained by marrying a homeowner, a possibility that has been raised in other research (Zhu & Chen, 2010). For instance, even if male and female migrants are willing to marry urban residents in order to acquire an urban home, it is the women who have better chances to realise that aspiration (Davin, 2005). Secondly, the *hukou* reform suppresses the effect of *hukou* status as other paths of participation in institutions, like the urban insurance schemes, become more important in determining migrants' homeownership (Huang *et al.*, 2014).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Rural migrants face a choice between returning to the countryside and settling permanently in the

city. The aim of this paper was to reveal and explain an expected difference in the motives for their choice between first-generation and new-generation rural migrants. We also traced the influence of various forms of family support. Our analysis revealed that new-generation migrants are less sensitive to benefits based on the *hukou* status. We also observed a positive correlation between family support and the migrant's aspirations to acquire an urban home.

Because of our emphasis on intergenerational differences, we traced the evolution of the grand narratives of the meaning of 'home' from classical times to contemporary China. We identified three stages – from 'the family-first home' of Chinese tradition to 'the State-sponsored home' of the socialist regime and to 'the self-actualization home' in contemporary Chinese thought. This sequence is closely related to a series of profound social changes and institutional transformations brought about by the Party's reforms. Traditional culture, as enshrined in Confucianism, was rooted in farming and required a big family that lived together. The socialist regime, in contrast, stimulated urban industrial development, for which it created nationally financed welfare benefits for people with an urban *hukou* status. By thus replacing the role of the family in taking care of the individual, the 'home' acquired the meaning of 'the State-sponsored home'. But reforms introduced after the Cultural Revolution created a path to a market economy. The government no longer offered free housing for people with an urban *hukou* and transferred responsibility for some social welfare provisions to the market. Along with the penetration of modern Western ideas, the meaning of 'home' shifted towards an individualistic perspective – 'a self-actualization home'.

This individualistic tendency is particularly significant among the new-generation migrants, who were born after 1980 and came to the cities during the 2000s. It is probably a result of two sets of conditions. Firstly, after the 'opening-up' of China, the new-generation migrants had received a better education than their parents and were apt to embrace modern thought. Secondly, their stage in the life course comes with fewer family responsibilities. These migrants might choose to stay in a city and take advantage of its educational resources for professional training to further their future career. Or they might

return to their hometown and use their acquired human capital to start their own business instead of going back to farming. Most likely, they will take a wait-and-see attitude towards an uncertain future. Whatever the outcome, they are trying to find their own way to set up a new home.

As China's modernisation proceeds, this individualistic tendency might become more dominant in the future, unless institutional barriers remain. For instance, except for urban social insurance schemes, most welfare provisions are still based on a *hukou* status. First-generation migrants continue to take these institutional benefits and constraints into account. Even the new-generation migrants cannot be entirely free from traditional structures. Current *hukou* reforms do not remove the need for the migrant to obtain family support to purchase an urban dwelling. As a result, the migrant can hardly shake off the will of the family along the path to a new home, even if she or he attaches great value to individualism. But nowadays, the individual's family bonding in the notion of 'family-first' relates more to depending on family support than on contributing to family welfare. Nevertheless, as *hukou* reform continues and its benefits decrease over time, the new-generation migrants are likely to embrace modern thought more thoroughly. It seems possible that as the new-generation migrants age, they would not attach as much value to *hukou* benefits as first-generation migrants do now. In that light, the cross-generational differences among migrants are not only determined by their differences in life course but also related to institutional transformations. More precisely, the key to understanding the contrast between the two generations of migrants is to link the life course to institutional transformations.

Recent *hukou* reform has been driven by the municipal governments' efforts to boost real estate development. By offering a local *hukou* with its related benefits to new homeowners, they intended to bind them to the local economy. The policy has had some success among the better-off rural migrants who were capable of purchasing market-sector housing after years of saving. For most of the poor rural migrants, urban homeownership remains out of reach, even if they aspire to it. If it is important to meet their latent demand for urban housing, more aspects of the *hukou* system should be subjected to reform. For instance, migrants might be made to qualify

for a local *hukou* after participating in an urban pension scheme or other social insurances for a certain number of years. With that local *hukou*, they might then be able to secure a mortgage loan. Thus, the further specification of *hukou* and welfare benefits might also help rural migrants shift their home to the destination of their migration as market mechanisms become more widely available, also to them.

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