

The Settlement of Rural Migrants in Urban China: Some of the Migrants are not Floating Anymore

by

Dr. Kenneth Roberts
Economics Department
Southwestern University
Georgetown TX 78626 USA
robertsk@southwestern.edu

Dr. Rachel Connelly
Economics Department
Bowdoin College
Brunswick ME 04011 USA
connelly@bowdoin.edu

Dr. Zhenzhen Zheng
Chinese Academy of Social Science
Beijing PRC
zhengzz@cass.org.cn

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Abstract

The sweeping economic and social changes affecting China are compressing into a few decades the transition from a predominately rural agricultural society to an urban society based in manufacturing and services. The pioneers in this transition have been the millions of Chinese migrant workers who have left their rural villages to work in the cities. At first, most of these migrants were men who planned to return home after a few years, but women now comprise a substantial portion of rural labor migrants. Recent evidence shows that Chinese migration patterns are changing; not only are more women migrating, but they are going after marriage, often with their husbands and sometimes with their children. As they increasingly migrate as families, they are more likely to settle in their urban destinations.

The goal of this paper is to investigate the issue of permanent settlement in urban areas, with a particular focus on the process of the settlement of women. To accomplish this goal, our study uses the 2001 Chinese Urban Labor Survey (CULS). The 2001 CULS data collection effort was focused on five large cities, and specifically targeted migrants with a separate sampling frame. The survey yielded 500 migrant interviews in each city, and includes several indicators of settlement beyond duration of stay. We argue that, in addition to duration in the city, other important indicators of settlement are if the migrant is self employed, if she resides with members of her immediate family, if she has changed her *hukou* status, and if she remits less income back to the village. We explore each of these in this initial portrait of new settlement of the Chinese rural migrants in urban areas.

Beyond the descriptive tables these indicators of settlement in the five cities, the paper offers a multivariate analysis of the determinants of three of these indicators: length of stay, coresidence with one's spouse, and coresidence with one's children. Initial results indicate that age at migration, being currently married, and being self employed are strong predictors of length of stay. Being self employed is also a strong predictor of having one's spouse in the city, while only for married women is being self employed a predictor of having one's children in the city. Differences among the five cities regularly emerge, indicating that institutional structures and local labor markets are important determinants of settlement behavior.