

Article

Resilience and Circularity: Revisiting the Role of Urban Village in Rural-Urban Migration in Beijing, China

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Abstract: Recent policies in China have encouraged rural-urban circular migration and an “amphibious” and flexible status of settlement, reacting against the recent risks of economic fluctuation in cities. Rural land, as a form of insurance and welfare, can handle random hazards, and the new Land Management Law guarantees that rural migrants who settle in the city can maintain their rights to farmland, homesteads, and a collective income distribution. Existing studies have pointed out that homeland tenure can reduce migrants’ urban settlement intentions (which is a self-reported subjective perception of city life). However, little is known about how the rural-urban circularity and rural tenure system (especially for those still holding hometown lands in the countryside) affect rural migrants’ temporary urban settlements (especially for those preferring to stay in informal communities in the host city). The existing studies on the urban villages in China have focused only on the side of the receiving cities, but have rarely mentioned the other side of this process, focusing on migrants’ rural land tenure issues in their hometowns. This study discusses the rationale of informality (the urban village) and attests to whether, and to what extent, rural migrants’ retention of their hometown lands can affect their tenure security choices (urban village or not) in Chinese metropolises such as Beijing. Binary logistic regression was conducted and the data analysis proved that rural migrants who kept their hometown lands, compared to their land-loss counterparts, were more likely to live in a Beijing urban village. This displays the resilience and circularity of rural-urban migration in China, wherein the rural migrant households demonstrate the “micro-family economy”, maintaining tenure security in their hometown and avoiding the dissipation of their family income in their destination. The Discussion and Conclusions sections of this paper refer to some policy implications related to maintaining the rural-urban dual system, protecting rural migrant land rights, and beefing up the “opportunity structure” (including maintaining the low-rent areas in metropolises such as Beijing) in the 14th Five Year Plan period.



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1. Introduction

The “urban village” has become a hot topic in relation to informal settlements in rapidly expanding metropolises in developing countries, including those in the Chinese context [1,2]. The “urban village” (namely, *chengzhongcun*) is, in the context of land use and urban planning provisos, incompatible with official norms, and its participants suffer from substandard housing, inferior quality in the built environment, and a lack of facilities and infrastructure. It is acknowledged that the “urban village” has reduced the cost of urbanization and facilitated China’s rural-to-urban migration in the past four decades, by acting as a “transitory shelter”, providing cheap rental housing for low-wage migrant workers and creating rental income for local landless peasants. Urban villages are rural patches of land scattered in the city area, surrounded by or adjacent to urbanized and developed landscapes [1,2]. The rapidly industrializing and urbanizing areas of developing countries, including those in China, are faced with similar challenges concerning the

inadequate supply of public housing for migrants, such as a shortfalls in government budgets to fund public services and inequitable access to urban welfare. The use of informal habitats to house migrant workers and other low-wage earners is popular in these areas. The urban village has been referred to as a new way to plan/build mixed-use communities in a recent literature review [3].

However, on the national circular migration scale and from the perspective of migrant tenants, the existing interpretation of the urban village is fragmented into geographical and rural-urban relations. In China, land is state-owned and commodified in the cities. However, the rural land is collectively owned by the village committee or township government and cannot be traded in most circumstances (unless designated by the government for commercial uses). This dual rural-urban land system dates back to Mao's central planning system, when China's urbanization level lagged far behind the developing world and free labor migration was a forbidden area until the 1980s. In Mao's central planning system, the rural-urban schism was apparent, and the rural *hukou* was managed through collective ownership of rural land, run by the People's Communes and aiming at self-sufficiency. The *hukou* system is a residency permit system in China that has separated the rural population from the urban population, and the local population from the non-local population. The *hukou* system confers a wide range of welfare benefits on the urban population. Migrants maintain their non-local residency status and practically enjoy relatively few welfare benefits in the host city [4]. This rural and urban dualism has been challenged since market-oriented reforms and the gradual *hukou* reforms facilitated labor mobility. However, restrictions are still imposed on the usage and transactions regarding rural land or housing. In integrated rural-urban planning and governance processes that are top-down, the administrative redefinition of rural land to urban land through farmland expropriation and resident status conversion is the only legal way of "rural land urbanization" from a rural land status (that is, collectively owned by the village and uncommodifiable) to an urban one (that is state-owned and able to be traded in the land market) [1]. To date, the leasing and sales of self-built housing on rural lands remain extralegal, according to the Land Management Law in China. The boundaries between rural and urban land use are the administrative, regulatory, and tenure divisions in China. China's urban-rural household registration system (*hukou*) and the inherited rural-urban schism since Mao's central planning system have artificially divided rural and urban areas throughout the country, forming the dual rural vs. urban social-economic structure and land-use management system [4–6].

Interestingly, rural migrants' choice of informal settlement (e.g., urban villages) goes beyond the boundaries between the dualistic rural-urban economic and land use structure. More specifically, rural migrants attach more importance to their hometown's tenurial security but they do not care much about whether their urban shelter is formal or informal in their host city. Urban villages (as extralegal housing clusters) are rampant in their host cities. Migrant tenants' "perceived tenurial security" is strong enough to support exchanges of informal property and has shaped a huge informal housing market in host cities. Migrant households demonstrate a "micro-family economy", keeping tenure security in their hometown and avoiding the dissipation of family income in destinations, and therefore choosing to stay in urban villages. According to Fan (2021), Asian urban-bound migration is part of the "split households" strategy to diversify the sources of family income [7,8]. We have taken the phrase "micro-level family economy" from previous studies on developing countries to highlight the role of the "family utility maximization strategy" to explain migrants' tenure choices [9,10]. Breadwinners enter cities to accumulate savings for their family, and city migrants still retain their village residency status, allowing them to continue to enjoy rights and shares to the farmland and homestead back home. The migrants are not left out in benefit shares from rural collective income distribution and compensations when their farmland is acquired and converted to other uses [11,12]. The Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalization (SPRR, 2018–2022) also encourages the amphibious status of rural-urban migration (i.e., migration between urban destinations and rural

origins, rather than settling in cities) in response to the recent risks of economic fluctuation. Rural migrants are free to go to a city or back to their hometown and thus become more adaptive to the uncertainties involved in urbanization [13]. One focus of the new Land Management Law is to improve the three-layer system of rural land rights by maintaining collectivity in ownership rights, ensuring contract rights, and making management/use rights transferrable. Rural migrants who settle in the city are also allowed to maintain their land rights to their farmland, homestead, and the collective income distribution that is attached to their rural residency status.

However, urban villages are regarded as informal habitats to house rural migrant workers and other low-wage earners. The destruction or maintenance of such habitats by the governments of migrant-receiving cities has become an issue of good or bad governance related to the city's imaging and high-tech, aesthetic, and greening pursuits [1]. This study examines the rationale behind the informality of the urban village structure and attests to whether, and to what extent, the keeping of hometown lands by rural migrants can affect their tenure security choices (urban village or not) in Chinese metropolises such as Beijing. We tentatively propose the assumption that rural migrants who keep hometown lands are more likely to choose informality in their urban destinations. The following sections examine (a) the role of urban villages in rural-urban circular migration in China; (b) empirical studies and statistical analysis on the tenure choices of rural migrants in Beijing; and (c) the policy implications from the discussion of the rural-urban continuum in a circular migration context.

2. Informality or Resilience? The Linkage between Urban Villages and Migration

2.1. *Urban Village as Informality from a Dualistic Rural vs. Urban Land Use Perspective*

Unlike the Western community development plan for urban villages to preserve local neighborhood atmosphere [14], the urban village in China is not built to revive the nostalgic dreams and positive aspects of traditional village life in the city. The urban village is normally interpreted as a transitory shelter for low-wage migrant workers in an urbanizing China. Given migrants' low wages and lack of access to subsidized public housing, the low-cost informal rental housing sector of the urban village has surfaced to support the large demand among these migrants [15–18]. Similarly to India and Southeast Asian countries, the urban village in China refers to informal settlements in expanding metropolises [19]. The urban village is seen as a pathology of the rapid urban expansion in an urbanizing Asia and has negative connotations, including low-quality informal tenements, poor infrastructure and facilities, overcrowding, and a lack of planning regulations and management. The city governments in Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen have low tolerance for dilapidated illegal constructions on rural land and have taken action to clear up the urban village housing that has sheltered migrant tenants.

Is the urban village a disordered and unregulated informal settlement that is foreign to the planned city? The recent comparative studies on this bottom-up urban environment by Oostrum (2021) have proved that urban villages do not develop haphazardly; instead, their transformation of density, mixing, and access is adaptive and interdependent [19]. As discussed by Liu et al. (2020) in their study on the peri-urban mosaic formation, it is fragmentary and piecemeal land acquisition that produces mosaic-like urban villages—an land process that is informal in nature through the lens of the rural-cum-urban land development process (instead of a dualistic rural-versus-urban land-use conversion process) [20]. According to Oostrum (2021), the urban village in Asia demonstrates recurring patterns in a spatial configuration that embody urban design principles and are attuned to residents' needs. The urban village is not an example of pure informality that transgresses land use regulations and building codes [19].

Existing studies have also explained the reason why urban villages are deemed informal in the land management system. Ambiguous land ownership in rural villages is the main reason for the persistence of informality in a rapidly urbanizing China [21]. Differing from other developing countries, the urban village in China grows from a distinct

rural-urban dual land system, wherein urban land is state-owned and land-use rights are transferred by city governments, whereas rural land is owned collectively by farmers while being unalienable [20]. Rural land is used exclusively within agricultural communities, and cannot be converted into urban uses without going through state-initiated rural land expropriation procedures. Tenements built on rural land for migrants' transitory lodgings are therefore illegal. It has been proven that urban villages are the outcome of grassroots land speculation and rentiers, under the impact of market forces and state regulation. Informal land uses can create tensions between governments, real estate developers, and local communities over land interests, and between intra-community neighbors and family members over issues of land ownership and distribution [22]. In urban villages under the rural-urban dual land system in China, the perceived tenurial security is, however, strong enough to support exchanges of informal property and shape a huge informal housing market for migrant tenants [23,24]. Perceived tenure security has been proven to be important, affecting the supply and pricing of urban village housing [24,25].

2.2. Urban Village as Resilience from a Rural-Urban Circular Migration Perspective

The online Oxford dictionary defines resilience as "the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape" or "the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties". In this study, resilience is interpreted as the multiple-choice capacity to sustain rural-urban migration in the face of stress and adversity in everyday city life (such as economic risks and uncertainties, poverty, institutional barriers, housing unaffordability, and public housing inaccessibility). Low-rent urban village housing can provide more housing choices for low-wage migrants and beef up the resilience of migrants to city life (such as the migrants' ability to adapt successfully in the face of stress in the city). Informal means are devised to settle down and serve low-income rural migrants, at a low cost.

The access of migrant workers to the urban village, however, is not only restricted in terms of affordability, but also on grounds of legality, as the urban village in the great metropolises has been "cleared-up" and rebuilt into commercial areas, high-tech industrial parks, and talent apartments to curb the "urban sprawl" and intensify land-use efficiency [1]. However, can formalization address the urban village phenomenon, if the key to the issue of informal housing on rural lands is undefined property rights over rural land and houses? We have underestimated the demand side, which is the migrants' tenurial choices between village homes and city places. Existing studies on the spatiality and informality of the urban village, however, have failed to prove the feasibility of "amphibious warfare" for rural-urban migrants, straddling their family "utility maximization" rationalities of (a) hometown tenure security and (b) thrifty consumption of urban housing, taking the form of informal settlement to avoid the dissipation of the family income. The amphibious status of rural migrants and their preference for hometown tenure security cannot be underestimated.

C. Cindy Fan (2021) conducted a series of surveys on the "split households" arrangement in receiving places and sending places for rural-urban migration and proved the prevalence of circular migration in China, similar to that in Africa, Asia, and Latin America [7]. Circular migration can be a step towards permanent urban settlement, and also probably towards returning to one's hometown. Fan's surveys have given some proof of familial utility maximization strategies among rural migrants in China: (a) the couple migration may simply be a strategy to maximize household labor power devoted to their urban earnings, rather than a transition toward permanent settlement in the city; (b) migrants are not willing to spend their hard-earned income in cities (instead, settling in the crowded and cheap urban village housing), not because of unaffordability, but because they can save earnings as a remittance to rural homes; (c) young migrant workers continue to build large houses in their home villages to attract their potential brides and facilitate patrilocal residence; and (d) many migrants are unwilling to give up the rural *hukou* due to access and benefits that are tied to their rural *hukou*, including farming and housing land

and compensation for a land requisition that are considered increasingly more valuable than urban *hukou* [7,11–13,18,26].

Rather than attracting the rural population to buy urban housing, the recent policy in China has begun to guarantee that rural migrants are free to go forward to the city or back to their hometown, and is becoming more adaptive to the uncertainties in urbanization [13]. The 14th Five Year Plan has reaffirmed the importance of protecting the migrants' land rights to farmland, homestead, and a collective income distribution, which are attached to their rural residency status, even though some rural migrants have a permanent urban settlement. Return migration is indeed a component of the circular movement through which rural returnees are expected to overcome the economic risk and inefficient market in cities. Return migration is prevalent in the cities of developing countries with precarious job opportunities and insufficient social security systems [8].

We assume the urban village to be an urban issue, but it is also a part of the migration trajectory, bridging a whole rural tenure system between the village home and the city. We can hardly predict the outcome of the demolition of the urban village if we remain blind to this circular migration and “amphibious warfare” institution for rural-urban migrants. As elaborated by Wu et al. (2013), since the demolition of the urban village fails to tackle the root demand for unregulated living and working space, demolition only leads to “the replication of informality in more remote rural villages” and other kinds of neighborhoods [21]. Informality in China is not only created by the dual rural-urban land market and management system and by an under-provision of migrant housing, it has also become part of micro-migration strategies to maximize familial utility on the move. In this sense, a “transitory” stay in the urban village and circular migration is typical of many breadwinners who decide to avoid family income dissipation.

3. Rural Migrants' Transitory Stays in Beijing Urban Villages

3.1. Research Area

We tentatively proposed the assumption that rural migrants who keep their hometown lands are more likely to choose the informality of urban destinations. Data analysis on Beijing was conducted to attest to this hypothesis. Beijing was chosen for this empirical study because it is the largest destination for migrant workers in North China, and it is the city that enacts the strictest *hukou* control and bans on sales of rural land and housing in China. At the same time, Beijing has a strong desire to compete for a place in the global city roster, thus initiating city re-imaging movements and having a low tolerance for dilapidated illegal constructions, as shown in Figure 1 [27–30]. The scholars, however, regard informal housing as a model for “inclusive and pro-poor urbanization” in China [31], since it has reduced the cost of urbanization and facilitated China's rural-urban migration in the last four decades. According to Peter Ho's (2014, 2017) “credibility thesis”, titling or formal registration of these informal housing systems may not matter from the perspective of migrant tenants [32–34]. Unlike De Soto's advocates of formal title, Ho and Sun (2021) pointed out that actors may feel perfectly secure without formal rights; and, on the contrary, formal rights may not improve people's access to credit [31]. Ho also pointed out some factors that can affect “perceived tenure security”, such as the duration of occupation, the settlement's size, the level of service provision, the perception of past and current policies, the cohesion of community organization, and the employment opportunities. The urban village constitutes a credible and affordable alternative for rural-urban migrants, for whom urban formal rental housing is out of reach, or for whom social housing belongs to a closed-off arena due to the *hukou* system [31]. Migrant tenants' fear of eviction has been proven to be important to reduce the “perceived security of tenure” [35]. However, even when faced with demolition and eviction, the urban village is still “partially credible”, a better choice than “empty” institutions such as unaffordable formal rental housing or inaccessible social housing.

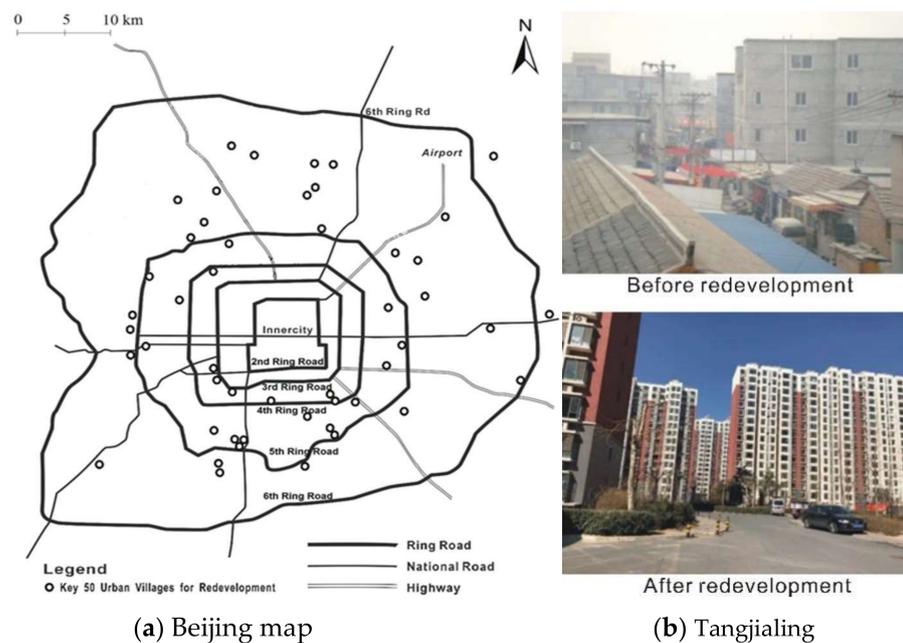


Figure 1. The 50 key urban villages identified for redevelopment in Beijing since 2010 (Source: the name list of the 50 key urban villages is from News. Focus [27]; field trip by authors).

To date, formalization has been the main top-down government approach to redeveloping urban villages and legalizing their property rights. Rural lands are either converted into state-owned lands for urban uses or become a “rural-urban integrative demonstration project” to house talented migrants on the preserved rural lands. As reflected by the demolition of the famous “Ant Tribe” Tangjialing Village (Figure 1b) for low-income IT workers’ apartments in Zhongguancun Science Park, the informality and the everyday life of low-wage migrants were disrupted by the state-initiated formalization schemes, and some dislocated tenants moved to more remote villages in suburban Changping [21,35]. Beijing’s urban village is being rebuilt into an urban community, but this is leading to the gentrification process, replacing low-wage migrant tenants [1,36]. As pointed out by Wu et al. (2013), the “beautification and modernization narrative” of urban village redevelopment is rarely balanced with the opportunity cost to the local economy of “removing the main source of low-cost homes” [21]. This particular contextual setting and policy application in Beijing has the potential to (a) inspire the new rural-urban nexus framework (not merely on the side of urban regeneration); (b) provide more temporary affordable housing in a transitional period of urbanization; (c) offer continuous feedback of housing needs in the loop of rural-urban circular migration; and (d) create rural-cum-urban mixed functions that are not dualistic anymore. The next section introduces the data source and analysis methods used to attest whether, and to what extent, rural migrants’ keeping of their hometown lands can affect their tenure security choices (urban village or not) in Beijing.

3.2. Data and Methods

The urban village is not merely an informal urban destination, but also represents a strategy of migrant family economy based on principles of resilience and circularity. This study refers to residence status in the urban village, but does not consider the rent levels, which are full of uncertainties and vary with different tenure security on rural plots [24]. This section uses the data from the 2017 Migrant Dynamics Monitoring Survey (MDMS) to look into whether, and how, rural migrants’ tenure status in their places of origin would influence their tenure security choices in their destinations. The data on migrants’ stays in the urban village were derived from the 2017 Migrant Dynamics Monitoring Survey (MDMS), conducted by the National Health Commission of China. The eligible migrants

in this national survey were those who moved across a county (*xiàn*) or city (*shì*) boundary from their registered household and who had stayed in the current destination for more than one month. The data collected on the residential committee units were based on the probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling schemes from each sub-district and town in the city unit. In the PPS sampling, the probability of the selection for a sampling unit is directly proportional to a size measure.

In the total Beijing migrant samples, 2992 cases of the migrant labor force with rural origins were valid for statistical studies, and the remaining retired or unemployed data were discarded. The data demonstrate a male-dominated migration, because 55.8% were male; 37.1% of rural migrants were in the below-30 age group, 33.0% were in the 31–40 age group, and 29.9% were in the above-40 age group. Our focus was on the rural migrants' preference for the informal tenure type in the urban village, which could represent an integrative rural tenurial continuum, bridging their origins and destinations.

Logistic regression was used to analyze relationships between rural migrants' choices of the urban village in their destination or not (dichotomous dependent variable) and the explanatory variables. The explanatory variables included (a) migrant household profiles; (b) migratory status; (c) employment and housing expense stress in destinations; (d) landholding in rural origins (categorical and continuous independent variables). The logistic regression approach was used to combine these independent variables to estimate the probability that the migrants' transitory stay in the urban village would occur.

With a focus on the role of hometown rural tenurial status, we first consider the tenurial distribution of hometown farmland and homesteads: (a) holding both farmland and a homestead; (b) farmland only; (c) homestead only; and (d) land loss (neither farmland nor homestead). The migrants' tenure choices in their destinations were composed of two types: (a) urban village, and (b) others. It was hypothesized that, for migrants, the keeping of rural lands in their hometown could predict a higher odds of choosing an insecure housing tenure in the urban village of their destination. Binary logistic regression was conducted in SPSS, and the regression analysis results are listed below.

3.3. Results

According to the MDMS data, 49.5% of rural migrants in Beijing had chosen to live in the urban village, especially the inner- and outer-suburban villages. Of these, 50.5% chose to settle in the urban formal community in Beijing. As shown in Table 1, the majority of those in the urban village were tenants (99.3%), and migrant homeowners in the urban village held the long-term rent that was issued by the village committee or the township government [24]. In the urban formal community, 86.0% were tenants, 13.3% were private homeowners in the housing market, and 0.6% were homeowners of the government-subsidized housing. When living in the urban village, rural migrants can lower their housing expenses in Beijing but suffer from substandard housing and inferior quality in their built and living environment. When choosing the urban formal community, the land use and construction are compatible with the urban planning provisos and norms, but tenants are faced with high rent costs. According to He, even young professionals are burdened with higher housing costs and precarity in megacities such as Beijing and Shanghai in China, due to the financialization of rental housing [37].

Table 1. Rural migrants' housing choices in Beijing, 2017.

	Home Owning	Subsidized Home Owning	Small Property-Owning	Renting	Total
Urban formal community	13.3%	0.6%	0.1%	86.0%	100.0%
Urban village	0.4%	0.1%	0.3%	99.3%	100.0%
Total	6.9%	0.3%	0.2%	92.6%	100.0%

Source: 2017 MDMS.

The binary logistic regression analysis demonstrated the significant impact of the keeping of hometown land on the likelihood that rural migrants would choose the urban village or not in their urban destinations. The full model contains four groups of predictors—household profiles, migratory status, employment and housing expense stress in destinations, and landholding in rural origins.

Table 2 shows the binary regression results. Omnibus tests of model coefficients indicate that the binary regression model is highly significant, $\chi^2(43, N = 2,992) = 1019.732$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that the model can distinguish between rural migrants who stay and do not stay in the Beijing urban village. The Hosmer–Lemeshow goodness of fit test (higher than 0.05) indicates that the model fits the data well, with no significant differences between the observational data and the forecast data. The Cox and Snell R-squared value (0.289) and the Nagelkerke R-squared value (0.385) indicate the amount of variation in the dependent variable explained by the model. However, these are described as pseudo-R-squared statistics, rather than the true R-squared values in the multiple regression output. The predicted correct percentage (74%) indicates how well the model can predict the correct category (choosing the urban village or not) for each case.

Table 2. Binary logistic regression of the migrants' choices of the Beijing urban village, 2017.

Migrants' Choices Regarding the Informal Tenure of the Urban Village (Ref = Urban Formal Market)			
Predictors	B	SE	Exp(β)
Household profile			
Age	−0.054 ***	0.006	0.947
Gender (ref = female)	0.108	0.096	1.114
Marriage (ref = unmarried)	0.448 ***	0.165	1.565
Education level (ref = college and above)			
Primary and below	0.460 **	0.217	1.583
Junior secondary	0.492 ***	0.157	1.636
Senior/technical secondary	0.192	0.153	1.211
Logged annual family income	−3.954 ***	0.241	0.019
Migration status			
Household size in urban destinations	0.021	0.050	1.021
Place of origin (ref = East China)			
North-eastern region	0.531 ***	0.193	1.701
North-western region	0.005	0.256	1.005
North China	0.188	0.118	1.207
Central China	0.182	0.125	1.200
South China	−1.048	0.815	0.351
South-western region	0.389 *	0.203	1.475
Second generation of rural migrant workers (ref = others)	−0.192 *	0.114	0.825
Employment in urban destinations			
Occupation (ref = blue collar)			
Cadre, manager or head	0.040	0.642	1.041
Technician/professional	−0.099	0.215	0.906
Staff/clerk	−0.665	0.421	0.514
Service worker	−0.291	0.181	0.748
Agricultural worker	0.562	0.822	1.755
Other	−0.829 ***	0.281	0.437
Industry (ref = labour-intensive manufacturing)			
Primary industry	−0.364	0.742	0.695
Non-manufacturing sectors in secondary industry	0.118	0.223	1.125
Capital-intensive manufacturing	0.574 *	0.329	1.775
Skill-intensive manufacturing	0.134	0.253	1.144
Other types of manufacturing	0.541	0.371	1.718
Producer services	−0.047	0.199	0.954
Public services	−0.599 **	0.245	0.550
Consumer services	−0.086	0.163	0.918
Employer type (ref = privately-owned/joint stock)			
State-owned	−0.448 **	0.187	0.639
Collective-owned	−0.253	0.381	0.776
Foreign-invested/joint venture	−0.055	0.260	0.947
Family- or individually-owned	−0.071	0.146	0.932
Non-profit organization	−1.879	1.269	0.153
Other	0.596 ***	0.196	1.814

Table 2. Cont.

Migrants' Choices Regarding the Informal Tenure of the Urban Village (Ref = Urban Formal Market)			
Predictors	B	SE	Exp(β)
Employment status (ref = stable employees)			
Temporary employees (no contract)	−0.059	0.205	0.942
Employer	−0.656 ***	0.238	0.519
Self-running	0.163	0.152	1.177
Other	−0.296	0.389	0.744
Housing pressure in urban destinations			
Housing expense-to-income ratio	−5.795 ***	0.408	0.003
Landed status in rural origins			
If still holding rural lands in hometown (ref = land loss)			
Holding both farmland and homestead	0.738 ***	0.123	2.092
Homestead only	0.861 ***	0.131	2.365
Farmland only	0.661 ***	0.197	1.936
Constant	16.957 ***	1.001	
N	2992		
df	43		
λ^2	1019.732 ***		
−2 Log Likelihood	3127.760		
Cox and Snell R^2	0.289		
Nagelkerke R^2	0.385		
Percent correctly classified	74%		

Note: Significant at * 0.1; ** 0.05; *** 0.01 level.

Exp(β) values are the odds ratios (OR) for each of the explanatory variables, showing “the change in odds of being in one of the categories of the outcome when the value of a predictor increases by one unit” [38] (p. 461). The rural migrants with hometown lands, compared to their land-loss counterparts (ref), were more likely to live in the urban village (OR = 2.092 for farmland and homestead holders, 2.365 for mere homestead holders, and 1.936 for mere farmland holders), controlling for all other factors in the model. A rural homestead in a hometown is a more prominent pulling factor than farmland in regard to returning home eventually, since migrants holding homesteads (OR = 2.365) were more likely to choose a transitory stay in the urban village of their destinations than those merely holding farmland (OR = 1.936). It was evident that alleviating housing expense pressure is a strong motivation for staying in the urban village (OR = 0.003), as its regression coefficient was the strongest of all these explanatory variables (Table 2). Income level was listed in the top two of the coefficient values.

As shown in Table 2, in the explanatory factors concerning household profiles, only age, marriage, education, and income variables made a statistically significant contribution to the model. Rural migrants who were younger, married, less educated, and low earners were more likely to stay in the urban village, controlling for all other factors in the model. Migrants from the north-eastern and south-western region were 1.701 and 1.475 times more likely to stay in the Beijing urban village, compared to those from the more advanced East China (ref), when controlling for all other factors in the model. Those from south China were the least likely to choose the urban village. The place of origin matters, as south China is more advanced and affluent than most of the listed regions, and those from south China can afford to stay elsewhere. Additionally, second-generation rural migrant workers, compared to those from other backgrounds (ref), were (OR = 0.825) less likely to choose the urban village.

When it comes to employment in urban destinations, rural migrants who have other occupation types (such as freelance workers in different kinds of metropolitan industries), get involved in public services and state-owned sectors and assume the role of employers, and are less likely to stay in the urban village (compared to blue collar workers, especially those engaged in labor-intensive manufacturing and the private economy as stable employees). Migrants in capital-intensive manufacturing are more inclined to choose the urban village (OR = 1.775), compared to those in labor-intensive manufacturing (ref),

due to the suburbanization of manufacturing clusters (such as electronic and equipment manufacturing) and the migrant workers' preference for the nearby villages in the suburb.

4. Discussion: Revisiting a Synthesis between the Rural-Urban Dual System

We performed exploratory regression analysis to obtain convincing statistical results about the relationship between the holding of hometown tenure and rural migrants' choices as to their housing tenure (informally residing in the urban village or not) in their destinations. Rural land status in rural origins was proven to exert a statistically significant contribution to the model. Those holding homesteads in their places of origin were most likely to choose the urban village in their destinations, displaying a hypothesized "micro-family economy", keeping tenure security in their hometown and avoiding the dissipation of their family income in their destinations. The assumed "permanent urban settlement" in the previous studies is questioned in this study, and doubts are therefore raised as to its underestimation of the "amphibious" and flexible status of rural-urban migration in transitional economies such as China. The "amphibious warfare" for rural-urban migrants includes (a) the hometown landholding in their rural places of origin, and (b) the multiple-choice of urban housing in their destinations (settlement or a transitory stay and the thrifty consumption of informal housing).

4.1. Different Rural Land Institutions, Different Urbanization Paths in Developing Countries

First, urban villages are regarded as informal settlements built on rural lands in host cities. However, they are also a manifestation of China's unique urbanization path and rural land institutions. In the 1950s, Brazil began its agricultural modernization at the expense of small-scale farming, explaining why landless rural workers had to migrate to the rapidly industrializing cities that provided the only prospects for them [39]. Such squatting is, however, discouraged or even forbidden in urban China. This migration policy difference between different countries in the developing countries is derived from their disparate urbanization paths in different contexts.

Studies on China's rural-urban divide have highlighted a series of *hukou* policies against migrants' permanent stays in cities [40]. However, these have neglected the long-lasting divide in the rural vs. urban welfare distribution system, which is a kind of "complementary balance" in the use of a rural vs. urban dualist land system to overcome the economic risks, if any, in the transitional period. As though situated in a rural-cum-urban "amphibious" status, migrants can access the labor and capital market for efficiency in urban destinations, and also ensure the continuity of their family and lineage, maintaining security in their rural places of origin. The importance of small-scale farming and the strong agricultural collective entity (in both origins and destinations) cannot be understated in a mobile and urbanizing Asia. In recent years in China, some harsher residency controls were enforced on lower-skilled migrant workers and illegal village constructions, and the urban villages were ended with demolitions. The non-*hukou* migrant tenants are neglected and become victims to some extent as a result of informal tenement demolition and soaring rent in the city. The urban village as the main source of low-rent housing cannot be understated.

The statistical analysis presented in Table 2 revealed some interesting findings. Second-generation rural migrant workers were found to be less likely to choose the urban village, compared to other backgrounds. This implies that second-generation rural migrant workers have a great desire to become urban settlers, and they can gain access to opportunities and resources (compared with others with rural origins). This assimilation process is important for rural-urban migration, as second-generation migrants tend to settle down in formal communities and gradually integrate into the receiving society. In addition, the blue collar workers among rural migrants (especially those in capital-intensive manufacturing jobs) are more inclined to choose the urban village. The suburbanization of manufacturing in the cities in China has created the residential suburbanization of migrant workers. Some of them choose to live in the nearby villages in the suburb as a result. For instance, in the

China–Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP), low-skilled migrants live in the low-end rental housing market, including informal ones in the nearby villages [41].

4.2. Maintaining the Rural-Urban Dual System and Improving the Opportunity Structure for “Amphibious” Migrant Workers

There have been long-lasting academic debates on the “structural” power of China’s rural-urban dual system on its migrant workers. Chan and Wei elaborated on the impacts of the rural-urban dual system in China on internal migration. They analyzed the mechanisms of the rural-urban dual system, and how it has helped to generate low-cost migrant labor for urban markets [4]. As argued earlier, rural migrants in China are embedded firmly in a mega-land institution: hometown lands as welfare and security, urban lands as a speculative market (if they become home-occupiers), and a consumptive use (as tenants), and the urban village as their affordable though transitory shelter. Chan and Wei’s (2019) thesis on the rural-urban dual system recognized the asymmetry of the power structure, highlighting that the dual system provides the “opportunity for discrimination” against rural migrant workers [4]. On the contrary, Chen and Fan’s (2016) thesis on the split household strategy for economic calculus ignored this structural asymmetry but highlighted the “opportunities for risk reduction” for microeconomic rationalities [12]. How can we interpret the divergence in the opinions of Chan and Fan?

As argued by Chan and Wei (2019), China’s rural-urban dual system is a “mega dual system”, different from the more limited and smaller dualistic structure in the Lewis model [4]. To fix the rural-urban gap and the plight of “split households” (such as migrant children and left-behind children), central governments in China enacted the National New Urbanization Plan (NUP, 2014–2020) and the Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalization (SPRR, 2018–2022) to grant more welfare benefits for migrants in urban destinations and more economic opportunities for returnees to their rural places of origin. However, the rural land system has not been removed from a transitional China, as reaffirmed in the new version of the 2021 Land Management Law in China.

However, policy-makers have neglected the fact that transitory stays and the need for cheap housing are still the primary concerns of migrants. The demolition of urban villages is validated according to security and public interest concerns, but this has changed the housing opportunity structure for low-wage migrants. It is an interesting question whether the peri-urban migrant enclaves will become regulatory areas, or if they will provide low-rent housing opportunities for risk reduction [35]. The more committed institutions of land use are still engaged in debate regarding how to regulate and serve these urban floaters within China’s mega rural-urban dual system and development model.

5. Conclusions

In this study, we have revisited the concept of the urban village in metropolitan China, which does not represent pure informality in a destination, but it is also a part of a rural-urban circular migration trajectory, since rural migrants who keep their hometown lands are more likely to choose a transitory stay in an urban village. Migrants’ straddling of their village homes and city living-places has been underestimated in previous studies and policy-making. To date, few resettlement sites have been provided for these dislocated migrant tenants.

We have also discussed the policy debates on the Chinese rural-urban dual system—does the rural-urban dual system provide “opportunities for discrimination” (for investors and urban governments), or “opportunities for risk reduction” (for the migrant family economy)? Chinese governments are implementing macro policies (NUP and SPRR) that beef up the opportunity structure for “amphibious” migrant workers. However, there is still a long way ahead, regarding the questions of how to perverse low-rent housing areas for temporary migrant workers, and how to provide more public services for the new trends of the increasing “familization of migration”.

Another implication in land use policy is the importance of a welfare-oriented land system. Optimal land use is deemed good as it can generate higher economic returns, but

the value of resilience for social welfare and integration is underestimated. The demolition of urban villages is the result of long-term land-use conflicts between city governments, property developers, low-wage migrant workers, and other disadvantaged residents. In this study, resilience is conceived as a capacity that can develop through village-based stakeholder interactions to mediate the housing stress of migrants (e.g., the urban village). More research is needed to look into forms of community property and collective land ownership that are still robust in the 21st Century [42].

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