IDENTITY RESOCIALIZATION: THE RETURNING PHENOMENON OF MIGRANT WORKERS UNDER RURAL REVITALIZATION IN LIAONING, CHINA

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ABSTRACT: *In 2017, China initiated the Rural Revitalization Strategy (RSS) to revive rural regions. It aims to revitalize rural areas and the farming sector through modernization and infrastructure enhancement. This led to the return of many migrant workers. This study examines the economic opportunities available to returning migrants in Liaoning, analyzes their success rate in terms of integration, and highlights the challenges they face during resettlement. The study entailed a secondary data analysis, and the data were analyzed using statistical tools and SPSS software. The study found that migration was influenced by education and its role in economic opportunity. Employment status was found to be a significant factor in economic opportunity, particularly in the labor market. Notably, the majority of migrants chose to remain in Liaoning, suggesting that rural rehabilitation initiatives had been effective. The findings highlight the complex reintegration processes of returning migrants and underscore the need to understand these dynamics for effective policymaking.*

KEYWORDS: *returning migrants, rural revitalization, migrants, migrant laborers, migration, urbanization, China*

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INTRODUCTION

A process of rural revitalization has been implemented as part of a national strategy to reshape the country's socioeconomic landscape. Due to the reform policies introduced in China in 1978, the rate of urbanization exceeded the global average (Hong et al. 2021: 1). Additionally, urbanization triggered the migration of the rural population, driven by poor living conditions and limited employment opportunities. Urbanization has led to the neglect of rural areas, resulting in damaged infrastructure, reduced economic activities, and decreased agricultural productivity. To address these issues, the Rural Revitalization Strategy (RSS) was introduced in 2017, with two-term goals: firstly, "progress on rural revitalization by 2035" and second, "fully rejuvenated with well-off farmers and strong agriculture sectors by 2050" (Zhou et al. 2020b). This entails a range of initiatives, including investments in agricultural modernization, rural infrastructure development, technology adoption, and social service enhancements, all aimed at enhancing the quality of life in these areas. Many residents of the province joined the Chinese urban workforce in search of employment (Du et al. 2023: 622). The noticeable trend of migrant workers returning to their rural origins is driven by changing dynamics of the Chinese economy and the government's emphasis on rural revitalization. The experience of returning migrant laborers in Liaoning province is a microcosm of China's larger rural regeneration agenda. Therefore, their success stories and challenges provide vital insights that can inform and improve policies and initiatives at the provincial and national levels. Lastly, these returning migrants might serve as role models, motivating others to follow in their footsteps and contribute to regeneration initiatives.

The study examines the challenges and strategies faced by migrant workers upon returning to their rural areas. Understanding this phenomenon can generate insights that help formulate effective policies and strategies for the revitalization process. This could be instrumental in preserving local culture, especially in relation to the individuals returning from urban areas with new ideas and perspectives. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to provide insights that enable the balanced revitalization of Liaoning within the context of rural revitalization.

The current study is significant in terms of its impact on stakeholders, policymakers, and academic inquiry. The insights into the return of migrating workers are not limited to statistical observations, but they also provide testimony about the tangible socio-economic shifts occurring in Chinese rural areas. Policymakers can use these insights to foster a sense of investment and belonging in rural communities. Prior studies have established that the main

role in reintegration is played by village heads in Chinese communities (Li et al. 2019: 111–124). With these insights, special programs can be developed to foster social cohesion and mitigate potential social conflicts. Ultimately, the study could be significant in providing contemporary academic researchers with valuable insights into the reintegration process, migration patterns, and their potential implications.

The current study addresses the following research questions:

- What are the economic opportunities recognized by the returning migrants in Liaoning?
- How do returning migrants rate their integration into the rural communities of Liaoning, post-migration?
- What are the challenges identified during the resettlement process?

Hence, the research objectives of the current study include:

1. Investigating the observed economic opportunities recognized by the returning migrants in Liaoning
2. Analyzing the success rate of returning migrants in terms of economic and societal integration.
3. Highlighting the challenges faced by migrant workers during the resettlement process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical context of rural revitalization in China

China is expected to continue its process of urbanization, having been predominantly agrarian for many years. Migration from rural to urban areas was triggered by the economic reforms introduced in the 1970s, as people moved due to improved employment prospects, access to amenities, and better living conditions (Wu et al. 2014). However, this process has had numerous consequences in rural areas, as youths have left the ageing population and children behind. Popularly known as the 'left-behind' phenomenon, this has resulted in the rural region's population being deprived of support and lacking resources (Ye et al. 2017). A study conducted with 400 elderly persons living separately from their migrant children found that the rural workforce had been depleted, arguing that migration has led to a 'semi-proletarianized' situation in rural areas (He–Ye 2014).

Similar findings were established by employing Zelinsky's mobility transition model (Chen et al. 2014). One of the primary reasons for this consequence was the abandonment of farmland (Xu et al. 2019). To address this issue, the Chinese government has initiated a process of rural revitalization, focusing on enhancing economic opportunities and living conditions in rural areas by addressing communities and regions affected by poverty due to migration (Han 2020).

Consequently, the Chinese government started promoting agricultural technology start-ups, agricultural modernization, and the diversification of rural economies. Chen et al. (2021) investigated the evolutionary characteristics of urban-rural relationships and classical theories that align with cognitive understanding, arguing that rural and urban development can be promoted through an integrated approach under government regulation. Thus, the Chinese government aims to revitalize rural areas by strategically developing infrastructure, providing an alternative to migration towards urban regions.

Returning migrant workers: Profiles and patterns

Both push and pull factors influence the migration of the laborers back to their rural roots. Tadevosyan et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study in Chongqing Municipality, Dianjiang County, China, and identified social, human, and financial capital as the main determining factors of the movement, with a dearth of the latter causing a push and an abundance causing a pull. However, this study addresses the pressing need to develop policies and designs that aid migrants by meeting their social and economic needs. Among the identified factors, family obligations were among the primary reasons, although a study investigating the 'new generation of migrant workers in Urban China' found that this new generation juggles between work and family, and is often confused due to the rural and urban cultural divide (Cheng 2014).

Another study on the evaluation of programs in Chengdu provides insight into the other pull factor, land ownership (Zhang 2022), by showing that rural restructuring can take the form of self-organizing, government-led, and returned entrepreneur types. Moreover, returning migrants may have new opportunities as the landscape of rural rehabilitation evolves at both individual and societal levels, such as adapting skills learned in cities to rural environments and the tourism-led commodification of rural areas. A study investigating rural commodification in Xixinan village, Huangshan city, noted the association between rural transformation, tourism, and commodification (Chen–Kong 2021), as well as the prevalent demand for rural experiences, urbanization,

and globalization. Moreover, individuals' urge to reconnect with their cultural origins and to have a sense of belonging can be significant pull factors, as many migrants consider the memories, customs, and community relationships associated with rural living to be of fundamental importance (Duan et al. 2020). Thus, migrants return with urban experiences, skills, and goals that have the potential to alter the direction of rural development.

Economic opportunities and challenges

Owning land, adopting entrepreneurship, and rural tourism are viable economic opportunities for migrant workers. A case study on Yuanjia, China, examined the lives of migrants, also known as "urban villagers," by analyzing the dynamics of the market and the trends that shape them (Gao–Wu 2017). The study found that policies are required to improve the well-being and consumption of rural migrants. Local demand in rural regions may not instantly align with the characteristics of returnees. Rural spending power, tastes, and habits may differ dramatically from those in urban regions. Therefore, it is essential to navigate the factors associated with rural markets.

Furthermore, Aisaiti et al. (2019) conducted an empirical study to explore the financial intentions of rural farmers towards inclusive finance and found that perceived risks impact negatively on the willingness to participate, while perceived benefits positively influence the intention. In contrast, a study that examined the financial situation of microenterprises found that entrepreneurship in rural areas is more closely associated with informal finance rather than formal finance, suggesting a lack of association between residents and formal financial services (Beck et al. 2015). This claim was validated by the study of Oliphant and Ma (2021), which found that while borrowers face barriers in the form of membership fees, lenders may be cognitively biased against borrowers. Therefore, it can be expected that returning migrants will also face similar challenges in obtaining financial support.

Integrations of returning migrants

When migrants return to their rural grassroots, their integration is challenged due to their adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and local dynamics. Chen and Wang (2019a) found that the influence of return migration on rural economic growth is

determined by local economic conditions. As discussed in the previous section, returning migrants may have gradually adopted new lifestyles or developed distinct speaking styles. This can consequently pose a challenge to their acceptance in rural communities. Village heads can play a crucial role in integrating returning migrants into the community, as noted in earlier studies (Zhou et al. 2020b). In one study, qualitative analysis using SWOT and the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) revealed that returning migrants are significantly influenced by technical and business management factors. Additionally, the study found that government interventions that enhance the entrepreneurial capabilities of migrants can significantly aid in their integration. Therefore, the integration of migrants requires government policies and the intervention of village seniors.

Theoretical frameworks

For the current study, Push-Pull Theory, Transnationalism Theory, and Human Capital Theory were used, which were supported by Social Identity Theory and Acculturation Theory. Each theory provided insights into different aspects of the return migration process; thus, within a solid analytical framework, the context of Liaoning's rural regeneration could be developed.

The current study was built upon three essential theoretical underpinnings:

Push-Pull Theory. This theory, coined by Raventein, highlights the factors that pull individuals to an area or push them away from it (Kaushik 2021). The theory is instrumental in evaluating the economic opportunities for returning migrants, part of the research question.

Transnationalism Theory. This theory entails the interaction and connections of migrant laborers with their origins or grassroots. It involves considering social and cultural factors to understand the reasons behind decisions, perceptions, and actions (ibid.). This theory is instrumental in understanding the success rate of migrants' integration. It emphasizes the dual identities and social networks that affect them even after their return, highlighting the complicated relationship between urban and rural surroundings.

Human Capital Theory. This theory posits that individuals invest in skills to enhance their earnings and productivity. The theory is mainly applicable to the research question concerning the challenges perceived by returning laborers (ibid.). It indicates how the perspectives of rural challenges and opportunities for returning migrant laborers are shaped by the human capital they could acquire through their livelihoods in urban areas. The idea provides a perspective through which the newly acquired skills of returning migrants can be evaluated

when addressing the challenges they face during resettlement.

Social Identity Theory. This theory suggests that humans interact and categorize themselves as distinct or belonging to a specific social group, such as an age group. The theory defines social identity as the tendency of a person to evaluate and self-categorize according to the group. This influences self-esteem and affects social creativity, individual mobility, stereotyping, and social competition (Trepte–Loy 2017). It implies that the social identity of a migrant worker may be a psychological hurdle if the host country resists or refuses to support this. Consequently, it offers substantial psychological and emotional insight into why migrant workers are motivated to develop a social identity that aligns with and resonates within the host society.

Acculturation Theory. This theory informs us about the adoption of the host culture by people migrating to another group, which is distinguished by its differences in beliefs, race, class, or ethnicity. Acculturation refers to the process by which individuals assimilate, integrate, become bicultural, or experience marginalization as a result of differences between their heritage culture and the host culture, which mutually influences both the individual and the surrounding societal organization and structure over a prolonged period (Ozer 2017). Moreover, these acculturational strategies depend on factors like social support, observed discrimination, language proficiency, and identity exchange within the host environment. Thus, the theory explains the psychological push and pull factors that motivate migrant workers to adopt the host culture.

Literature gap

While the literature encompasses extensive research on migration patterns from rural to urban areas, very few studies have addressed urban-to-rural migration. Additionally, the literature has examined the impact of migration on the economy in isolation, as well as the evolving dynamics of rural tourism on migrating laborers. This situates the present study to investigate the effect of migration on laborers, while exploring the success of integration, the challenges the latter face, and their psychological state upon return. Moreover, the literature review describes the complex pathways that returning migrants take when integrating urban experiences with rural environments and navigating the intricate mechanics of reintegration. Thus, the findings of this study will shed light not only on the experiences of returnees but also on the larger picture of identity resocialization, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of migration in the context of rural revitalization efforts.

METHODOLOGY

Data

Secondary data analysis was chosen to help investigate the patterns and trends among the factors and duration of migration. The study used the *National Migrant Population Health and Family Planning Dynamic Monitoring Survey (2018)* dataset to reveal the multifaceted interplay affecting migration. The structured and systemic investigation aids in understanding the relationship of the variables through statistical and empirical measurement (Basias–Pollalis 2018). The aggregated data was open-access and included various survey questions related to migration. The survey collected data from individuals who had lived in the area of influx for one month or more, were 15 years old or more, and were not registered in the local district (county or city).

The data in the survey were collected through a questionnaire focusing on (1) the basic situation of the country of origin; (2) the situation of local individuals and family members; (3) employment status; (4) residence intention; and (5) health and public services. For the current study, specific data questions were identified that would provide insight into migration status in Liaoning. Returning migrant workers are identified as individuals who had previously moved to urban areas for employment and have since returned to their rural areas of origin (Zaiceva–Zimmermann 2016).

The sample size in the survey was 4,000 from Shenyang, Dalian, and other prefecture-level cities in Liaoning. Naturally, the sample size in the current study also reflected the same. Additionally, the independent variables included occupation, household earnings, and type of employment, while the dependent variable was the duration of stay. From the *National Migrant Population Health and Family Planning Dynamic Monitoring Survey (2018)*, data specific to the specific questions in the survey were obtained, namely:
 – Gender;
 – Education;
 – Type of household registration;
 – Food or accommodation provided by the respondent's employment unit;
 – Average monthly income;
 – Doing more than one hour of paid work per week;
 – When former job finished;
 – Current main occupation;
 – Current employment status;
 – Personal earnings last month or from last employment;
 – If the respondent plans to stay in the local area in the future;

– If they plan to stay in the local area, for how long;
– Type of unit respondent is currently working in.

The data were carefully selected to provide insight into migration status. For instance, data on the type of household registration, food or accommodation provided by their employment unit, average monthly income, and more than one hour of paid work in a week can aid in understanding the phenomenon.

While the study included such data, ethical considerations were prioritized (Iphofen 2009). Key focal areas included respecting privacy and confidentiality by anonymizing data, adhering to data use permissions, ensuring accurate representation within the original context, and addressing inherent biases. The approach was aligned with legal and ethical standards, particularly in regard to data protection laws. The study was committed to responsibly presenting the findings. Throughout the research, the study was attentive to the impact on stakeholders, including the academic community and subjects represented in the data, maintaining the integrity and ethical responsibility of our research.

Data analysis

The study took the categorical variables, including gender, level of education, and employment, from the 2018 data set. Since the questionnaire responses involved various categories, dummy variables were created to obtain robust and sustainable results. For instance, type of occupation was coded as 'Occupation_ Peddler,' 'Occupation_Business,' 'Occupation_Professional_ technology,' 'Occupation_Production,' Occupation_Security_guard,' and so on. It is essential to arrange data before data analysis (Ruel et al. 2015). Therefore, the data were rigorously examined to ensure that they were ready for uploading to the SPSS platform, using the specified nominal or ordinal scale for the responses that were obtained.

An analysis of the categorical variables was performed to understand the fundamental characteristics of all the variables under study (Field 2013). This facilitated an understanding of the distribution of occupation, education level, and gender among the sample. Additionally, Spearman's Correlation was used to assess the ordinal and continuous variables while rejecting categorical variables. This increased understanding of the linear correlation and degree of relatedness (ibid.). Furthermore, a two-way ANOVA was used to assess the interaction effects among the independent variables. To further determine the significance and reliability of the observed values, residual statistics were examined, and a

residual plot was generated to evaluate the robustness of the regression model in the current study. These statistical tests were triangulated using factor analysis. The current study may be limited by certain biases, despite its meticulous design. Most importantly, any biases related to the primary study may have been inherently transferred to the current study. However, the study successfully presented data and insights to obtain an understanding of the phenomenon.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Sociodemographic characteristics

The data revealed that the gender distribution of the migrant population in Liaoning province comprised 48% males and 51% females (Table 1). Regarding the current investigation, insights into demographic distribution are significant, as factors affecting migration impact women and men differently (Christou–Kofman 2022). The education level among the returning migrants was classified as primary school, middle school, high school, undergraduate, postgraduate, specialty, or never attended school (Table 1). Most of the population had pursued

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of demographics

Baseline characteristics	Distribution	
	n	%
Gender		
Female	2049	51.2
Male	1951	48.8
Level of education		
No education	61	1.5
Primary school	562	14.0
Middle school	1806	45.2
High school	806	20.1
Undergraduate	303	7.6
Specialization	441	11.0
Postgraduate	21	0.5
Employment		
Unemployed	305	7.6
Employed	1825	45.6
Employer	831	20.8

Note (s): Total sample, n=4000.

education until high school or middle school. On the other hand, a small portion of the population had a level of education ranging from post-graduation to primary school. Employment status is directly correlated with economic opportunities. The primary data about this were classified into employer, employed, and unemployed categories (Table 1). According to the data, the majority of the population consisted of laborers. Among the demographic factors under investigation, plans to stay were significant in terms of the direction of the research. The success of the revitalization of the situation of the laborers in rural areas can be determined by the positive or negative responses of the migrants. The results suggest that the majority of the migrant population chose to remain in Liaoning province. Hence, this implies that the revitalization has been successful to some extent.

Correlation between migration and economic opportunities

The Spearman correlational analysis provided a significant overview of migration. The test found that migrants who spend more on their homes may have greater economic chances for revenue generation. High monthly average gross wages are associated with higher family expenditure ($\rho = 0.302$) and personal earnings ($\rho = 0.553$), suggesting that individuals with higher wages are more likely to spend more on their families and have larger personal earnings. Additionally, returning migrants with higher personal wages had higher average monthly gross incomes ($\rho = 0.195$) and household expenditure ($\rho = 0.553$). Additionally Zeng et al. (2019) stated that housing subsidies and accommodations can positively impact migrant labor settlement. This implies that personal wages are related to the region's economic prospects. Economic opportunities, as a pull factor, are the most important determining factor for migration decisions (Tadevosyan et al. 2020). However, personal earnings were negatively associated with gender proportions (–0.343), implying that income may differ by gender.

Furthermore, a positive relationship exists between gender and work status, suggesting that gender distribution may be a relevant factor in employment outcomes. Employment status and gender have a positive association (p = 0.047). This suggests that the gender distribution may have an impact on the return-to-work status of migrants. Duration of stay is inversely associated with household spending ($\rho = –0.080$) and gender distribution ($\rho = –0.197$), implying that longer-staying migrants may have lower household expenditures and a different gender distribution. It is known that the Chinese government established an institutional

framework and policy system for rural revitalization, which is likely reflected in the results we obtained (Yue–ZhiHong 2019). Furthermore, a significant association exists between the duration of stay and overtime, suggesting that migrants who have been in Liaoning for a longer period may be more productive. These claims align with the theory of acculturation and social identity, as prolonged exposure to the host culture has positively influenced migrants' attitudes towards the social organization and functioning of the Liaoning region, leading to behavioral and value integration (Ozer 2017; Trepte–Loy 2017). This essentially implies the effects of rural revitalization efforts in terms of social benefits. The regression plot in Figure 1, with the variables along the mean, further justifies the results we obtained. Moreover, factor analysis was conducted to validate the factors obtained from the results. This process identified three emerging factors: sociodemographic influences, economic opportunities, and workload and labor, which reflected the influence of gender (0.71) and duration of stay (0.69), household expenditure (0.81) and gross income (0.77), and personal earnings (0.68) and employment status (0.74), respectively. This indicates that the range of occupations affected by rural revival has been multifaceted.

Table 2. Spearman's correlations among the variables included within the study

	Family's household expenditure	Average monthly gross income	Personal earning	Gender population	Employment status	Duration of stay	Overtime working hours
Family's household expenditure	1	0.302**	0.195**	0.021	0.075**	0.080**	0.171**
Average monthly gross income	0.302**	1	0.553**	0.033*	0.191**	0.078**	0.197**
Personal earning	0.195**	0.553**	1	0.343**	0.209**	0.067**	–
Gender population	0.021	0.033*	0.343**	1	0.006	0.064**	0.197**
Employment status	0.075**	0.191**	0.209**	0.006	1	0.047*	–
Duration of stay	0.080**	0.078**	0.067**	0.064**	0.047*	1	0.119**
Overtime working hours	0.171**	0.197**	–	0.197**	–	0.119**	1

*Note: Significance levels: *0.05; ** 0.01.*

Success of integration

The regression analysis revealed that the first model consisted of continuous variables, namely, household expenditure and personal earnings, whereas the second model comprised categorical variables related to occupation. The sum of squares obtained for Model 1 was less than that of Model 2. This suggests that the continuous variables, namely, personal earnings, expenditure, and monthly income, in the first model of the regression accounted for the success of integration. However, the categorical variables accounted for the variation, implying that the successful integration of returning migrants might be affected by factors that are not accounted for.

Table 3. *ANOVA*

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Model 1	Regression	46.98	3	15.659	9.731	0.000b
	Residual	3146.03	1955	1.609		
Model 2	Regression	146.11	34	4.297	2.714	0.000c
	Residual	3046.90	1924	1.584		

The presence of statistically significant coefficients for key predictor variables linked to employment, occupation, and other characteristics shows that these factors may have an impact on the resettlement process for returning migrants in Liaoning. These findings are useful in understanding the difficulties migrants encounter. Furthermore, the mean residual is near zero, indicating that the integration model's predictions are unbiased on average, which is a favorable criterion for determining integration success (Table 3). Therefore, the lower standard deviation indicates more consistent and accurate predictions within the context of integration. Additionally, examining the correlation between predicted values and residuals is crucial for assessing potential systematic overprediction. The lack of a linear relationship between predicted values and residuals suggests model stability, which is a critical factor in relation to the successful integration observed in Liaoning, China.

The coefficients for the variables in Table A1 (see Appendix) indicate factors that facilitate successful integration. Household expenditure and average monthly income have a positive effect on the duration of stay, implying an expected increase in stay with higher income and expenditure. However, personal earnings are negatively related; thus, a decrease in personal income is likely to result in an increase in the duration of stay. In Model 2, gender and profession had a significant and strong effect on the duration of migration. These results confirm that economic factors, including income and expenditure, as well

as sociodemographic influences linked to gender and duration of stay, are key predictors of integration. Moreover, the correlation matrix reveals a correlation coefficient of $\rho = 0.209$ between the factor variables of economic opportunities and the prevalence of workload and labor, as observed in the relationship between earnings and employment status. Thus, it can be inferred that average income, household expenditure, and occupation type play a significant role in the successful integration of the returning migrants.

Challenges to reintegration

Despite the evidence of the successful revitalization process, the analysis also reflected that there could be perpetual challenges to reintegration. The model exhibited minor heteroscedasticity; considering that the confounding variables are adjusted, some of the variables may require further investigation to enhance the model's robustness (Table 4). This can be interpreted as indicating that there might be temporal or sequential patterns in the integration process. Additionally, this implies that the migrants' experiences with integration in Liaoning are influenced by previous experiences, which may be due to various factors, such as shifting community dynamics or changing regulations. Therefore, there are specific challenges to reintegration that would require further investigation.

The P–P plot (Figure 1) further signifies that the residuals are distributed uniformly, implying the acceptability of the model. It implies that the economic security of the returning migrants and their potential may be impacted by their employment position, including whether they are working full-time, part-time, or independently. Shi and Yang (2022) have claimed that not only the net income of individuals determine their overall sustainable rural marketization but also industrial prosperity, governance, ecology, and quality of life. The type of job and sector in which returning migrants work can have a significant impact on their financial potential. Some careers may be associated with better development prospects and pay than others.

Table 4. Residual statistics (Pearson correlation coefficients)

	Unstandardized predicted value	Unstandardized residual	Duration of stay
Unstandardized predicted value	1	0.000	0.214**
Unstandardized residual	0.000	1	0.977**
Duration of stay	0.214**	0.977**	1

*Note: Significance level **: 0.01.*

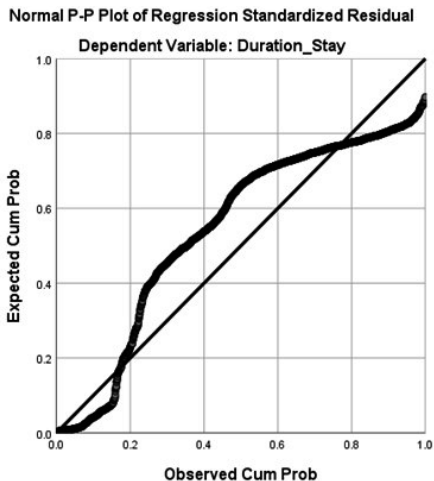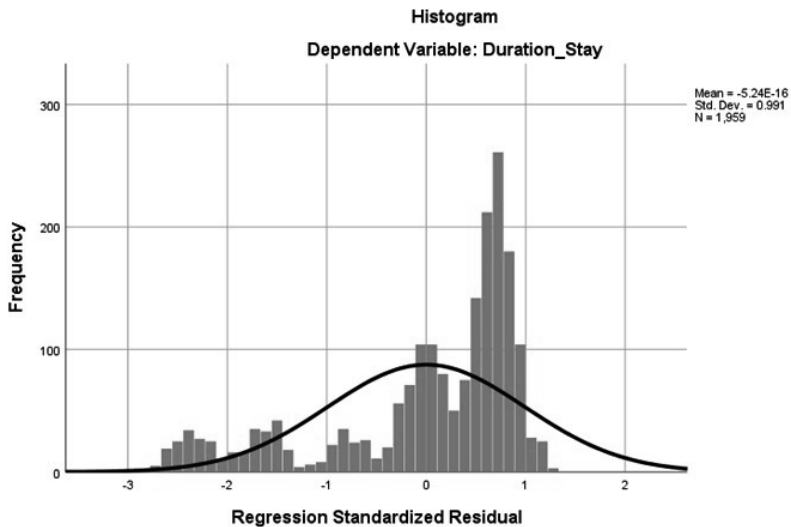**Figure 1.** *Standardized residual plot*

Figure 2. *Duration of stay measured through regression standardized residual*

DISCUSSION

Observed economic opportunities for returning migrants

Various factors drive migration from rural to urban regions. Following the Chinese Rural Revitalization Strategy, a drive to return migrants was expected. The findings of the current study suggest that employment unit type, employment status, occupation, working hours, and average income were the main contributing factors for the returning migrants. A study undertaken to investigate the factors influencing the return decisions of youth in Jilin province found that the educated population chose migration based on the presence of a satisfying lifestyle (Yinhe 2021). Due to the possibility of a higher quality of life, financial security, and the presence of meaningful connections, individuals are becoming increasingly attracted to their local towns.

Based on family history and available resources, such as the type of occupation and employment unit, return decisions are impacted. This demonstrates how economic factors influence decisions to settle in economically advantageous locations, such as metropolitan districts near their rural homes. Economic changes and hukou reforms (see more details in the following section) influence migration patterns due to the sensitivity of migrants to wage differences and their choices of settlement locations (Liu–Xu 2017). Therefore, only when personal earnings are high will there be a preference for urban or small towns. Studies on internal migration in China place strong emphasis on the diversity of migration behaviors, suggesting that migrants have a variety of experiences and reasons for their behavior related to economic prospects (Shi–Yang 2022: 8908). Both returning migrants and other migrants make decisions based on their duties to their families as well.

Additionally, the relevance of consistent working hours (Table 2) and the availability of stable employment opportunities were inferred. A case study in Guangdong province found that consistent working hours were associated with job satisfaction, reduced work stress, and lower turnover. According to Lu et al. (2017: 1–12), consistent working hours are linked to job satisfaction, reduced work stress, and lower turnover rates. Therefore, it was quite evident that Liaoning province would have optimum economic opportunities to sustain the returning migrants. However, it is essential to note that the study relied on secondary data and lacked the consideration of personal reflections from the migrating population and ground-level feedback. Therefore, although the study provides a robust understanding of the phenomenon of returning migrant workers, further studies will be needed to investigate the opinions and conditions of migrants in terms of economic opportunities.

Insights into the success of integration of migrant laborers

The main occupations undertaken by the returning migrants involved fixed employment. Most importantly, the successful integration of migrant laborers was also measured through house registration. Interestingly, the number of individuals with house registration in Liaoning province was found to be moderate. However, data on whether the employer provided accommodation or food showed that most respondents did not receive any such amenities. A study found that 29.2% of Hangzhou migrant workers spend more than 30% of their income on rent, implying that a sizable fraction of this group is burdened by high housing costs (Zeng et al. 2019). A tendency for migrant workers to leave the city due to housing issues is indicated by the 14.1% of migrant employees who report intending to move back to rural regions. Formal housing is strongly correlated with settling intention (Liu et al. 2017). This is because rising rents leave low-income migrant workers with fewer convenient and inexpensive housing alternatives, which may cause them to leave the city. Therefore, the house registrations in the rural area reflect intentions to settle in the rural province.

Additionally, this study found that the commoditization of rural characteristics, high property prices, and community and corporate collaboration were relevant factors. Therefore, having an agricultural or non-agricultural household registration in Liaoning can be a positive attribute, contributing to the successful reintegration of the returning migrants. Many rural migrants who live in cities nevertheless felt a deep connection to their rural villages, as evidenced by their resistance to switching their hukou (household registration) status from rural to urban (Wu et al. 2022).

One of the most important components of their identification and attachment is the "community connection" phenomenon. As a form of social capital, community connection has the potential to serve as a valuable resource for rural development and rejuvenation. The connections and interactions people have outside of their respective communities are referred to as bridging social capital. Depending on their geographical area and socioeconomic background, migrants have varying senses of community and connections to place. Individuals with strong ties to traditional agriculture, often from isolated villages and rural backgrounds, tend to have a stronger sense of community and a deeper attachment to place. Although the current study did not examine the societal aspects of returning migrants, they can be a significant determining factor in successful integration. Besides this, the strong correlation between personal earnings and duration of stay was the most significant indication of the successful integration of the returning population in Liaoning.

A study based on micro-level data collected nationally in 2014 found that economic incentives significantly influenced where Chinese rural migrants chose to reside. As economic incentives increase, this effect lessens (Chen– Wang 2019b). Based on variables including education level, work position, and geographical disparities, the study revealed considerable variability in the influence of economic incentives on settlement intentions. Additionally, the wide range of opportunities was evident in the moderate standard deviation associated with the occupation variable – for instance, the latest tourism development in the province of Liaoning (Zhou et al. 2020a). Such steps help create a methodical framework for identifying and promoting these initiatives, ensuring effective resource allocation and sustained growth. Therefore, the research found evidence that migrants had been moderately successful in reintegrating themselves, and there is substantial evidence of the effect of the steps taken by the Chinese government to promote successful reintegration.

Challenges to the resettlement process

Data from primary sources is needed to provide direct evidence of the challenges faced during reintegration. The relevance of personal income was consistent; however, the data showed that average family income was strongly associated with both the choice to stay and the duration. Several factors may contribute to the observed regression. For instance, the overall family expenditure, including lifestyle costs, could be high. Moreover, the literature review revealed that banking organizations offer financial assistance to returning migrants.

Furthermore, the latter presents the various challenges that returning migrants face during revitalization. First, rural regions with underdeveloped infrastructure, such as those lacking sufficient transportation and communication systems, may experience a rise in emigration from rural areas. Second, people may migrate in search of greater access to social services in metropolitan regions due to the poor quality of social services provided in rural communities, including healthcare and education. Third, in rural areas, social standing and career prospects might influence migration choices. People may relocate in search of better social and economic opportunities.

However, the current study was unable to address the specific challenges faced by returning migrants in Liaoning. Nevertheless, to address these challenges, this study provides policy recommendations, including building affordable housing, increasing access to education and vocational training, enhancing the agricultural sector, promoting rural tourism, and facilitating transparent land

management. However, it is crucial to have community-led development efforts, financial inclusion programs, and constant policy review and modification. The framework can be completed by supporting partnerships, focusing on sustainable practices in rural development, and tailoring assistance to the diverse needs of returning migrants. Therefore, by fostering an atmosphere conducive to effective reintegration, these measures can help improve and maintain rural communities.

CONCLUSION

China has experienced a substantial trend of rural-to-urban migration in recent decades, driven by economic opportunities and the desire for a better life in metropolitan areas. Liaoning was found to provide both benefits and challenges affecting the migrant movement. This study demonstrated that economic variables play a crucial role in determining rural laborers' relocation decisions and their reintegration into Liaoning. Significant factors that influence migration include personal earnings, job status, occupation, working hours, and average income. Through household registration and the availability of resources such as lodging and food, the integration of returning migrants into rural villages in Liaoning was assessed. Although a moderate number of people had registered their homes in the province, the results show that most migrants did not benefit from any employer-provided facilities, indicating housing issues for this demographic. Moreover, high housing costs are a major determinant of migration choices. For successful integration, housing affordability must be addressed further in Liaoning province. Thus, the study recommends reforms in policies, such as emphasizing the development of agricultural and recreational sites to boost job creation and economic growth, providing incentives to migrant workers in rural areas, and reducing housing and education costs for migrant families, as policy implications.

A stronger sense of community and place connection was shown to be correlated with strong ties to traditional agriculture and rural origins. This current study suggests that the above policy recommendations should prioritize community-led development initiatives, financial inclusion programs, and policies that promote sustainable practices in rural development. The policy recommendations aimed at supporting the social and mental well-being of migrant workers can create an environment that enables them to integrate organically into mainstream Chinese culture and values. By reducing external pressures on their psychological and emotional drivers, these measures can foster a stronger sense of belonging and cultural rootedness among migrant workers. To inform more focused policy initiatives, future research should

investigate the growth of non-agricultural industries, including rural tourism, access to education and vocational training, and affordable housing options. The infrastructure in rural areas, including transportation, communication, and healthcare, should also be improved. The government must encourage partnerships, advance sustainable rural development strategies, and adjust aid to meet the diverse needs of this community, creating an environment that is conducive to effective reintegration. However, the study is limited due to aspects associated with the analysis, including its use of secondary data, the non-segregation of agriculture and occupation types, and the lack of accounting for personal feedback, which would have enhanced the understanding of the motivational factors behind migrant resettlement.

However, these limitations could be addressed in future studies that utilize longitudinal designs to include data over different time periods, thereby measuring changes after revitalization occurs. Additionally, a mixed-method approach, including surveys or interviews with returning migrants, would ensure a more direct reflection of the conditions of the laborers and the success of integration. An additional quantitative analysis, associated with the mixed-methods approach, would ensure that the data are supported with substantial evidence as well. Therefore, recommendations for future research include using primary data collected through surveys or interviews and employing both qualitative and quantitative methods for data analysis. The current research has paved the way for future studies on the reintegration of returning migrants. It was observed that there is a lack of literature investigating the effect of migration on the laborers themselves. Furthermore, there is a significant gap in the exploration of the success of integration, the challenges faced by returnees, and their psychological state after returning. The current study has not only established basic findings about the variables that can be used to assess reintegration, but it has also highlighted the challenges related to average income in the reintegration process. Therefore, future studies can involve further investigations along the same lines to obtain robust solutions that can be integrated into the government's policies and frameworks.

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APPENDIX

Table A1. *Coefficients for the variables included in the study. The dependent variable in the study is duration stay*

	Unstandardized Coeff.			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Model 1					
(Constant)	3.844	0.058	0.000		
Family's_household_expenditure	5.762E-5	0.000	0.075	0.940	1.064
Average_monthly_gross_income	3.799E-5	0.000	0.000	0.526	1.902
Personal_earning	−1.648E-5	0.000	0.168	0.548	1.824
Model 2					
(Constant)	2.841	0.307	0.000		
Family's_household_expenditure	5.094E-5	0.000	0.122	0.892	1.121
Average_monthly_gross_income	2.910E-5	0.000	0.002	0.492	2.034
Personal_earning	−1.898E-6	0.000	0.883	0.463	2.158
Gender_population	0.215	0.064	0.001	0.786	1.273
Level_education	−0.002	0.027	0.927	0.711	1.406
Employment_status	0.215	0.092	0.020	0.393	2.542
Occupation_Peddler	−0.160	0.129	0.214	0.508	1.967
Occupation_Business	−0.006	0.238	0.980	0.915	1.093
Occupation_Professional_technology	0.341	0.141	0.016	0.336	2.978
Occupation_Production	0.153	0.152	0.315	0.328	3.050
Occupation_Security_guard	0.512	0.204	0.012	0.727	1.375
Occupation_Transportation	0.408	0.219	0.063	0.705	1.419
Occupation_Agriculture_forestry	0.155	0.231	0.502	0.739	1.354
Occupation_Architecture	0.408	0.197	0.039	0.603	1.658
Occupation_Cleaning	0.240	0.271	0.376	0.808	1.238
Occupation_Express_delivery	0.109	0.200	0.585	0.740	1.351
Occupation_Furnish	−0.056	0.357	0.875	0.893	1.119
Occupation_Housekeeping	0.731	0.544	0.179	0.895	1.117
Occupation_No_permanent_job	0.373	0.310	0.229	0.875	1.143
Occupation_Other	0.129	0.125	0.304	0.306	3.266
Occupation_Other_business	0.255	0.176	0.147	0.538	1.860
Occupation_Other_production	0.864	0.585	0.140	0.929	1.076
Household_registration= Non-agricultural	0.057	0.071	0.420	0.878	1.139
Household_registration=Resident	0.263	0.273	0.335	0.978	1.022

Table A1. *(Continued)*

	Unstandardized Coeff.			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Employ_unit_type= Collective enterprise	0.024	0.308	0.938	0.938	1.066
Employ_unit_type= Community/citizen	0.245	0.434	0.573	0.938	1.066
Employ_unit_type=Foreign owned	0.309	0.146	0.034	0.648	1.543
Employ_unit_type=Independence	0.889	0.732	0.225	0.986	1.014
Employ_unit_type=Organ	0.428	0.228	0.061	0.862	1.160
Employ_unit_type=Other	−0.037	0.389	0.925	0.956	1.046
Employ_unit_type=Private enterprise	0.039	0.080	0.628	0.554	1.805
Employ_unit_type=Share/link	0.191	0.158	0.227	0.833	1.200
Employ_unit_type= Sino-foreign joint venture	−0.035	0.199	0.860	0.867	1.153
Employ_unit_type=State-owned	0.100	0.140	0.475	0.749	1.336