



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

The lived experience of young migrant mothers in China

A case study in Beijing

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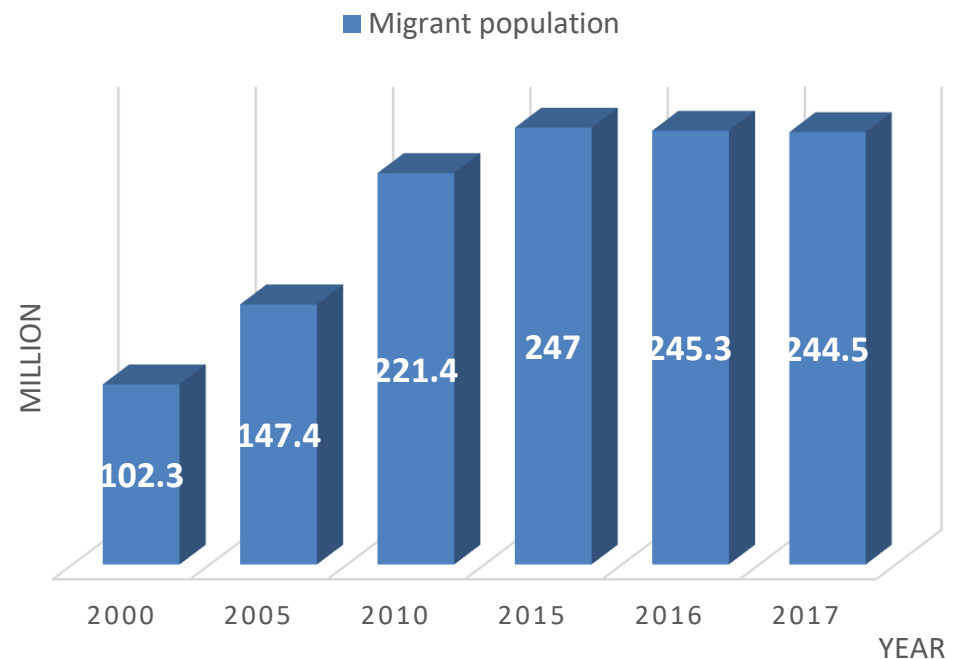
- **Background**
 - Internal migration in China
 - *Hukou* system
 - Migrants in China
- **Review of relevant studies**
- **Research gaps**
- **Life course theory**
- **Research questions**
- **Study design**



Internal migration in China

- 258 million international migrants in 2017 (UN, 2018).
- Over 740 internal migrants (UNDP, 2009).
- Internal migration is more prevalent, especially in developing countries.
- Rural-to-urban migrants:
 - *Nongmingong* (peasant workers/rural labourers)
 - *Liudong Renkou*: the floating population.

MIGRANT POPULATION IN CHINA



Hukou System

- The household registration system (*Hukou*) was introduced in the 1950s to regulate people's movement.
- According to the *Hukou* system, people are classified as either rural or urban citizens, and one's access to social welfare and public services is closely linked to their rural/urban status.
- Rural people are believed to have low 'quality' and less human capital (Zhang, 2014).



Rural-to-urban Migrants in China

First-generation migrants

- Born between 1960 and 1980
- Transition of the economic system.
- 26.9% are women
- 8.8 years of education on average.
- To support the family, usually after marriage.

New-generation migrants (50% of the migrant population)

- Born after 1980
- Reform and opening-up in 1978
- 40.8% are women.
- First migration in late teens or early 20s.
- 9.8 years of education on average. To pursue personal development.
- They are more educated, more eager to integrate and more adaptable to urban lifestyle

(NBS, 2011)

Young migrant women in China

Dagongmei

- ***Dagongmei*** (country girls working in the cities): being rustic, naïve but who can 'eat bitterness' or being the source of crime and immorality (Zhang, 2014).
- Prevalence of risky sexual behaviours (Li et al., 2009; Zeng et al. 2015; Huang et al. 2015) and unintended pregnancies (Huang, et. al, 2012)



Young migrant women in China

- ‘After migration, waged work transforms rural women from an invisible labourer in the household to a visible cash earner in the city, enables them to be financially independent from their families, and gives women an opportunity to recognise their own value and ability and gain confidence in themselves.’ (Zhang, 2014)



Young migrant women in China

- 70% of the new-generation migrants leave their rural homes when they are still single (NBS, 2011).
- Because of their socio-economic status, most migrant women will either return to their rural hometown for marriage or marry another migrant in their hosting cities (He, 2013).
- More and more migrant women opt to give birth to their child in their host cities. In Shanghai, migrants outnumbered permanent residents in the maternal population (Du, et. al, 2012).



Young migrant mothers in China

Before childbirth

- Migrant mothers are four times more likely to die during pregnancy compared with local mothers (Du, et. al, 2012); the number of still-birth among migrant mothers is twice as high as local mothers (Zhan, Sun & Blas, 2002).
- Migrant mothers are less educated than local mothers (CCR CSR, 2018). They lack the relevant maternal health knowledge and awareness to attend healthcare.
- They feel that they are looked down upon by the staff and do not feel comfortable and secured (Zhan, Sun & Blas, 2002).

Young migrant mothers in China

After childbirth

- Urban state-funded childcare services are not accessible to rural families, and the lack of support from extended families makes childrearing more challenging (CCR CSR, 2017).
- The younger migrant parents are more likely to have experienced parental migration as a child. They will most likely to shift their priority from personal development to the well-being of their children (CCR CSR, 2013).
- Many migrant mothers opt to quit their job and become full-time mothers because they have no other options. They experience the shift from being an 'independent woman' to being a 'dependent wife' (Esara, 2004).



Young migrant mothers in China

After childbirth

- Their actual ability to fully perform their maternal responsibility is hindered by the institutional constraints and their socio-economic status: **inaccessible urban public education for their child** (CCR CSR, 2017); the **financial pressure** to raise a child in the city (To, So & Kwok, 2018); **lack of efficient time** to attend to their child due to the long working hours (CCR CSR, 2013; Xu, et. al, 2017).
- Young migrant parents are more exposed to urban parenting practices and are more willing to raise their children in an urban way (Lin, 2019).
- Many experience feelings of guilt and incompetence when they cannot live up to their responsibilities. Younger migrant parents are more likely to suffer from stress and anxiety (CCR CSR, 2013).

Research gaps

- Studies are explicitly focused on trans-local motherhood (older migrant mothers who leave their children in the rural homes).
- The experience of young migrant mothers are seldom explored. An overemphasis on the institutional barriers and failure to recognise human agency.
- The limitation of the term 'New Generation Migrants' (born after 1980).
- Little is known about the interplay of migration and other life transitions, such as education completion, entry into labour market, marriage and childbirth.



Life course approach

- According to Giele and Elder (1998), the 'life course' is 'a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time'.
- 'Early transitions can have enduring consequences by affecting subsequent transitions, even after many years and decades have passed'. (Elder, 1998)
- The life course approach focuses on **the interplay of human lives and historical times; 'timing of lives'; linked or interdependent lives; and human agency** in making choices (Elder, 1994).
- Life course approach was first introduced into China by Li Qiang in the 1990s.
- He (2013) explored the life history of one female migrant who was born in the 1980s, and discovered that her migration was a result of combined factors, including son preference, limited educational resources, low family income and personality.

Life course approach

- One study in Jakarta showed that girls who migrated from the countryside to Jakarta **between the age of 10 and 17** experienced the various transitions at a much faster pace, and they were **the most disadvantaged** because they were more likely to leave school at an earlier age, progress faster into employment and enter marriage and motherhood earlier (Utomo et al., 2013).
- Less is known about the timing of migration among young female migrants and how this impacts their transition in later life.



Research questions

Therefore, this study aims to explore the negotiation work-care conflict, gendered norms and identity in young migrant mothers' everyday life and better understand how their life is actually lived as a young woman, a migrant, and a mother.

- (a) Why did they migrate to the city? How did they make the decision to migrate?
- (b) How do they describe their experience of migration? How does migration influence their social network and family relationships?
- (c) What is their life like as a young migrant woman in their community, in their workplace and in the wider society?
- (d) How do they experience transition to motherhood? How does motherhood change their life?
- (e) How do they describe their life as a migrant mother in the city? What are the challenges as a migrant mother in the city?
- (f) What are their life aspirations, for themselves and their child?



Methods

A case study in Beijing

- Different cities have different policies regarding migrants' access to public services and settlement.
 - Beijing: 724,000 rural migrants (total population 23,000,000) (NSB, 2017).
- Hukou* system: reforms and adjustment. More opportunities to well-educated migrants, but more restrictions for migrant labourers.



Interviews

- Twenty migrant mothers, aged 18-25, will be recruited from one migrant community in Beijing with the assistance of a local NGO.
- The NGO has been working with the migrant population since 2006, and it organises workshops and activities for migrant families in the migrant community.
- Participants will be invited to take part in two rounds of interviews:
 - (a) life-history interviews, with a focus on their past experiences.
 - (b) in-depth interviews, with a focus on their present life.

Conclusion

- Current discourses depict migrant women as an almost homogenous group. However, their transformations and constant negotiation of identity intersect with gender, class, rural/urban status, age and marital status.
- A life course perspective stimulates a more holistic approach to migration. It is important to understand how accumulations of experiences, resources and vulnerabilities shape their life course.
- As Zhang (2014) suggested, 'There are as many life courses as there are female migrants.'





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Thank You

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