Work Withdrawal Behavior among Migrant Workers: A Multiple Embeddedness and Identity Pressure Perspective

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Abstract

Work withdrawal behavior among 290 million migrant workers—intentional behaviors aimed at reducing work and organizational roles (work avoidance and reduced effort, tardiness and absenteeism, turnover, etc.)—has significant consequences. To address this, the present study employs Conservation of Resources theory as an umbrella theory, integrates perspectives on multiple embeddedness and identity pressure, and constructs a comprehensive model for predicting migrant workers' work withdrawal behavior. The model proposes a measurement indicator system encompassing both implicit and explicit work withdrawal behaviors; it establishes predictive relationships between migrant workers' multiple embeddedness in urban areas and their hometowns and different forms of work withdrawal behavior, as well as the indirect predictive effect of dual identity pressure as "rural persons" and "urban persons" on work withdrawal behavior through migrant workers' multiple embeddedness in cities. Grounded in the specific characteristics of the migrant worker sample, this study develops a "contextualized" comprehensive theoretical model for predicting work withdrawal behavior, which not only fills a theoretical gap in micro-level migrant worker research but also enriches theory and literature in the domains of identity, multiple embeddedness, and work withdrawal behavior.

Full Text

Studies of Rural Migrant Workers' Withdrawal Behaviors: A Perspective from Multiple Embeddedness and Identity Strain

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Abstract

The withdrawal behaviors of China' s 290 million rural migrant workers—intentional actions to reduce work and organizational role engagement, including work avoidance, reduced effort, lateness, absenteeism, and turnover—carry significant consequences. Grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this research integrates literature on identity strain, multiple embeddedness, and withdrawal behaviors to propose an identity-based process model of withdrawal behaviors. The model examines how rural migrant workers' multiple embeddedness in urban settings predicts different withdrawal behaviors, while simultaneously investigating how dual identity strain based on both "rural" and "urban" identities moderates the effects of urban embeddedness on withdrawal behaviors. This research advances theoretical understanding of withdrawal behaviors through identity processes beyond traditional attitudinal variables and enriches "contextualized" withdrawal behavior theory through examination of this special population.

Keywords: rural migrant workers, withdrawal behavior, identity strain, embeddedness

1. Problem Statement

Rural migrant workers refer to laborers with rural household registration who work in urban areas, representing a special identity marker under China' s traditional household registration system (Zheng Gongcheng, 2002) and a type of migratory labor (Liu Ya et al., 2018). China' s migrant worker population is massive, reaching 29.077 million in 2019 and accounting for two-thirds of urban employment, exerting significant influence on both China' s national economy and the global economy (Wang & Jing, 2012). However, due to restrictions from the household registration system and education levels, migrant workers can only access jobs that urban residents avoid—heavy, dangerous, or dirty work (Liu Ya et al., 2018; Wong & Leung, 2008). Additionally, they face poor living conditions and difficulties securing education for their children. These dual inequalities in work and life result in low urban belonging and difficult urban integration: in large cities with populations over 5 million, only 16.8% consider themselves "locals" in their city of residence, yet migrant workers still desire urban citizenship, creating a persistent contradiction between their integration reality and aspirations.

Meanwhile, migrant workers' high turnover rates (Xie Pengxin & Cen Xuanfei, 2019), frequent job-hopping, and continuous return-migration waves (Yuan Fang et al., 2015) have created labor shortages for many enterprises and industries. Beyond turnover, migrant workers also exhibit withdrawal behaviors that actively reduce engagement in work roles and tasks, such as lateness, absenteeism, extended breaks, fabricating excuses to avoid work tasks, and handling personal matters during work hours (Hanisch & Hulin, 1990, 1991; Harrison, 2002; Lehman & Simpson, 1992). Wang Hongyu and Wang Hui' s (2016) survey

of 1,514 migrant workers found that 57.93% had been late, left early, or taken sick leave without cause; 51.92% had handled personal matters during work hours; and 35.73% had deliberately lowered work standards. These behaviors often lack objective systematic records and are less likely to be punished, yet they transmit negative emotions, create poor work atmospheres, and may cause greater organizational harm than turnover (Hanisch & Hulin, 1991; Podsakoff et al., 2007).

Existing research on migrant workers predominantly adopts macro perspectives (e.g., income and welfare, Wang Chunchao & Ye Qin, 2014; socioeconomics, Xia Fang & Wang Yalin, 2008; urbanization, Qin Lijian & Chen Bo, 2014), while micro-level research primarily focuses on physical and mental health (e.g., Li Qiang et al., 2017; Wang Na et al., 2017; Huang Silin et al., 2015), with limited attention to withdrawal behaviors. Given the massive population, significant impact, prominent withdrawal behaviors, and substantial harm, this research takes urban migrant workers (e.g., manufacturing workers, delivery personnel) as subjects to comprehensively study withdrawal behaviors including turnover. The theoretical contributions are twofold:

First, this research fills a gap in micro-level theoretical research on migrant workers. Previous studies have been primarily descriptive, lacking systematic theoretical investigation. This research uses Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) as an overarching framework to integrate withdrawal behavior theory, multiple embeddedness models, and identity strain perspectives, constructing a comprehensive model predicting both explicit and implicit withdrawal behaviors among migrant workers.

Second, the research variables proposed in this study possess particularity within the migrant worker population, and the constructed theoretical model helps reveal variables and mechanisms overlooked in related fields. Specifically, China's household registration system creates dual identity strain for migrant workers—both their traditional "rural" identity and their developed "urban" identity are difficult to confirm in interpersonal relationships within urban environments. As migration literature shows (e.g., Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), migrant workers' embeddedness in both urban and hometown settings simultaneously influences their urban withdrawal behaviors in different directions. Moreover, due to migrants' mobility characteristics, explicit withdrawal behaviors—particularly turnover—have different types, most notably job-hopping and return-migration turnover, which share similar withdrawal psychological tendencies with other withdrawal behaviors but may have different embeddedness predictors. For instance, urban and hometown community embeddedness may better predict return-migration turnover, while occupational embeddedness may better predict job-hopping turnover. Therefore, as previous researchers have advocated, using a special sample—migrant workers—helps examine withdrawal behavior types and their predictors that are difficult to observe in other samples (Hom et al., 2017; Maertz & Griffeth, 2004; Smith et al., 2011), and forms "contextualized" theory to make incremental contributions to related fields (Johns, 2006;

Rousseau & Fried, 2001; Tsui et al., 2006).

2.1 Recent Research Progress on Migrant Workers

Through searching English and Chinese authoritative journals for migrant worker-related papers, we identified 129 English articles (65.1% on Chinese migrant workers) and 276 Chinese articles. The thematic distribution is detailed in Appendix 1. These studies provide the following insights for our research questions:

First, due to household registration identity preventing migrant workers from enjoying equal treatment with urban workers (Yang Tingfang & Ling Wenquan, 2013), they are more likely than other urban working groups to experience identity strain. Research consistently reveals that urban-rural identity differences, marginalization experiences of not being accepted by mainstream groups, and resulting psychological pressure (e.g., Wong et al., 2007; Fu et al., 2018) are key factors affecting migrant workers' work attitudes and behaviors. Researchers also note that unequal treatment in urban life and work creates identity recognition difficulties (e.g., Gan Weiyu et al., 2015; Wang Bangjun & Yang Dongtao, 2014). Qin et al. (2019) demonstrated that poor external feedback (unequal treatment) creates a gap with migrant workers' identity standards, generating identity strain that predicts subsequent turnover.

Second, migrant workers' embeddedness in urban work environments is an important predictor of withdrawal behaviors. However, existing evidence primarily addresses explicit withdrawal behavior—turnover: work embeddedness positively affects turnover (Liu Peiqi et al., 2016), while family and community embeddedness negatively affect turnover intention (Li Guoliang & Dang Guixing, 2019; Luan Hui & Wan Guowei, 2018; Liu Peiqi et al., 2016; Tian Chong, 2012; Xu Jie, 2012) and return-migration intention (Yang Tingfang & Ling Wenquan, 2013; Yang Tingfang, 2015).

Third, migrant workers' work migration characteristics significantly influence their withdrawal behaviors. Qin et al. (2014) noted that distance from hometown constitutes special job demands for migrant workers, causing emotional exhaustion and affecting turnover when supervisor support is lacking. Li et al. (2019) found that family encouragement to return home and urban occupational embeddedness jointly affect return-migration intention. Both studies indicate that explaining migrant workers' withdrawal behaviors requires simultaneous consideration of opposing forces from both work locations and hometowns. Sociologist Huang Binhuan (2014) even argued that migrant workers' frequent job and regional mobility results from dual "dis-embeddedness" in both urban and rural areas.

2.2 Work Withdrawal Behaviors and Their Antecedents

Hulin and colleagues (Hulin, 1991; Hanisch & Hulin, 1990, 1991; Hanish et al., 1998) defined work withdrawal behaviors as actions that reduce or exit work role participation. Hanisch and Hulin (1990, 1991) noted that withdrawal behaviors include both explicit turnover, absenteeism, lateness, and early departure, as well as implicit behaviors that maintain membership but reduce work participation, such as reduced work effort, fabricating excuses to avoid work tasks, extended breaks, negligence, handling personal matters during work hours, and daydreaming. Lateness, absenteeism, and turnover, being observable and recordable, are typically considered representative withdrawal behaviors (Berry et al., 2012; Harrison et al., 2006; Rosse & Hulin, 1985; Koslowsky, 2009; Zimmerman et al., 2016). However, these three indicators are constrained by low incidence rates (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998; Hom et al., 2017), and archival records may contain misjudgments (Hanisch et al., 1998; Boswell et al., 2004). Therefore, researchers have called for attention to implicit withdrawal behaviors (e.g., Hulin, 1991; Hanisch & Hulin, 1990, 1991; Koslowsky, 2009) and establishing connections with explicit indicators (Hanisch & Hulin, 1990, 1991; Harrison, 2002; Lehman & Simpson, 1992). Current research rarely simultaneously examines both explicit and implicit withdrawal behavior indicators.

In fact, different withdrawal behaviors share similar psychological connotations—actively withdrawing from work participation (Hulin, 1990)—but differ in withdrawal degree, progressing from implicit to explicit behaviors. Empirical research and meta-analyses (Berry et al., 2012; Krausz et al., 1998; Koslowsky et al., 1997) support correlations between different degrees of withdrawal behaviors. Therefore, studying them together better captures the comprehensive withdrawal behaviors of migrant workers and provides better insights for management and motivation.

Regarding withdrawal behaviors, they were initially considered consequences of job dissatisfaction (March & Simon, 1958; Hulin, 1991; Hanisch & Hanisch, 1990, 1991, 1998). More recently, researchers have proposed that withdrawal behaviors result from stress avoidance (Darr & Johns, 2008; Grandey et al., 2004). Spector et al. (2000) noted that withdrawal behaviors aim to escape situations that may cause direct harm, including dissatisfaction, stressors, injustice, or other negative emotion-inducing situations. Meta-analyses have revealed direct effects of hindrance and challenge stressors on both explicit (turnover) and implicit withdrawal behaviors (Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007).

Among all withdrawal behaviors, the most studied explicit indicator is turnover, widely considered a consequence of negative work attitudes (e.g., Griffeth et al., 2000; Zimmerman et al., 2016; Luo Haoshuang, He Xuefei, & Wang Xiaozhuang, 2016) and stress (e.g., Darr & Johns, 2008; Mawritz et al., 2014; Huang Youli & Li You, 2018). Recent research hotspots include examining relationships between organizational or professional identification and turnover based on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) (e.g., Zhu et al., 2016; Sung et al., 2018; Conroy

et al., 2017; Cao & Hamori, 2020; Kraimer et al., 2012). Conroy et al. (2017) revealed that when organizational and professional identification are inconsistent —low organizational and high professional identification—this strengthens the positive effect of negative emotions on turnover. Kraimer et al. (2012) found that among repatriated expatriates, higher professional identity strain predicted turnover. Recent research indicates that withdrawal behaviors are increasingly considered consequences of stress rather than job attitudes, warranting further investigation into identity-related stress effects on withdrawal behaviors.

2.3 Work Embeddedness-Based Research on Withdrawal Behaviors

Job embeddedness (Mitchell et al., 2001) refers to the sum of forces that keep employees in their current organizations, divided into on-the-job and off-the-job components (i.e., organizational/community embeddedness), each comprising three dimensions: fit (matching and adaptation to organization or community), links (number of connections with others and entities in organization or community), and sacrifice (material, social, and psychological costs of leaving). This construct has proven important in predicting withdrawal behaviors (e.g., absenteeism, turnover) after controlling for traditional turnover predictors (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment) (Crossley et al., 2007; Holtom et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2001). Recent work embeddedness research shows three main trends:

- **Diversified Embeddedness Targets**
  Based on the three basic dimensions, scholars have developed occupational embeddedness—embeddedness in a specific profession rather than a specific job (Ng & Feldman, 2007), family embeddedness—linking employees' families to communities and organizations (Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010), and team embeddedness—embeddedness in teams (Chang & Cheng, 2013). Kiazad et al. (2015) argued that regardless of target, embeddedness aligns with COR theory, with its three components (fit, links, sacrifice) representing personal resources; resource loss triggers withdrawal from corresponding target environments. However, research simultaneously examining multiple embeddedness remains limited.

- **Expanded Embeddedness Samples**
  Applying embeddedness models to migratory groups has advanced multiple embeddedness theory. For migratory populations (e.g., expatriates and military personnel), community embeddedness gains importance because repatriation (Tharenou & Claufield, 2010) or return-migration (Smith et al., 2011) becomes important withdrawal behavior indicators involving leaving current residential communities. For expatriates, community embeddedness reflects the overall cultural, humanistic, and physical environment of host cities (e.g., Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010; Kraimer et al., 2012). Research shows that hometown community embeddedness and host city community embeddedness are two major

forces affecting migratory groups (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010; Lo et al., 2012). According to the "push-pull" model (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), these two directional community embeddedness have opposite effects on return behavior: hometown community embeddedness promotes return-migration turnover, while urban community embeddedness inhibits it.

- **Diversified Embeddedness Mechanisms**
  Initially, researchers focused on parallel or integrated effects of different embeddedness variables in predicting withdrawal behaviors (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2001). Recently, more attention has been paid to interactive relationships: on one hand, causal relationships may exist between embeddedness variables (e.g., community embeddedness affects organizational embeddedness) (Andresen, 2015; Ng & Feldman, 2014), meaning different embeddedness variables can mediate each other; on the other hand, different embeddedness may have canceling effects, as Smith et al. (2011) found community and organizational embeddedness had opposite effects on military personnel's retirement intention, while Porter et al. (2019) found organizational embeddedness inhibited while community embeddedness promoted the effect of workplace turnover contagion on turnover.

These three expansions of work embeddedness research are significant for constructing a comprehensive model predicting migrant workers' withdrawal behaviors: First, based on migrant workers' migratory characteristics, a more comprehensive embeddedness model can be obtained, including not only urban organizational, occupational, and community embeddedness but also hometown community embeddedness, all jointly affecting urban withdrawal behaviors. Second, given the diversity of migrant workers' withdrawal behaviors, especially explicit indicators (distinguishing job-hopping, occupational change, and return-migration turnover), predicting them through different embeddedness variables can simultaneously reveal common and differentiated characteristics of different withdrawal behaviors. Third, conversely, the particularity of the migrant worker sample provides convenience for simultaneously testing different embeddedness variables, thereby revealing interactive mechanisms among embeddedness variables in predicting different withdrawal behaviors and making important contributions to embeddedness theory.

3. Research Proposals

Based on analysis and synthesis of relevant research trends, this study proposes three sequential questions: (1) What indicators comprise migrant workers' withdrawal behaviors, and what is the relationship between implicit and explicit indicators? (2) How does migrant workers' multiple embeddedness model predict their withdrawal behaviors? (3) How does migrant workers' identity strain affect their withdrawal behaviors through multiple embeddedness?

Question 1 aims to establish the validity of withdrawal behavior indicators based

on this special population and build connections between implicit and explicit indicators. Questions 2 and 3 aim to theoretically address the development and formation of migrant workers' withdrawal behaviors and the common and differentiated characteristics of different withdrawal behaviors. Specifically, using COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) as the overarching framework, we propose a model predicting migrant workers' withdrawal behaviors. Three studies are distinguished:

Study 1: Developing an Indicator System for Migrant Workers' Withdrawal Behaviors

Study 1 aims to: (1) develop an implicit withdrawal behavior scale based on migrant workers' fundamental characteristics; (2) establish associations between implicit withdrawal behaviors and three explicit withdrawal behaviors —job-hopping turnover, occupational change turnover, and return-migration turnover.

Based on previous literature descriptions of withdrawal behaviors (Hannish & Hulin, 1990; Harrison, 2002; Lehman & Simpson, 1992), we will develop an implicit withdrawal behavior indicator list, including: missing meetings, extended breaks, drinking before work, chatting during work, handling personal matters during work, daydreaming, complaining, work negligence, leaving tasks for others, etc. While absenteeism and lateness/early departure are also considered explicit withdrawal behaviors, they are more covert than turnover, so we include them as implicit indicators. Based on these indicators, we will select two representative migrant worker groups—manufacturing workers and delivery personnel—and HR managers from these industries to rate the applicability of implicit withdrawal behavior indicators to both groups, ultimately obtaining indicators applicable to both groups with slightly different wording to fit each work context.

Some researchers consider workplace deviance as withdrawal behavior (Hulin, 1990), while others include reduced extra-role behaviors (Kanungo & Mendonca, 2002; Koslowsky, 2009). Both deviance and extra-role behaviors have directional components; for example, counterproductive work behavior includes deviance components that can be distinguished as organization- or colleague-targeted (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001; Penney & Spector, 2005), and organizational citizenship behavior is a typical extra-role behavior also distinguishable as organization- or colleague-targeted (Robinson & Morrison, 1995; Hoffman et al., 2007). Withdrawal behaviors aim to avoid or detach from work roles rather than actively targeting others or organizations (Carpenter & Berry, 2014). Therefore, we will test discriminant validity between implicit withdrawal behaviors and organizational citizenship behavior scales (Dalal et al., 2009), workplace deviance scales (Bennett & Robinson, 2000), and counterproductive work behavior scales (Spector et al., 2006) to establish the indicator system's validity.

Since implicit to explicit withdrawal behaviors share similar psychological connotations despite differing degrees, all three turnover types may associate with implicit withdrawal behaviors. We hypothesize:

H1: Migrant workers' implicit withdrawal behaviors significantly predict turnover likelihood (regardless of type). However, compared to job-hopping and occupational change turnover, return-migration turnover is more likely driven by factors unrelated to work roles. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2: Migrant workers' implicit withdrawal behaviors positively predict job-hopping and occupational change turnover likelihood (compared to return-migration turnover).

As shown in Figure 1, establishing associations between implicit and explicit withdrawal behaviors also provides criterion-related validity for the former; together they constitute the indicator system for migrant workers' withdrawal behaviors.

Study 2: Establishing a Relationship Model Between Migrant Workers' Urban Multiple Embeddedness and Withdrawal Behaviors

This study addresses: (1) the common and differentiated effects of different embeddedness variables in predicting different withdrawal behaviors; (2) interactive relationships among embeddedness variables in predicting withdrawal behaviors.

COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) posits that people have tendencies to acquire, retain, foster, and protect resources—accumulating resources while protecting existing resources from loss. Both potential and actual resource losses, whether social or psychological, trigger stress responses and negative behaviors. Kiazad et al. (2015) argue that embeddedness levels represent resource abundance, and resource deficiency triggers varying degrees of withdrawal behaviors, with different embeddedness variables predicting different withdrawal behaviors accordingly.

Therefore, both organizational and occupational embeddedness may predict withdrawal behaviors within organizational work roles, especially implicit withdrawal behaviors. However, for explicit withdrawal behavior—turnover—prediction depends on type: occupational embeddedness better predicts occupational change turnover than organizational embeddedness, while organizational embeddedness better predicts job-hopping turnover than occupational embeddedness. We propose:

H1a: Migrant workers' organizational embeddedness negatively correlates with implicit withdrawal behaviors.
H1b: Migrant workers' occupational embeddedness negatively correlates with implicit withdrawal behaviors.
H2a: Migrant workers' organizational embeddedness negatively predicts job-hopping turnover likelihood.
H2b: Migrant workers' occupational embeddedness negatively predicts occupational change turnover likelihood.

Community embeddedness implies community resource scarcity and departure tendency (Kiazad et al., 2015) but does not necessarily predict work with-

drawal behaviors (Allen, 2006). However, for migrant workers' return-migration turnover, community embeddedness may synergistically interact with organizational and occupational embeddedness: return-migration turnover remains a work/organization departure behavior potentially affected by organizational and occupational embeddedness, while community embeddedness may moderate their effects. Based on the "push-pull theory" explaining migratory workers' return (Toren, 1976; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), low urban community embeddedness pushes migrant workers to return, while high hometown community embeddedness pulls them back. We infer: urban community embeddedness strengthens while hometown community embeddedness weakens the negative effects of organizational/occupational embeddedness on return-migration turnover likelihood. We propose:

H3a: Migrant workers' urban community embeddedness strengthens organizational embeddedness' s negative prediction of return-migration turnover likelihood.
H3b: Migrant workers' urban community embeddedness strengthens occupational embeddedness' s negative prediction of return-migration turnover likelihood.
H4a: Migrant workers' hometown community embeddedness weakens organizational embeddedness' s negative prediction of return-migration turnover likelihood.
H4b: Migrant workers' hometown community embeddedness weakens occupational embeddedness' s negative prediction of return-migration turnover likelihood.

Study 2' s theoretical model (Figure 2) further explores relationships between migrant workers' multiple embeddedness and withdrawal behaviors.

Study 3: Establishing a Model of Migrant Workers' Dual Identity Strain Predicting Withdrawal Behaviors Through Urban Multiple Embeddedness

Study 3 addresses: (1) validity testing of migrant workers' dual identity strain; (2) effects of identity strain on withdrawal behaviors through different embeddedness.

A. Validity Testing of Migrant Workers' Dual Identity Strain

Kraimer et al. (2012) proposed the identity strain construct based on identity theory (Stryker, 1980; Burke, 1991; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Role identity is "that part of the self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they play" (Stryker & Burke, 2000: 284), and identity strain emerges during self-verification processes (Burke, 1991; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Burke (1991) described four components: (1) identity standards—individuals' definitions of meanings and norms for each identity; (2) social inputs—inputs from social environments perceived as relevant to identity standards during role performance; (3) comparison—individuals continuously compare perceived social inputs with identity standards, perceiving strain when inconsistent, which Kraimer et al. (2012) defined as identity strain; (4) role behaviors—comparison

results determine identity behaviors.

Kraimer et al. (2012) found that stronger expatriate identity salience predicted greater identity strain upon repatriation, and work deprivation strengthened the positive relationship between expatriate identity salience and identity strain. McAllister et al. (2015) found that higher military rank before discharge predicted higher veteran identity strain in workplaces because higher-rank military identity standards contained expectations difficult to satisfy in workplaces.

Qin et al. (2019) proposed that migrant workers, farming for generations, develop salient rural identity with standards including "I am a capable, respected farmer," but after entering cities, their low social status creates conflict between social feedback and original identity standards, generating identity strain. They found stronger rural identity salience predicted greater identity strain and poorer urban adaptation.

However, Qin et al.'s description of "rural identity connotation" is oversimplified, with rural identity measurement emphasizing "I am a farmer" and identity strain measurement simply substituting "farmer" for "international employee" and "rural" for "overseas" in Kraimer et al.'s (2012) scale, potentially confusing "rural identity" with "farmer occupation" and being inapplicable to migrant workers who never farmed. Therefore, this study further elaborates on Qin et al.'s identity strain connotation: on one hand, non-farming migrant workers may still develop salient "rural" identity in hometowns, with standards possibly including expectations for how "rural people" should be treated and identification with rural traditional values and customs (e.g., "I am a respected rural person," "Rural traditional values are correct"). After entering cities, migrant workers' low income, benefits, and social status, plus differing urban values, likely create perceived environmental inputs inconsistent with identity standards, generating identity strain. On the other hand, everyone has multiple identities (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Ashforth & Mael, 1989), and migrant workers begin seeing themselves as "urban" after living in cities (Wang Chunguang, 2010), especially new-generation migrant workers who grew up in cities with parents (Li Peilin & Tian Feng, 2012). However, because their urban treatment cannot equal that of urban residents (e.g., Chen Hongfang & Sun Hongxiang, 2009; Wang Xianghong & Chen Jian, 2016), perceived environmental inputs may also fail to meet urban identity standards, generating "urban identity strain." Therefore, deeply understanding identity standards related to migrant workers' "rural" and "urban" identities and the inconsistencies these standards encounter in cities is crucial for understanding identity strain connotation. We propose two open-ended questions:

Q1: What is the connotation of identity strain derived from migrant workers' "rural" identity, and how should it be measured?
Q2: What is the connotation of identity strain derived from migrant workers' "urban" identity, and how should it be measured?

B. Testing Dual Identity Strain's Prediction of Withdrawal Behaviors

Through Urban Multiple Embeddedness

From COR theory, identity strain indicates poor embeddedness resources. Specifically, high identity strain reflects low person-environment fit (Kraimer et al., 2012; Qin et al., 2019), meaning poor "fit" resources in embeddedness. High identity strain means weak interpersonal feedback related to identity standards from environments (Burke, 1991), indicating limited interpersonal link resources. Kiazad et al. (2015) noted that fit and links are instrumental resources that further generate value resources—sacrifices required to leave current environments. Therefore, weak fit and link resources naturally mean fewer potential sacrifices for leaving. Thus, migrant workers with higher identity strain likely have lower urban multiple embeddedness levels. We propose:

H1a/1b/1c: "Rural" identity strain negatively correlates with migrant workers' urban organizational/occupational/community embeddedness.
H2a/2b/2c: "Urban" identity strain negatively correlates with migrant workers' urban organizational/occupational/community embeddedness.

Identity strain forms during self-verification processes; when individuals find self-verification difficult, they are more likely to detach from current environments (Burke, 1991). Migrant workers' identity strain results from interactions with urban environments—matching between identity standards and urban environmental feedback (Qin et al., 2019)—and triggers withdrawal from corresponding work environments (Kraimer et al., 2009; Qin et al., 2019). Researchers also note that withdrawal behaviors aim to escape stressful situations (Darr & Johns, 2008; Grandey et al., 2004), so identity strain may also directly affect withdrawal behaviors.

Since organizational enterprises are important carriers of urban environmental influence on migrant workers, those experiencing either "rural" or "urban" identity strain are more likely to want to exit organizational work roles, thus increasing implicit withdrawal behaviors. However, the nature of the two identity strains differs: "rural" identity strain more likely leads to return-migration turnover because only returning home restores environment consistency with "rural" identity standards, while "urban" identity strain more likely leads to occupational change turnover because migrant workers may believe their current profession prevents entry into environments matching "urban" identity. Job-hopping turnover is relative to return-migration turnover, indicating relative satisfaction with the current urban environment, thus unlikely resulting from "rural" identity strain. It is also relative to occupational change turnover, indicating satisfaction with current occupational environment and work style, thus unlikely resulting from "urban" identity strain. In these cases, direct relationships between both identity strains and job-hopping turnover are unclear, more likely connecting indirectly through organizational embeddedness. We first hypothesize direct relationships between identity strain and withdrawal behaviors:

H3a: "Rural" identity strain positively correlates with implicit withdrawal behaviors.

H3b: "Rural" identity strain positively predicts return-migration turnover likelihood.

H4a: "Urban" identity strain positively correlates with implicit withdrawal behaviors.

H4b: "Urban" identity strain positively predicts occupational change turnover likelihood.

Since Study 2 hypothesized relationships between urban organizational embeddedness and implicit withdrawal behaviors and job-hopping turnover, we further hypothesize that organizational embeddedness mediates relationships between dual identity strain and these withdrawal behaviors:

H5a: Urban organizational embeddedness mediates the relationship between "urban" identity strain and implicit withdrawal behaviors.

H5b: Urban organizational embeddedness mediates the relationship between "rural" identity strain and implicit withdrawal behaviors.

H6a: Urban organizational embeddedness mediates the relationship between "urban" identity strain and job-hopping turnover likelihood.

H6b: Urban organizational embeddedness mediates the relationship between "rural" identity strain and job-hopping turnover likelihood.

Since we hypothesized relationships between urban occupational embeddedness and implicit withdrawal behaviors and occupational change turnover, we further hypothesize that occupational embeddedness mediates relationships between dual identity strain and these withdrawal behaviors:

H7a: Urban occupational embeddedness mediates the relationship between "urban" identity strain and implicit withdrawal behaviors.

H7b: Urban occupational embeddedness mediates the relationship between "rural" identity strain and implicit withdrawal behaviors.

H8a: Urban occupational embeddedness mediates the relationship between "urban" identity strain and occupational change turnover likelihood.

H8b: Urban occupational embeddedness mediates the relationship between "rural" identity strain and occupational change turnover likelihood.

Although identity strain may also negatively affect urban community embeddedness, we are more interested in the moderating effects of urban and hometown community embeddedness on relationships between other embeddedness and return-migration turnover (as described in Study 2). Therefore, we propose moderated mediation hypotheses:

H9a/9b: Urban community embeddedness strengthens the indirect effect of "rural" identity strain on return-migration turnover through organizational/occupational embeddedness.

H10a/10b: Urban community embeddedness strengthens the indirect effect of "urban" identity strain on return-migration turnover through organizational/occupational embeddedness.

H11a/11b: Hometown community embeddedness weakens the indirect effect of "rural" identity strain on return-migration turnover through organiza-

tional/occupational embeddedness.

H12a/12b: Hometown community embeddedness weakens the indirect effect of "urban" identity strain on return-migration turnover through organizational/occupational embeddedness.

Study 3's theoretical model (Figure 3) further tests how migrant workers' dual identity strain predicts withdrawal behaviors through urban multiple embeddedness.

4. Theoretical Construction

This study constructs a model explaining and predicting comprehensive withdrawal behaviors among migrant workers based on COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001).

First, the model integrates two perspectives on withdrawal behaviors—one arguing that withdrawal behaviors have different natures requiring separate study (Blau, 1998; Johns, 1998; Mobley, 1982), and another arguing that a unified measurement construct underlies different withdrawal behaviors requiring integrated measurement (Hanisch et al., 1998; Mitra et al., 1992; Rosse & Hulin, 1985). Therefore, this study examines both implicit withdrawal behaviors reflecting the unified withdrawal construct and explicit withdrawal behaviors represented by turnover, while establishing connections between them and comparing similarities and differences in antecedent variables, contributing to withdrawal behavior theory development. Additionally, distinguishing turnover into job-hopping, occupational change, and return-migration types according to Chinese migrant workers' actual conditions meets researchers' calls to examine special turnover types based on special samples (Hom et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2011), further enriching withdrawal behavior indicators.

Second, this study simultaneously expands multiple embeddedness theory and withdrawal behavior theory by establishing relationship models between migrant workers' multiple embeddedness and different withdrawal behaviors. Chinese migrant workers have migratory characteristics, where organizational, occupational, and community embeddedness in work cities simultaneously affect withdrawal behaviors (Li et al., 2019). Based on Kiazad et al.'s (2015) multiple embeddedness theory, different embeddedness as specific resources more directly affect outcome variables with consistent targets, so this study constructs correspondences between different target embeddedness and different withdrawal behaviors. Additionally, based on the "push-pull theory" of migratory group return (Toren, 1976; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), this study simultaneously examines opposite moderating effects of urban and hometown community embeddedness on withdrawal behavior predictions, expanding the temporal-spatial connotation of community embeddedness and enriching research on relationships among different embeddedness.

Third, based on Chinese migrant workers' particularity, this study proposes dual identity strain as a predictor of multiple embeddedness and withdrawal

behaviors, affecting withdrawal through embeddedness, thus more completely explaining the mechanism of migrant workers' withdrawal behaviors. Domestic and international migrant worker research generally focuses on special identity status and work characteristics' impacts on economic development (e.g., Cao et al., 2017; Li et al., 2016; Wang & Jiang, 2012) and society (e.g., Yue et al., 2013; Qin et al., 2014), while identity strain examines inconsistencies between perceived external environmental feedback and internal identity standards after entering cities due to migrant workers'special situations and identities (Qin et al., 2019). Based on identity theory (Stryker, 1980; Burke, 1991; Stryker & Burke, 2000), this study proposes that migrant workers' identity strain originates from pressure perceptions caused by two parallel identities— "urban" and "rural" — differing from previous migrant worker research based on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) examining identity conflicts (e.g., Yang Dongtao & Qin Weiping, 2013; Zhang Shuhua & Fan Yangyang, 2018).

Overall, migrant worker issues have gained widespread attention from national governments, domestic and international business communities, and academia. Both promoting migrant worker-urban integration and improving enterprise efficiency require reducing migrant workers' withdrawal behaviors. However, withdrawal behavior research shows insufficient integration and comparative analysis of withdrawal indicators, affecting explanatory and predictive precision. Meanwhile, international migrant worker research remains primarily descriptive, lacking theoretical demonstration and making it difficult to address mechanism issues in predicting and intervening in widely concerned withdrawal behaviors —these are future research priorities. Based on China' s special migrant worker population, this study constructs a comprehensive withdrawal behavior indicator system, combining identity strain and urban multiple embeddedness based on COR theory to predict different withdrawal behaviors, enriching identity theory, multiple embeddedness theory, and withdrawal behavior theory, while constructing a comprehensive withdrawal theory based on migrant worker characteristics. This has distinctive innovative features meeting researchers' calls for "contextualized" theory (Johns, 2006; Rousseau & Fried, 2001; Tsui et al., 2006).

However, this research proposal has limitations: First, the model focuses on identity strain and urban multiple embeddedness in predicting withdrawal behaviors, but other factors like migrant workers' work/city expectations and environmental differences between hometown and work city may affect identity strain and urban embeddedness. Future research could control for migrant workers' age and expected work duration, and use distance between hometown and work city as a proxy for environmental difference to control for potential confounding effects (Qin et al., 2014). Second, future research should adopt quasi-experimental designs and intervention studies, examining whether interventions can alleviate identity strain by changing identity expectations, thereby altering urban multiple embeddedness and ultimately affecting withdrawal behaviors. From a normative management perspective, enterprises' proactive intervention in migrant workers' withdrawal behaviors can unleash productivity,

enhance vocational skills, strengthen urban multiple embeddedness, reduce various withdrawal behaviors in workplaces, and further promote urban integration and social harmony.

References

Chinese references preserved exactly as in original

Appendix 1: Overview of Migrant Worker Research Literature Themes

Table content preserved exactly as in original

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv —Machine translation. Verify with original.