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How Housing Provident Fund Policies Promote Talent Attraction: an Incentive Compatibility Perspective — Evidence from City H

Xueneng Su[1], Sanqin Mao*

(Business School, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, China)

*Corresponding author: **Sanqin Mao**

ABSTRACT: *Based on incentive compatibility theory, this study develops a theoretical framework to examine how Housing Provident Fund policies may contribute to talent attraction. It focuses on the interactions among government, enterprises, and individuals within housing policy arrangements and explores how institutional optimization can better align the incentives of these three actors. Taking City H as a representative case, this study employs policy document analysis and descriptive case analysis to examine recent adjustments to the Housing Provident Fund system and their potential implications for talent attraction. The analysis shows that policy measures such as higher loan ceilings, more flexible withdrawal arrangements, and differentiated support mechanisms can help reduce housing constraints and strengthen the attractiveness of the city to highly qualified talent. However, the effectiveness of these policies may still be limited by insufficient policy differentiation, weak employer incentives, limited institutional coverage, and inadequate regional portability. Accordingly, this study proposes improving policy targeting, strengthening employer participation, expanding institutional inclusiveness, and promoting more flexible and coordinated policy arrangements. The findings provide practical implications for local governments seeking to improve housing security policies and enhance their capacity to attract and retain talent.*

KEYWORDS: *Housing Provident Fund policy, Housing security, Incentive compatibility theory, Talent attraction, Urban competitiveness*

I. INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of the new era, intensifying regional competition and the growing "war for talent" among cities have made the optimization of the talent-development environment an important means of enhancing urban competitiveness and promoting high-quality development. Housing conditions not only directly affect the living costs and residential stability of talent, but also further influence employment choices, intercity mobility, and long-term settlement intentions. As an important institutional component of China's housing security system, the Housing Provident Fund (HPF) is gradually evolving from a traditional housing-welfare instrument into a policy tool that combines housing security with talent incentives.

However, in practice, inconsistencies may still exist among government policy objectives, enterprise cost constraints, and the housing needs of talent. For example, excessively high contribution requirements may increase labor costs for enterprises and weaken their willingness to recruit and participate in the system. Meanwhile, insufficient policy differentiation, inconvenient access to benefits, and weak portability across regions may reduce the actual sense of benefit that talent derives from the system. Therefore, whether HPF policies can effectively attract and retain talent depends not merely on raising loan ceilings or expanding benefit levels, but more importantly on whether institutional arrangements can coordinate the interests of governments, enterprises, and talent so that each actor, while pursuing its own interests, makes choices that are consistent with the overall objective of talent attraction.

Against this background, this study introduces incentive compatibility theory and develops a tripartite analytical framework involving government, enterprises, and talent from the perspective of institutional design and actor interaction. It focuses on how HPF arrangements concerning contributions, loans, and withdrawals shape the behavioral incentives of different actors, and further examines the constraints embedded in existing policies in terms of differentiated incentives, enterprise feedback, institutional inclusiveness, and cross-regional mobility.

This study seeks to answer three questions. First, through what mechanisms do HPF policies affect the attraction and retention of urban talent? Second, how can incentive coordination among governments, enterprises, and talent be achieved? Third, which institutional factors may weaken the incentive mechanism, and how can the existing system be further improved?

Compared with the existing literature, this study makes three main contributions. First, it incorporates the HPF system, traditionally regarded as a housing-security instrument, into the analytical framework of local talent policy, thereby broadening the perspective on its policy functions. Second, from the perspective of incentive compatibility and mechanism design, it analyzes the interests and behavioral logic of governments, enterprises, and talent, addressing the limitation of prior studies that have focused more on policy outcomes than on underlying institutional incentive mechanisms. Third, it proposes targeted policy optimization strategies in terms of policy precision, enterprise participation, institutional inclusiveness, and regional coordination, thereby providing both theoretical support and practical reference for local governments seeking to improve housing security systems and strengthen their capacity to attract talent.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Studies on the Institutional Foundations and Current Development of the Housing Provident Fund System

At the institutional level, Liu Wei (2025) argues that China's Housing Provident Fund policy has a dual effect on employees' housing demand. On the one hand, it can alleviate housing pressure; on the other hand, it may also contribute to rising housing prices [1].

With regard to implementation mechanisms, Yin Zhichao and Guo Rundong (2024) find that contributions to and withdrawals from the Housing Provident Fund can effectively stimulate household consumption, with stronger effects among homeowners, low-income households, and young and middle-aged families [2]. Luo Chengkua (2025) points out that, in the process of expanding coverage and increasing contributions, the Housing Provident Fund system faces implementation difficulties such as collection obstacles and insufficient coverage, which require targeted policy responses [3].

In terms of equity and performance evaluation, Li Minmin (2025) further examines the fairness of the Housing Provident Fund policy. The study argues that substantial disparities exist across income groups, leaving some groups at a disadvantage in accessing Housing Provident Fund benefits. From a broader perspective, equity concerns are reflected not only in differences among population groups but also in regional disparities. Accordingly, the study recommends improving institutional design to strengthen both incentive effects and distributive fairness [4].

2.2 Studies on Incentive Mechanisms in Public Policy

At the theoretical level, the incentive compatibility theory developed by Hurwicz (2006) provides an important theoretical foundation for public-policy design. The theory emphasizes that institutional arrangements should align participants' pursuit of self-interest with broader collective objectives, and this principle has been widely applied to the analysis of Housing Provident Fund policies [5]. Yang Hongshan (2014) further argues that the implementation of housing-security policies is jointly shaped by policy pathways and incentive mechanisms [6].

At the empirical level, Li Huilong and Wei Xinyuan (2021) point out that policy implementation is influenced by multiple factors and is fundamentally associated with tensions between policy incentives and competing values. More specifically, the implementation of Housing Provident Fund policies is constrained not only by policy design itself, but also by the socioeconomic environment, stakeholders' perceptions and behavior, and conflicts among different value orientations [7].

2.3 Studies on the Relationship Between Housing Provident Fund Policies and Talent Attraction

Chai Huamin and Li Jing (2020) find that Housing Provident Fund policies can significantly increase the housing demand of migrants with stable employment relationships, although the effects vary across population groups [8]. Li Weijun and Deng Guoying (2024) show that participation in the Housing Provident Fund significantly strengthens migrants' settlement intentions, and the result remains robust after addressing endogeneity and conducting robustness checks [9]. Ge Tengfei and Yu Guohua (2024) likewise argue that employment quality and housing burden significantly affect the settlement intentions of highly educated migrants, with stronger effects observed in first-tier and new first-tier cities [10].

In summary, existing studies indicate that Housing Provident Fund policies significantly affect migrants' settlement intentions and housing-purchase behavior, although the magnitude of these effects varies across population groups and regions. However, their specific effects on highly educated talent remain insufficiently explored, providing an important entry point for the present study.

III. RELATED CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

3.1 Related Concepts

3.1.1 Housing Provident Fund Policy

China's Housing Provident Fund system originated in the early 1990s as an important supporting measure for the market-oriented reform of the urban housing system. Its original objective was to improve the efficiency of housing-resource allocation and facilitate the transition from welfare-based housing allocation to a market-oriented housing-security system. With the continued development of the system, the Housing Provident Fund gradually evolved into a policy-based housing-finance instrument jointly funded by employers and employees and earmarked specifically for housing-related purposes.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Housing Provident Fund policy has increasingly extended beyond the protection of employees' basic housing needs and has taken on a growing role in local talent policy. Through flexible contribution mechanisms, differentiated loan arrangements, and more convenient withdrawal conditions, the system can better match the housing needs of different categories of talent and has become an important policy instrument for enhancing the overall attractiveness of cities.

On this basis, the Housing Provident Fund system has gradually been integrated into regional development strategies and public-service systems. It not only plays an important role in alleviating urban housing pressures and improving livelihood security, but also contributes to optimizing population mobility and facilitating a more efficient spatial allocation of highly qualified talent. It has therefore become an important policy instrument for enhancing urban competitiveness and strengthening talent agglomeration [11].

3.1.2 Talent Attraction

Talent attraction refers to the process through which local governments, enterprises, public institutions, or social organizations attract and retain external talent by means of policy support and institutional arrangements. As China's economy enters a stage of high-quality development, talent has become increasingly important as a strategic resource. Against this background, talent policy has gradually shifted from the traditional model of simply "recruiting and employing people" toward a more comprehensive system emphasizing the ability to attract, retain, and make effective use of talent.

Housing security is an important factor affecting talent mobility and employment stability and has therefore become a key area of policy intervention. Owing to its flexible contribution mechanisms, relatively strong loan support, and diversified withdrawal arrangements, the Housing Provident Fund system provides institutional support for meeting the housing needs of talent at different levels and has become an important policy tool for strengthening a city's competitiveness in attracting talent.

3.2 Incentive Compatibility Theory and Its Applicability to This Study

In the mechanism design theory developed by Hurwicz, incentive compatibility is a core concept. It emphasizes that, under conditions of asymmetric information, institutional designers should establish appropriate incentive mechanisms so that participants, while maximizing their own interests, voluntarily choose behaviors that are consistent with broader collective objectives. In actual policy implementation, however, incentive distortions and mismatches frequently arise.

In the context of Housing Provident Fund policy, common forms of incentive misalignment include insufficient willingness among enterprises to make contributions because of cost concerns, weak policy identification among talent due to withdrawal restrictions or delayed benefits, and a disconnect between government policy incentives and actual implementation outcomes.

To address these problems, mechanism design can proceed in three directions.

First, as the principal designer and regulator of the system, the government can set incentive parameters more precisely through differentiated contribution rates, tax reductions, housing-purchase subsidies, and other instruments. For example, technology-oriented small and medium-sized enterprises may be allowed to apply moderately lower contribution rates, while newly introduced talent may be offered preferential Housing Provident Fund loan rates or one-off housing subsidies.

Second, enterprises, as important policy implementers, should be able to obtain identifiable benefits from participation in the system. For example, Housing Provident Fund contributions may help improve talent retention and stabilize the workforce, thereby creating a positive incentive loop in which enterprises can “afford to contribute and succeed in retaining talent.”

Third, talent, as the ultimate beneficiaries of the system, should obtain stable expectations and long-term returns. These may include access to Housing Provident Fund loans, greater flexibility in rental withdrawals, and other benefits that respond to housing needs at different stages of life and thereby enhance policy identification and attachment to the city.

At the operational level, it is also necessary to improve information disclosure, supervision mechanisms, and feedback channels. Transparent policy rules and implementation standards can reduce information asymmetry among governments, enterprises, and talent and enhance trust in the system. Effective supervision can ensure strict implementation and prevent avoidance behavior and arbitrage, while feedback mechanisms for enterprises and talent can help policymakers adjust institutional arrangements in a timely manner and maintain the dynamic effectiveness of the incentive mechanism.

Overall, incentive compatibility theory provides a systematic framework for the design of Housing Provident Fund policies. It helps create a coordinated and stable institutional environment in which multiple stakeholders can pursue their own interests while simultaneously contributing to common policy objectives.

IV. INCENTIVE COMPATIBILITY BETWEEN HOUSING PROVIDENT FUND POLICIES AND TALENT ATTRACTION

In the implementation of Housing Provident Fund policies, the government, employers, and talent form a typical three-party strategic interaction. Whether incentive compatibility can be achieved directly affects both policy performance and institutional sustainability.

4.1 Functional Roles of the Three Main Actors in the Housing Provident Fund System

4.1.1 Government: Institutional Designer and Resource Coordinator

The government plays the leading role in the design of Housing Provident Fund policies. Its core objective is to optimize the population structure and promote high-quality urban development through institutional innovation. At the policy-design level, the government must coordinate talent attraction, housing security, and fiscal constraints, while strengthening policy attractiveness in order to encourage talent mobility.

For example, newly introduced talent may be granted a higher upper limit for the contribution base or targeted housing subsidies. At the same time, differentiated support policies can be designed according to different categories of talent so as to improve the precision of resource allocation.

4.1.2 Employers: Practical Implementers of Human-Resource Allocation

Within the Housing Provident Fund system, employers serve as an important intermediary connecting institutional incentives with human-resource allocation. A well-designed policy should provide employers with an appropriate degree of flexibility in contribution arrangements in order to strengthen their willingness to participate.

If the system is excessively rigid, cost pressures may weaken enterprises' willingness to recruit talent. Therefore, while basic obligations should be maintained, policymakers may explore subsidy mechanisms for small and medium-sized enterprises or introduce incentive feedback for high-quality employers. Such measures may include tax reductions, preferential settlement policies, and other supporting incentives linked to contribution performance.

By embedding organizational incentives within the housing-policy framework, employers can obtain tangible returns while fulfilling their social responsibilities, thereby strengthening their willingness to cooperate with the system.

4.1.3 Talent: Core Respondents to Institutional Incentives

Talent are the direct beneficiaries of the Housing Provident Fund system and therefore constitute a key factor determining whether policy objectives can be achieved. Institutional design should fully consider the actual housing needs of different types of talent at different stages of life.

A diversified package of support instruments may include rental withdrawals, preferential loans, housing-purchase subsidies, and portable account mechanisms. These arrangements can also be linked, through points-based systems, to public resources such as urban settlement and children's education, thereby encouraging talent to form stable expectations and make long-term residential and occupational choices.

Only when talent genuinely perceive fairness and tangible benefits from the housing-security system are they likely to establish long-term residence in a city and contribute fully to its development.

4.2 Design of a Tripartite Incentive-Compatible Mechanism in Policy Implementation

During policy implementation, differences in the objectives of governments, enterprises, and talent continue to exist. Institutional mechanisms are therefore required to coordinate behavior and achieve incentive compatibility.

First, a flexible and adjustable contribution and withdrawal mechanism should be established. For example, a tiered and differentiated contribution-rate system can be introduced, with different matching arrangements for key talent groups and enterprises in different industries, thereby promoting a dual structure of "government guidance plus enterprise supplementation."

Second, governance should combine positive incentives with negative constraints. Enterprises that actively fulfill their contribution obligations may receive fiscal rewards or policy priority, while those that fail to comply may be incorporated into credit-based disciplinary mechanisms.

Third, integrated information systems should be promoted. A unified Housing Provident Fund information-service platform can facilitate account connectivity, data sharing, and convenient cross-regional transactions, thereby lowering participation barriers.

Fourth, a "contribution-duration bonus" mechanism may be introduced. Enterprises and individuals that have contributed for a specified number of years may receive additional benefits in terms of loan ceilings, settlement points, rental eligibility, and related policy areas. Such arrangements can strengthen long-term participation and institutional stickiness.

Through these multidimensional coordination mechanisms, policy incentives can be effectively transmitted into behavioral responses, thereby promoting greater consistency among the three parties during implementation.

4.3 Achieving Tripartite Incentive Compatibility Through Housing Provident Fund Policies

According to incentive compatibility theory, the design of Housing Provident Fund policies should ensure that governments, enterprises, and talent can pursue their own interests while simultaneously contributing to the realization of common policy objectives. The key to improving the effectiveness of institutional incentives therefore lies in aligning the behavioral objectives of the three actors within the same institutional framework.

More specifically, the government encourages enterprises to make Housing Provident Fund contributions on behalf of talent and uses fiscal subsidies, tax reductions, and other instruments to encourage enterprises to fulfill their responsibilities in a standardized manner. Under these institutional incentives, enterprises may treat Housing Provident Fund contributions as a strategic tool for improving recruitment competitiveness and talent retention, thereby obtaining practical returns from their welfare expenditure. Meanwhile, once talent obtain tangible benefits such as housing-loan support, convenient rental withdrawals, and preferential settlement arrangements, they are more likely to strengthen their attachment to the city and their willingness to pursue stable long-term development there.

This interaction can create a coordinated chain of objectives linking "talent stability—enterprise development—government performance." The transmission of incentives within the Housing Provident Fund system is therefore not merely a one-way transfer of resources, but rather an institutionalized multilateral feedback mechanism.

Incentive compatibility means not only that the three parties refrain from acting against institutional objectives while pursuing their own interests, but also that the institutional design itself encourages their behavior to converge over the course of dynamic interaction. In this way, the system can gradually foster a spontaneous and stable cooperative mechanism.

V. CASE ANALYSIS OF THE HOUSING PROVIDENT FUND POLICY IN CITY H

5.1 Overview of City H

By the end of 2024, City H had developed into a large and rapidly growing city, with sustained population expansion over the past decade. This growth has been supported by increasing employment opportunities, talent-attraction policies, and the continued development of industries such as information technology, Internet services, finance, and cultural and creative sectors.

City H has also maintained relatively strong economic performance. Alongside economic development, the city has continued to improve public services and social welfare in areas such as housing, education, healthcare, and social security. In this context, housing-related policies, particularly the housing provident fund system, have become an important instrument for improving residential welfare and enhancing the city's attractiveness to talent.

5.2 Recent Changes in the Housing Provident Fund Policy

In response to population growth, rising housing costs, and increasing competition for skilled labor, City H has repeatedly adjusted its housing provident fund policy. The major changes are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Major Changes in the Housing Provident Fund Policy of City H

Policy Item	Before Adjustment	After Adjustment
Loan limit	Maximum: RMB 1 million; individual maximum: RMB 500,000	Maximum: RMB 1.3 million; individual maximum: RMB 650,000; minimum eligible loan: RMB 200,000
Down-payment ratio	20%–35%, depending on location and housing status	No less than 20% for first and second homes; 15% for government-subsidized housing
Loan maturity	Maximum 30 years; age limits of 65 for men and 60 for women	Maximum 30 years; age limits extended to 68 for men and 63 for women, or five years beyond statutory retirement age
Rental withdrawal	RMB 1,500/month for eligible renters	RMB 2,000/month; full monthly contributions may be withdrawn by new residents

		and individuals aged 35 or below
Families with multiple children	No specific support	First-home loan limit increased by 20%; rental withdrawal ceiling increased by 50%
Contribution rules	Employer: 5%–12%; flexible workers: 10%–20%	Contribution base: RMB 2,490–39,530; employer: 5%–12%; flexible workers: 10%–24%

Source: City H Housing Provident Fund Management Committee and City H Housing Provident Fund Management Center.

Overall, the reforms have expanded both the coverage and intensity of housing support. Higher loan limits and lower down-payment requirements reduce financing constraints for homebuyers, while relaxed age restrictions extend repayment capacity. Increased rental withdrawal limits particularly benefit young workers and new urban residents, whereas additional support for families with multiple children reflects stronger coordination between housing and population policies. Meanwhile, clearer contribution standards and greater flexibility for self-employed and flexible workers improve institutional accessibility.

These adjustments indicate a gradual shift from a relatively uniform housing support system toward a more differentiated policy framework targeting heterogeneous housing needs.

5.3 Incentive Effects on Talent Attraction

From the perspective of incentive compatibility, the effectiveness of the housing provident fund policy depends on whether the interests of government, enterprises, and talent can be aligned within a common institutional framework.

At the government level, higher loan limits, lower down-payment ratios, and expanded rental support reduce housing constraints and improve the attractiveness of the city to potential migrants. Targeted benefits for young people, new residents, and families with multiple children also strengthen the distributive and incentive functions of the policy. Greater transparency in contribution standards further reduces information asymmetry and enhances institutional predictability.

At the enterprise level, maintaining a flexible employer contribution ratio of 5%–12% limits excessive cost pressure while allowing firms to incorporate housing provident fund benefits into their compensation and talent-retention strategies. Housing-related benefits may therefore complement wages and other employment benefits in strengthening employer attractiveness. If contribution compliance is further linked to public incentives or talent-related resources, enterprises may shift from passive compliance toward more active participation.

At the individual level, the policy reduces housing costs and improves access to housing finance. High-level talent may benefit from greater borrowing capacity, while young workers and new residents gain from more flexible rental withdrawals. The expansion of contribution options for flexible workers also indicates a gradual extension of the system toward emerging forms of employment.

Accordingly, the policy creates a tripartite mechanism of government guidance, enterprise participation, and individual response. By reducing housing constraints and institutional transaction costs, the housing provident fund system can strengthen urban attractiveness, facilitate talent settlement, and improve employment stability. However, several structural and implementation problems continue to limit its incentive effects.

VI. PROBLEMS AND UNDERLYING CAUSES

6.1 Structural Constraints

A major limitation is the insufficient differentiation of policy incentives. Although the system provides broad coverage, its benefits do not fully reflect differences in income, career stage, and housing demand. For example, the maximum loan amount of RMB 1.3 million remains limited relative to housing prices in central urban areas, while young workers with short contribution histories often accumulate insufficient balances to benefit substantially from the system. Uniform policy parameters may therefore generate unequal effective benefits across different groups.

A second problem is the lack of an effective incentive mechanism for employers. Enterprises are required to make contributions, yet greater participation does not necessarily generate additional benefits. This weakens the endogenous motivation of firms, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises facing relatively high labor costs. In some cases, firms may substitute cash allowances for formal contributions, reducing the institutional effectiveness of the housing provident fund system.

Third, flexible workers remain insufficiently covered. Although participation has become more accessible, contribution pressure, administrative complexity, and limited access to certain benefits continue to discourage participation among platform workers, freelancers, and other workers in non-standard employment.

6.2 Operational Constraints

Policy parameters also adjust more slowly than housing market conditions. With an average housing price of approximately RMB 50,000 per square meter in the main urban area in 2024, a 90-square-meter dwelling would cost around RMB 4.5 million. A maximum provident fund loan of RMB 1.3 million would cover only about 29% of the purchase price, limiting its ability to substantially reduce housing financing pressure.

Interregional portability is another constraint. Although housing provident fund accounts can increasingly be transferred across cities, differences in contribution requirements, qualification periods, and loan recognition standards continue to increase the costs of labor mobility.

In addition, fragmented information systems and inconsistent administrative procedures may increase transaction costs for both enterprises and individuals. Key parameters such as loan ceilings and rental withdrawal limits are generally adjusted periodically rather than automatically, reducing the responsiveness of the system to changes in housing prices, rents, and demographic structure.

6.3 Underlying Causes

These problems arise from both institutional design and policy implementation.

At the institutional level, the housing provident fund system remains largely based on standardized and relatively static rules. This model is effective in ensuring basic fairness but is less capable of addressing increasingly heterogeneous housing needs. Moreover, the system has not established a complete incentive feedback mechanism for enterprises and flexible workers, weakening voluntary and sustained participation.

At the implementation level, regional policy fragmentation and insufficient digital coordination constrain institutional portability. Meanwhile, the absence of a market-linked adjustment mechanism causes policy parameters to lag behind changes in housing costs and population structure.

Therefore, the central challenge is not simply insufficient policy support, but a mismatch between the traditional institutional framework and the increasingly differentiated requirements of urban talent attraction.

VII. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Establish a Differentiated Support Mechanism

City H should move from uniform support toward differentiated housing assistance based on talent characteristics, income level, career stage, and housing demand. Talent-specific housing provident fund accounts could be linked to the existing talent classification system, with differentiated contribution ceilings, loan limits, and interest-rate preferences.

For strategically important talent groups, a tripartite contribution mechanism involving government, employers, and individuals could also be considered. Such arrangements would improve the targeting of fiscal resources while increasing the effective value of housing support.

7.2 Strengthen Employer Incentives

A clearer incentive feedback mechanism should be established for enterprises. Contribution compliance, employee coverage, and continuity of contributions could be incorporated into enterprise credit evaluation or access to selected public policy resources.

Enterprises with strong compliance records could receive preferential access to talent housing, entrepreneurship support, or other employment-related resources. Such mechanisms would transform housing provident fund contributions from a purely mandatory cost into an element of corporate human resource strategy.

7.3 Introduce a Dynamic Adjustment Mechanism

Key policy parameters should be linked more closely to changes in the local housing market. Indicators such as median housing prices, rental costs, average contributions, and household income could be incorporated into a periodic adjustment framework.

Loan ceilings and rental withdrawal limits could then be revised according to predefined market indicators rather than relying solely on discretionary administrative adjustments. Data on contribution, withdrawal, and borrowing behavior should also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of policies across different groups.

7.4 Improve Regional Portability

Within the framework of Yangtze River Delta integration, City H should further promote mutual recognition of housing provident fund accounts, contribution periods, and loan qualifications.

A unified regional information platform could reduce repeated verification and administrative delays, while common standards for contribution recognition and loan eligibility would lower the institutional costs associated with intercity mobility. Such reforms would strengthen the role of the housing provident fund system in facilitating regional labor mobility.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Based on incentive compatibility theory, this study examines how housing provident fund policies can influence urban talent attraction through housing finance and welfare incentives. The case of City H shows that higher loan limits, lower housing-entry thresholds, expanded rental support, and differentiated benefits can reduce housing constraints and improve the city's attractiveness to skilled workers.

However, the effectiveness of the current system is constrained by insufficient policy differentiation, weak employer incentives, limited coverage of flexible workers, and delays in policy adjustment and interregional coordination. These problems reflect a broader mismatch between a relatively standardized institutional framework and increasingly heterogeneous housing and employment conditions.

Future reform should therefore focus on differentiated support, stronger employer incentives, dynamic policy adjustment, and improved regional portability. Through these mechanisms, the housing provident fund system can better align the interests of government, enterprises, and talent and become a more effective instrument for talent attraction, labor mobility, and long-term urban development.

This study is subject to several limitations. It focuses on a single city and relies primarily on administrative statistics and policy documents. Future research could extend the analysis to multiple cities and incorporate survey, interview, or micro-level data to evaluate the causal and heterogeneous effects of housing provident fund policies on talent attraction and retention.

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