

**Sustaining Family Life in Rural China:
Reinterpreting Filial Piety in Migrant Chinese Families**

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Abstract

This study explores the changing nature of filial piety in contemporary society in rural China. With the economic, social and political upheavals that followed the Revolution, can ‘great peace under heaven’ still be found for the rural Chinese family as in the traditional Confucian proverb, “make yourself useful, look after your family, look after your country, and all is peaceful under heaven”? This study explores this question, in terms not so much of financial prosperity, but of non-tangible cultural values of filial piety, changing familial and gender roles, and economic migration. In particular, it examines how macro level changes in economic, social and demographic policies have affected family life in rural China. The primary policies examined were collectivisation, the *hukou* registration system, marketization, and the One-Child policy.

Ethnographic interviews reveal how migration has affected rural family structures beyond the usual quantifiable economic measures. Using the village of Meijia, Sichuan province, as a paradigmatic sample of family, where members have moved to work in the cities, leaving their children behind with the grandparents, the study demonstrates how migration and modernization are reshaping familial roles, changing filial expectations, reshuffling notions of care-taking, and transforming traditional views on the value of daughters and daughters-in-law.

The study concludes that the choices families make around migration, child-rearing and elder-care cannot be fully explained by either an income diversification model or a survival model, but rather through notions of filial piety. Yet the concept of filial piety itself is changing, particularly in relation to gender and perceptions about the worth of daughters and the mother/ daughter-in-law relationship. Understanding these new family dynamics will be important for both policy planners and economic analysts.

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Glossary

baochan daohuzi	包产到户只	System of household responsibility for fixed output quota
baogan daohu zhi	包干到户只	System of household responsibility for its own management
cun	村	Village
danwei	单位	Work Unit, i.e, a place of work
dui	队	Brigade (term from collective people's commune system)
ganbu	干部	Cadre; a person in a position of authority, ie., government official or department head
guanxi	关系	Personalized networks or connections of relationships designed to provide support and cooperation among the parties so that one is able to prevail upon each other to perform a service or favor
hukou	户口	Household registration which divides population into urban residents and rural farming population
Nanchong city	南充市	Prefecture-level city in the northeast of Sichuan province where Meijia is located
nan zhuwai nü zhunei	男主外女主内	<i>men till, women weave</i> ; men take on role of breadwinning and women of homemaking
nongbao	农保	Farmers' insurance
nongming fudan	农民负担	"peasant burden," a form of taxation on the farmer.
putonghua	普通话	Mandarin, the common language spoken nation-wide
renmin gongshe	人民公社	Collective commune; people's commune system
shehui baoxian	社会保险	Social insurance
sheng	省	Province
shi	市	City, town
tiliu	提留	Farmer's "contribution" or financial obligation to local governments at the village level
tongchou	统筹	Farmer's "contribution" or financial obligation to local governments at the township level
tuigeng huan lin	退耕还林	Restore agricultural land to grazing and forest land
waiban	外办	The foreign affairs office in charge of approving foreign researchers in China
xian	县	County-level cities
xian	乡	Township
xiao	孝	Filial piety concept which is associated with reverence and obedience to the older generation

xiaoshun	孝顺	Filial piety
xibu da kaifa	西部大开发	[China's] Western Development Campaign
xiushen qijia zhiguo pingtianxia	修身齐家治国平天下	<i>Make yourself useful, look after your family, look after your country, and all is peaceful under Heaven</i>
yangdao	养到	Filial piety concept which is associated with support, service and caring
zhen	镇	Town
zizhiqu	自治区	Autonomous region

Map: People's Republic of China



Map: Sichuan Province



Map: Directions of migration from Meijia



List of interviewees

Cai Guozhong	蔡国忠
Chen Tian	沈天
Dong Jincan	董进财
Dong Wenfang	董文芳
Fan Bing	范冰冰
Fan Junjie	范俊杰
Guo Mingzhu	郭明珠
Hu Guohua	胡国华
Jin Fugui	金富贵
Li Jiahao	李嘉豪
Li Jian	李健
Li Kailai	李开来
Li Na	李娜
Li Shichang	李世昌
Li Shuhua	李淑华
Liu Jiajia	刘佳佳
Liu Yijun	刘怡君
Lǚ xiùli	吕秀丽
Lǚ Xiulian	吕秀莲
Mao Suzhen	毛素珍
Song Shuhui	宋淑慧
Sun Guanhong	孙冠宏
Sun Jinlong	孙金龙
Tang Qian	汤倩
Tongjun Liang	童俊良
Wan Xinhong	王信宏
Wang Enmei	王恩美
Wang Jiancheng	王建成
Wang Lanhua	王兰花
Wang Meili	王美丽
Wang Susu	王素素

Wang Wei	王伟
Wang Xiuli	王秀丽
Wang Xiuling	王秀玲
Wang Yumei	王玉梅
Wang Zhengyi	王正义
Wang Zhiming	王志明
Wenzhāng	文章
Wu Chengen	吴承恩
Wu Fang	吴芳
Zhang Jie	张杰
Zhang Li	张立
Zhang Wenxiang	张文祥
Zhang Yiyun	张怡筠
Zhang Yue'e	张月娥
Zhao Zhicheng	赵志诚
Zhou Meiling	周美玲
Zhou Qing	周晴
Zhou Wenxiong	周文雄
Zhou Xiuying	周秀英

Chapter One

Filial Piety, Livelihood and Migration

1.1 Introduction

Up until the turn of the twentieth century, China was, by and large, an agrarian society in which changes in family and society were relatively slow. With the advent of modernity and the drive to catch up economically with the West, there has been rapid transformation of China from static agrarian society to dynamic modern society. This development had profound social ramifications. Unprecedented economic growth has disrupted traditional family values and lifestyle, leading to a painful process of reorganization of the Chinese family and Chinese society. This change is deep, extensive, and irreversible. Contemporary China has become a melting pot of traditional and modern cultural ethos. At the societal level, there exists a rural-urban divide, replete with troubling social and economic inequalities. At the familial level, the remnants of the traditional family values in the old Confucian system are still very much a reality, although badly shaken up by the distinct ideological reforms initiated by the People's Republic of China in the 1950s.

Moreover, the mass out-flow of migrant workers from the countryside to the city has significantly altered the composition of rural Chinese families in the past 30 years. Though migration has brought about economic development and improved livelihood for many rural Chinese, such quick transformations are not without struggles and costs. For millions of rural families, survival depends on redefining traditional roles and activities. To survive, family members of working age are forced to physically separate from the family unit and pursue employment elsewhere, sometimes thousands of miles away from

their homes. With the absence of their adult children, the elderly Chinese, instead of enjoying relative relaxation and freedom, are burdened by assuming the ‘parenting’ role of caring for their school-age grandchildren and by looking after the land. These grave consequences affect young and old generations alike by burdening the elderly and by neglecting the young. With all of these radical changes in economic, politics, and social policy, is the Confucian practice of filial piety still relevant to contemporary Chinese culture?

1.2 Ethnography of Progress

Since its transition just a little over three decades ago from a state-directed to a market-led economy, China has done a commendable job in raising the living standards of its people. From 1981 to 2010, 680 million people had been lifted out of poverty. The proportion of people living in extreme poverty fell from 84% in 1981 to 10% (Economist, 1st June 2013). The implementation of social and economic reforms has transformed China from a sluggish agricultural economy to an industrial powerhouse and a global player that is rapidly overtaking many developed countries in the West.¹ This process of rapid industrialization has been fuelled significantly by the influx of cheap labour, mostly coming from rural China. The push for rigorous industrialization and development has led to the largest peace time flow of migration in the history of humankind. Since the onset of mass migration beginning in the early 1980s, over 260 million Chinese peasants have left their rural homes in search of work and livelihood in the urban areas (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The family unit, once the bedrock of agrarian Chinese society, is rapidly becoming fragmented by the pressure to migrate.

¹ China surpassed Japan as the world’s second-largest economy in 2010 (World Bank’s International Comparison Program 2011) and overtook America to become the world’s largest economy in 2014 (IMF, Google Public Data Explorer)

With economic marketization, many aspects of the social safety net created by the Mao-era state-planned economy are now eliminated. Since rural social security and pension systems are only just starting up, the responsibility to care for the elderly is now being shifted from the state to the family. Changes have increasingly demanded that families play an important role in the welfare of their elderly parents (Du et al., 2004; Ye & He, 2009). China's One-Child policy has also resulted in smaller family sizes. Consequently, it has led to more burdens on children, especially the singletons, to look after their elderly parents. Filial piety, in financial terms, is becoming increasingly difficult to fulfil.

Smaller family sizes have also altered the gender landscape in rural China. In previous eras, daughters were often dismissed in terms of filial piety. Their role was to take care of their future parents-in-law, rather than their birth parents. With the One-Child generation, however, daughters increasingly play an important role in supporting their elderly parents as they are often the only source of filial support (Gao, Li, & Zuo, 2012).

Enforcements of state policy have impacted the practice of filial piety among rural families. From economic policies of collectivisation, de-collectivisation, and marketization, to social policies such as *hukou* registration (sections 1.4.3 and 3.3) and One-Child (sections 1.4.3 and 3.4), the state has intervened radically in the structures of traditional Confucian society. Under Mao, the state sought to be the sole support and provider of services to all Chinese workers. Now, however, under marketization, the state is once again turning to filial piety as a primary form of social security and elder care.

Both modernization and migration have transformed the social fabric of rural society and family life. Superficially, these changes have brought about better

livelihoods for rural families, but underneath these changes life for these migrant families is no longer ordinary. Life has improved for these families on the personal and local levels. On the national level, labour migrants have fuelled China's economy for three decades and have helped China secure a place at the economic table on the world stage. Statistically speaking, Chinese society has been on a very successful journey; however, statistics do not illuminate the ordinary, everyday life of the people. The people helped build China's modern economy and yet they are overlooked.

In the face of all these social, economic and political changes, one cannot help but ask:

- To what extent have these changes affected family cohesion and the well-being of these rural families? With adult children leaving the village *en masse* to search for livelihood in the city, how has migration transformed the centuries-old tradition of filial piety where children have traditionally resided side-by-side to provide and care for their old age parents?
- How have these changes affected traditional concepts of gender? How do sons and daughter differ in their filial piety practices? What about families that do not have sons? Do daughters, particularly married ones, step in to meet filial piety roles that are traditionally associated with sons? What about daughters-in-law and their relationship with their mothers-in-law?
- What are the roles of the State? How do publicly dictated policies and social welfare on both national and local levels support or impact family life? What are the expectations of the State in repairing the breakdown of the social fabric where families are left to their own devices?
- How has modernization and the economic diversification China's social livelihood in the past 30 years destabilized the family and shifted its structure? Is filial piety still a relevant concept? How is filial piety lived out in the new, fractured lives of contemporary rural families? How are social and economic pressures changing the very concept of filial piety?

With integration into the world economy, traditional understandings of the Chinese family have been significantly altered and shifted. These changes have been scarcely detailed in prior academic studies (Yeoh, 2003; Lee, 2007). An in-depth and comprehensive understanding of changes in the family dynamics can bring significant

insight into understanding China and the Chinese family life during its current large-scale mobility. It can also provide understanding of the impacts and limitations of social welfare by explaining the state's key role in upholding and redefining traditional kinship.

1.3 Objective of the Study

This study seeks to explore the non-tangible characteristics and other aspects of family relationships in contemporary rural China. It investigates how migrant families negotiate and reconcile the fracturing of relationships that are often the outcome of migration. Macro-level, abstract, and non-quantifiable aspects of family life are explored due to the impact of large-scale out-migration. As we shall learn in Section 1.6 (Contribution to the Study) existing studies in Chinese studies have mainly focused on the tangible and quantifiable characteristics of migration. Instead, the author chose to investigate the many, multi-faceted dimensions of daily living experiences of migrants and their rural family. These investigations offer insights into the lives of Chinese rural families, the values these families hold dear, and how these family values are giving way to newly emerging norms. The intention of the study is to fill gaps in a literature which is all too often focused on the tangible and quantifiable characteristics of migration and family life due to the changing environment of rural China

This study answers the macro and micro questions raised earlier. In doing so, the author intends to reveal these families' ordinary ways of life and to show how these families understand and reconcile to the rapid economic, social and political changes they have experienced and adapt themselves to new ways of continuing the age-old Confucian practice of filial piety.

This introductory chapter provides an insight in modern China so that readers have some background on the economic, social, and political developments which China

has implemented since the formation of the People's Republic of China. Of particular concern are the economic movements from an agrarian economy, to a collectivized, planned economy, to a export-driven market economy. We will also discuss the import of two influential policies: *hukou* registration and One-Child. Then the traditional concept of filial piety will be introduced, along with the pressures that collectivisation, modernization and individualism have placed on the idea and its practice. Toward the end of this chapter, I will then present the justification and the objectives of the study and provide a road map of how the thesis is organized.

1.4 Economic, Social, and Political Developments and Societal Consequences

No country in modern history has experienced as much social and political turmoil as China has since 1949. Moreover, despite all odds against it, no country in modern times has been able to achieve as much economic success as China. In the first thirty years following the Revolution, the country encountered formidable challenges in terms of deep socio-political divisions and dire economic disasters. In contrast, the subsequent 30 years was a period of relative orderly social, political, and economic transformation and unprecedented growth.

Under Mao Zedong's leadership between 1949 and 1978, China experienced recurring political failures that caused widespread social unrest and economic disarray (Perry & Selden, 2000; Gittings, 2005). Because of a great belief in peasants and as an advocate for them, Mao was strongly convinced that, given the right prescriptions, China would have an economy that rivalled the United States, within a 30-year span (Cannon & Jenkins, 1989; Spencer, 1990).

Mao believed that agriculture and industrialization went hand-in-hand, so he implemented the first social engineering project through the Great Leap Forward (1958-

1963) programme. He focused on improving productivity in both of these sectors. He also believed that if the labour force was well-fed, then industry would prosper. Overnight, rice fields were ploughed over and factories were built. Under collectivisation, private properties were seized by the state and organized into communes on a massive scale. Private production of food was banned so people had to live and work in such communes (Spencer, 1990).

Over 700 million people were placed in 25,000-plus communes in rural areas across the country. Communes were self-sufficient where means of production were controlled (Wang, 1977; Gittings, 2005). The Great Leap Forward was short-lived because it generated one of the worst famines in human history. Historian Frank Dikötter (2010) estimated that close to 45 million Chinese starved to death. Culturally and economically, China continued to struggle until the death of Mao in 1976.

After Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping, China's paramount leader, transformed China as one of the world oldest civilization to a modern nation by instituting a variety of economic reforms that decentralized the planned economy and led the way to market reforms (Vogel, 2011). Deng actively engaged Western leaders in opening up China to trade and attracted foreign direct investment. In recognizing the failure of the agricultural system, Deng disbanded the commune system. Households were permitted to sign land contracts and given full control of the lands in terms of management and production, which increased incentives and production. With decollectivization, rural China experienced a huge jump in agricultural output. The increase in personal income and consumption helped jump-start the country's economy as a whole (Spencer, 1990; Gittings, 2005; Dillon, 2009).

State-owned-enterprises (SOEs) were gradually given to or sold to private small-scale enterprises. To increase productivity, inefficient SOEs were closed or auctioned

off to the private markets. Deng described this new arrangement as ‘Socialism with Chinese Characteristics’ (Goodman, 1997). This transition from the state-planned economy to a mixed economy allowed the State to control a large section of the economy while permitting private and active participation in the market (Gittings, 2005).

While Mao was the champion of peasants and inland developments, Deng focused on economic developments in the coastal areas. For Deng, foreign trade was the vehicle for growth. As a result, special economic zones (SEZ) such as Shenzhen and Xiamen were established mainly through foreign investments. Production in these SEZs was mainly for export in an attempt to engage in foreign trade and to open up China’s market. Deng believed that, given time, the economic success of these coastal areas would eventually spread to inland areas (Ng-Quinn, 1982; Thaxton, 2008).

1.4.1 The Changing State Role from Planned To Market Economy

Deng’s role in revising and developing China’s significant economic growth since post-Mao market reform can be perceived as one of the most successful industrialization programs in modern era. In the span of 30 years from 1978 to 2008, China moved from an impoverished and backward peasant society to an industrial powerhouse.

It is remarkable what China has been able to achieve in three decades. With improved economic conditions, the standard of living elevated for most Chinese (while creating socio-economic divides). Mao’s dream of meeting and surpassing the West finally is being realized. Economic policies put forward by Deng in 1978 have lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and improved the overall well-being of Chinese people. Substantial changes can be noticed across the range of human development indicators: increased life expectancy, declining infant mortality rates,

declining adult illiteracy, and increased educational attainments such as school enrolment rates. According to the United Nations Development Programme, “both national and international indicators show that China has already achieved the goal of halving the number of people in extreme poverty (income of less than \$1.25 a day) by 2015 set by the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG)”. The rate of Chinese living in poverty fell from 65 percent in 1981 to 4 percent in 2007. At the end of 2011, China became the first developing country to attain the U.N. Millennium Development Goal of reducing the ranks of its poor by 50 percent, ahead of schedule (UNDP, 2013). It is an extraordinary achievement given that China accounts for almost one fifth of world population.

From the economic perspective, China has done well in terms of raising per capita GDP and export growth. It has achieved several MDG targets ahead of schedule especially in the area of reducing poverty and hunger, reducing child and under-five mortality, and enrolling children in school. It has an undeniable achievement in poverty reductions in lifting millions of people out of poverty (UNDP, 2013).

But the side-effects of this extraordinary economic achievement have been other forms of social and economic inequality. The gap between the rich and the poor has widened significantly, and new forms of poverty have arrived: urban poverty; explosive growth of migrant labour works; transfer of agricultural work to women and the elderly; spatial and class inequality; and family fracturing.

1.4.2 Rural-Urban Divides and the Great Migration

While Deng was successful in terms of allowing China to develop beyond its previous agriculturally based society into a dynamic global economic player, his assumption that wealth would spread from the affluent coastal regions to the poorer

hinterlands has not been actualized. Gaps between rich and poor, both within and between regions have continued to widen. China's household income inequalities have increased considerably as its economy grows. Inequalities first occurred in the rural agricultural sector beginning with de-collectivization where some farmers accumulated more surplus than others. In the urban sector, class separation started in the early 1990s as the national economy opened to foreign direct investment, and the number of people employed in the state-own-enterprises (SOEs) with egalitarian pay structures decreased. Inequality levels started off at a very low level, but over time, have increased significantly (OECD, 2010).

Thus, China has moved from one of the world's most egalitarian countries to one of the most inequitable in its distribution of income and wealth. It is unimaginable that just 30 years ago, China was one of the most egalitarian societies, but now, it has widespread spatial and class inequality. In 2010, it had a Gini coefficient of inequality of 42.1. China's Gini inequality stands higher than and exceeds most of its neighbours except for Thailand, Hong Kong, and the Philippines (World Bank, 2015).²

The market plays an important role in the increase of household income inequalities, but indisputably it is policies such as the household *hukou* registration that contribute to regional discrepancies as well as gaps between households in the same regions. On the one hand, the state has abandoned the rice-bowl economy so that income and employment from cradle-to-grave are no longer guaranteed. But on the other hand, policies implemented by the state have not ensured a more inclusive and pro-poor pattern.

1.4.3 *Hukou* Registration and the One-Child Policy

² Hong Kong is part of China's One Country two Policies. Since it retains "independent" status, its economy is not included in China's figure.

The household *hukou* registration is arguably the most contested policy implemented in China since the inception of the People's Republic of China. The *hukou* system was introduced in the 1950s as part of the planned economy. Hansen (2001) called it a “de facto internal passport mechanism” restricting migration between rural and urban areas. It was the principal instrument used to enforce the collectivization of agriculture by keeping peasants on the farm so that they could provide sufficient and cheap food for urban populations. Under the state-planned economy, the system discouraged rural populations from moving into urban areas since their livelihood and means of survival depended on welfare provided by their local government. Having a *hukou* registration corresponding with one's place of residence was very important since it allowed the person to obtain housing, employment, grain rations, education, health care, and other social benefits (Solinger, 1999; Chan & Buckingham, 2008).

With the increased demands for labour mobility, however, the government has eased restriction on *hukou* registration. Rural migrant workers are allowed to migrate across the country and officially register as temporary urban residents. Although lawfully registered as temporary residents, migrants cannot fully participate in the urban welfare system or receive other basic social benefits provided to local permanent residents (Hansen, 2001; Zhao & Li, 2008). Local governments are free to deny services and necessary permits for employment and property rental, and can legally discriminate between permanent local residents and migrants. Scholars have argued that the social status of these migrants parallels the status of illegal aliens living in foreign countries (Solinger, 1997). In recent years, urban municipalities have adopted changes to the *hukou* policy to accommodate the new geographic landscape of China due to population mobility; however, the changes have not had a significant impact on the majority of the

migration labour population. Changes are geared to those who can well afford economic assimilation to the urban lifestyle.

The other contested policy that has impacted every aspect of Chinese society is the One-Child policy. With explosive population growth and low standards of living, the Chinese government implemented the one-child-per-family policy in 1979 to alleviate social, economic, and environmental stress. One of the demographic consequences of the drastic policy is China has one of the most rapidly aging populations in the world. In 2009, the population aged 60 or over accounted for 12 percent of total population; however, by 2050 the figure will increase to 31 percent, which is within the range of other developed countries, but the rate of increase is much faster (World Population Prospects 2010).

The One-Child policy is now entering its fourth decade. Those who were born during the program's first inception are now facing the challenge of providing for their parents and grandparents in addition to their own children. For urban elders, this is less of concern since they can rely on state-provided pensions as a source of income. By contrast, rural elders face difficulties because there is no social pension scheme for them. If a child is not able to provide for his or her parents and grandparents, then the older generation inevitably suffers impoverishment. This has become the case for many rural elders when their child has migrated.

One-Child has also impacted gender politics. Traditionally, Chinese families have preferred sons over daughters. In the Confucian tradition, sons were valued because they carried on the family name, provided primary financial support for their parents in their old age, and were thought to be more helpful than daughters in farm work. There are implications and complications due the One-Child policy for a society whose core cultural values are based largely on family relations. There is an emphasis on the

filial obligation to assure family continuity through future generations, an act that requires a male offspring.

These implications are not as prevalent in cities since retirees and elders are able to collect pensions from the states or the company for which they worked. In rural China, however, no social welfare exists, causing challenges for many elderly Chinese. Another factor adding to social disparities is the fact that people are living longer, resulting in a larger elder population. Smaller family size adds more burdens to the younger generation, the children of the migrants. The safety net of support from the family is disintegrating.

1.5 Filial Piety, and the Changing Geography of Family Life

The economic impacts of China's progress are evident in both the urban and rural areas. The sweeping economic changes from agrarianism, to collectivization and the planned economy, to the export driven marketization, as well as broad social policies of *hukou* registration and One-Child have combined to create one of the most rapidly modernizing nations in the world. These changes benefit the country as a whole while simultaneously presenting problems and issues at local levels. Addressing how these macro-level changes have impacted Chinese society requires an understanding of their world – in the country or the city – and of their families.

The structure and purpose of the Chinese family have its roots in ancient Confucian philosophy of order: from the old to the young. These traditions and practices established from centuries-old cultural understandings are being challenged and usurped, however, by the country's continual strides towards a modern economic society. Chinese family members all have roles that are being redefined. The traditional emphasis on

extended familial identity is becoming overshadowed by the unintentional move towards a more narrow focus on the nuclear family and individual identity.

Yet modern China still remains a communal society rather than individual and its family system remains one of the strongest in the world (Ikels, 2006). How has modernization and the economic diversification China's social livelihood in the past 30 years destabilized the family and shifted its structure? The traditional social understanding of family life was defined by the practice of filial piety, which was the very cornerstone of Chinese society for thousands of years (Croll, 2006). Elderly parents depended on their children to provide care and support for them in their old age. But with modernization and migration, this notion is now being challenged. In some instances, elderly parents are now experiencing role reversals, wherein they are required to serve the young by taking care of their grandchildren so that the children's parents are able to migrate in search of work.

Before addressing these challenges, however, it is important to establish what filial piety is in the classical sense. Under traditional Confucian familial order, fathers and husbands were the heads of household and the dominant breadwinners, whereas mothers and wives were to continue the patriline by bearing children, helping their husbands manage the household, and caring for his parents (Deutsch, 2006).

China is influenced by Confucianism, the concept of filial piety is deeply rooted, and the culture is to *Yangerfanglao* 养儿防老, to bring children up for the purpose of being looked after in old age (Du et al., 2004). In the Confucian tradition, the father must support his sons by providing for and educating them when they are young. In return, the sons learn from the father and owe their absolute obedience and lifetime support to him. Daughters, on the other hand, were taught obedience and domestic skills,

so that they could one day marry well and take their place in their husbands' households. Once there, their filial duties were to their parents-in-law, rather than their birth families.

Chinese writers throughout history have used tales of filial piety to demonstrate the extremes in which children honour and care for their parents. Filial piety tales have been known to transcend both time and culture. This guiding principle has played an important role in all aspects of daily life: attitudes toward one's parents, conception of self, emotional life, marriage practices, and social relations. During the imperial age, the Chinese defined a person's goodness and moral standard in terms of how they behaved towards their parents, which determines if he or she is a good son or daughter (Knapp, 2005; Yeh & Bedford, 2003). Filial piety is based on the Confucian teaching of familial hierarchy by formalizing the relationships between parents and children. Parents teach filial piety to shape children's values, attitudes, and behaviours (Liu, Sun, & Yang, 2008).

Confucius demanded unqualified obedience: son to the father; younger to the elder; and subject to the ruler. From the parent's point of view, there is great responsibility towards children while requiring the obedience and respect of the children towards their parents. The Chinese also give respect both to the living and the dead. "It is from the past that they have tried to learn, and the past is a pathway on which the feet of the spirits have trodden and made luminous" (*The Book of Filial Duty 14*).

Filial values continue to survive in China today. However, its practice is rapidly changing due to modernization. The first wave of change to filial piety occurred when the Communist Party, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, took control of China in 1949. The government aimed to root out the practice of filial piety since Confucian traditions, such as ancestor worship and absolute obedience to parents, were considered feudal practices that undermined allegiance to the Communist Party State. Individuals were exhorted to adhere to the Marxist ideology as members of a classless society rather

than any hierarchical entity such as the family structure. Authority structures of the family were denounced. Individuals were allowed to marry and divorce as they wished without obtaining consent of their parents. Individuals were pressed to sacrifice their own goals as well as their family's goals for the sake of socialism and the State (Ikels, 1990).

To undermine the authority of the father, the state took away family land and put it into collective management controlled by the state. The father, as head of household, lost control of the family common purse because village communes determined household shares of the production based on family size. Very early on, the state realized that collectivism undermined traditional family values where the needs of the elderly relied on the young (Chen and Chen, 1959). Collectivism continued to exist until market reform in 1978.

Since the opening of a market economy, China not only resuscitated and revised the practice of filial piety, but has been actively promoting it. This promotion of filial piety may be based in moral or philosophical grounds or the political realities of social welfare economics; either way, the practice is deemed to be a societal benefit. It fills the gap where the state fails to provide for the vulnerable families. However, with young people leaving the villages for the cities, filial value is declining. Since the young people are no longer in the village, they are less bounded by the traditional filial obligation and understanding. Thus this increases the risk of pushing the responsibility away and not providing (He & Ye, 2010). Given the rapidly aging Chinese population, filial piety has become an important public policy objective (Cheung & Kwan, 2000).

Yet migration and modernization have shattered many of the traditional practices of filial piety. Now the sons are the indirect recipients of the negative effects caused by absentee parents and adult role models. More than ever, many young rural Chinese

children are growing up without the guidance of their parents. Absenteeism by their parents due to migration causes young children to face and endure social and psychological challenges as they are growing up. Children no longer have immediate role models from whom they can learn the importance of filial relationships.

Migration is also changing the traditional gender roles of rural families.

Nowadays, when husbands are away seeking employment, wives are becoming heads of the household. Moreover, an increasing number of married women are now entering the paid labour market and becoming the de-facto family breadwinner. Traditional marriage roles are becoming increasingly obsolete in the modern economy. Married couples are now learning to negotiate these changes and will need to make collective decisions about who goes and who stays, and whether both end up going to different parts of the country when work circumstances warrant.

The Chinese family functioned as a well-designed enterprise that placed emphasis on order and efficiency, while emotionality was suppressed and stripped of significant meanings (Yan, 2003). Radical policies pursued by the new Communist Party State in the 1950s and the latter rise of individualism have significantly transformed Chinese family life and led to the weakening of the practice of filial piety – the very backbone of old age security in Chinese culture. In traditional China, filial piety was sustained and upheld by imperial law, public opinion, kinship organisation, religious systems, and structures of family ownership. However, this fabric of society has been undermined by drastic policy changes. Without such institutional supports, filial piety lost its social standing and cultural legitimacy.

There is an unavoidable contract between young and old family members in China. The constitution and government have clearly stated that the care of elders in China is primarily the responsibility of the family (Ikels, 1993). Traditionally, the senior

generations provided resources for the young and property was passed to children as security ensuring care of the elder family members. Though young people may have desired to live separately from their aging parents, or at times, strived to avoid supporting their parents in old age, traditional Confucian practices prevented them from doing so. Through the practice of ‘face saving mechanisms’ and familial harmony, elderly parents without resources or affection from their children were not entirely powerless (Ikels 1993). Elders had a variety of formal and informal means to ensure their respect and financial stability through filial support.

Under the campaign of revering and respecting the elders, the Chinese government has insisted that caring for the elderly belongs to the private domain and is the responsibility of the family. In recent years, the government introduced legislation to enforce this responsibility. The 1979 Criminal Law Code asserted that the refusal to support an aged parent can be punishable for up to 5-years in jail. The Inheritance Law of 1985 specified that children who neglected their obligations to elderly parents might be denied a share of the parents’ estate. In addition, the 1996 Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of the Elderly made clear that adults must meet the financial, medical, housing, and social needs of the elderly when they have the means to do so. Only in rare instances—where elderly persons are without children—does the State support them (Ikels, 2006). However, social security from the state has been extremely low and rarely covers the cost especially when elderlies encounter health issues (Ye & He, 2009).

The practice of filial piety in China is changing for many reasons such as the mobility of migrant labourers, increased participation of women in the work force, and the tendency for young people to adopt individualism. Moreover, there is also change in family size due to the One-Child policy. Traditionally, rural families always have large

numbers of children. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, family size has reduced from the average of five to six people per household to fewer than four in 1990 (Zeng , 1995). The tradition of out-migration in China is longstanding. Throughout history, Chinese have emigrated abroad to establish community. However, Chinese migrants were always considered sojourners. They left home with the intention of getting rich, returning home to marry, and settling down (Skeldon, 2011). Thus, they would return home prosperous and be with the family.

Traditionally, the eldest son held an important role in the family. The eldest son took on the family headship when the family stayed together as a unit. He will receive the largest share of the family inheritance when it comes to the time for family division, since he also maintained the cult to the family ancestors (Lee, Campbell, & Cameron, 2007). As a result, often the younger siblings would need branch out to form a new family. However, as family size get smaller, especially due to the implementation of the One-Child policy, older sons do not have the luxury to stay behind and the take over the household as in the past. They now too have to leave home to find livelihood and survival.

Sons were generally entrusted with the care of elderly parents, but for some families there is only a daughter. Rapid industrialization has enabled more and more young people to achieve financial autonomy from their parents' control at a much earlier age than before. Above all, the traditional Chinese family structures are increasingly fragmented into nuclear or even single-generation households in which the elders have little face-to-face contact with their children as well as their grandchildren.

Usually the women stay behind with the family to take care of children and elderlies, the men will migrate and work to take the responsibility of earning and providing for the family (Tao, 2009). With daughters and daughters-in-law increasingly

participating in the labour force, the reduced size of the family means fewer members are available for care of the elders. When female members migrated out, the caring structure in the family will change. The previous caring role of the female will be moved to elderlies especially the female elderlies (He & Ye, 2010). It has been shown that even for traditional China, where more and more women are gaining access to higher education, they are less likely than in the past to abandon their careers to look after their elderly parents (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). In the 2009 study of how children share the responsibility of providing for the elderly parents in Anhui Province, Gao, Li, and Zuo (2012) found that in a family where all the sons migrate, the siblings would not equally share the financial responsibility to provide for their elderly parents. The elderlies will lose all caring in daily life from their children since each of the siblings will want to push the responsibilities to others, resulting in the parents not getting any care (Du & Qu, 2013).

Also, family support shifts because the young are focusing on spending the resources on their nuclear families at the expense of their parents (Aboderin, 2003).

There is no sector of Chinese society that remains untouched by globalization and modernity. For a traditional society like China, any change can be painful because of the disruptive repercussions it stimulates in the traditional family system. On the other hand, it can offer society a new lease of life, a golden opportunity to have a new perspective in life, to look into the implications of change. This study offers an understanding of the structure, development, and functioning of Chinese family life in the dynamic era of migration, economic transformation and individuation.

1.5.1 From Filial Piety to Filial Care

Given the central importance of family life in Chinese societies, it will be unlikely that the social and economic changes mentioned above would bring a wholesale erosion of filial obligations and expectations. In fact, studies done by Yang (1998) and Chow (2004) have shown that filial piety is still relevant, though it is enacted differently. Yang argues that filial piety will not disappear completely. More likely, a mode of individual responses to social changes of piecemeal coping will evolve selectively combining the retention of traditional core values with the creative transformation of other, less central values (Yang, 1998). Chow finds that the value of filial piety is not totally forgotten even in present-day cosmopolitan Hong Kong. Most Hong Kong people still treasure its values and practise it in ways that they find suitable and appropriate (Chow, 135).

First, filial piety practices are now focused on daughters as opposed to solely just sons as it has been in the past, and it is reported that their patterns of filial support are different from those of sons. In a survey of young university people in Beijing, Yue and Ng (1999) found that gender differences manifest different patterns of practising filial piety: males are more obliged to take care of family by providing material support, whereas females maintain more emotional attachment and keep in contact with family elders. It is suggested that daughters, whether co-resident or not, are often the preferred source of support for elderly parents in routine daily care and emotional support (Chow, 1990; Joseph, 1998; Zhan & Montgomery, 2003).

Second, Yan (2003) suggests that there is a shift from the notion of filial piety to filial care. Young people in rural areas now subscribe to the concept of “*yangdao* 养到,” which is associated with support, service, and caring rather than “*xiao* 孝” associated with reverence and obedience to the older generation. The young still adhere to the notion of repayment and gratitude for past care, but now there is less a sense of “limitless

indebtedness.” Now the filial behaviour is more of a practical expression of mutual needs, gratitude, and support.

Moreover, the centrality of the parent-son relationship in China is waning. Collectivization eliminated both the element of land transfer and the household as the organizer of the productivity unit. In fact, it was more advantageous to break up the family because the household contract system of the 1980s offered young men and women equal and immediate access to their own land if they established independent households. With de-collectivization in 1983, the state granted land rights to individuals rather than to the family. The father and the son received equal shares from the state (Selden, 1993). This not only weakened the position of the family’s head, but also allowed the village youth to have a sense of entitlement. Land division is no longer perceived as a share of property passed on from parents to children. Rather, land became their individual property which the state granted to them directly (Selden, 1993). With this, family dynamics took a sudden and drastic turn, and the elders would complain that their young children were now drunk with new wealth. The young were desperately eager to establish their own households and identity, but, at the same time they are “said to be brash, uncaring for their parents, vulgar in their conspicuous life-styles, and lacking moral restraint” (Selden, 1993). It appears as if China has now become a free-for-all society where the young claim equal share with the old.

1.5.2 Filial Care: Unconditionality and Anxiety

Importantly, unlike the Confucian ideal, children’s reverence and care towards their parents are no longer unconditional. The costs of non-filial behaviours to parents by their children can be substantial and life-threatening. Therefore, parents who possess assets and economic resources such as land or a residence can use these as bargaining

chips to stipulate how their children treat them. Parents' tactics of using bargaining chips can be observed among urban parents who have both wealth in the form of a residence and pensions from their job. However, this is not a typical case for the rural elderly. With collectivization in 1950s, parents, or more specifically the fathers, who once headed the household, no longer have total control of the agricultural land. Further, young people now prefer non-agricultural employment and desire to move away from the land into the urban sectors. Land wealth is no longer the incentive it once was.

For some elders, their status has declined and living conditions have worsened. With diminishing authority and the dependence on their children for their well-being, "elders trembled to speak of their fate, the middle aged were worried about their immediate future, and young couples were confused by the storm of complaints from their parents and grandparents" (Yan, 2003: 163). Parents with a single child are painfully aware that their family has only one chance at a good future. Consequently, they invest the bulk of the family resources on the child (Fong, 2004). Parents who complained about the time and money spent on their children were told by friends and relatives that "this is an investment for your own future ... your future will rise and fall with that of your child" (Fong, 2004: 139). Parents' hands are tied in matters of discipline and authority over young children. Fong observes a scenario in which the father was found beating the child for failing to study so the son responded with "Beat me now and I'll beat you when you are old."

Thus, one of the primary concerns of the elderly people in China is the question of who will look after them economically and socially. Formal support for older people is limited, and the family remains the principal institution to look after the elders. China, as well as other Asian societies where the practice of filial piety is deep, has continually promulgated the notion that care of the elderly is of paramount importance. Family often

plays an essential role in providing the elders with living arrangements, and inter-generational transfers in later life. With rapid urbanization and “Westernisation” in recent decades, the social foundations for filial piety have been greatly undermined in Chinese society. Ironically, the state has mandated the financial aspects of filial piety, without rebuilding the emotional and moral structures that were part of Confucian culture.

Thus, it has become common for grandparents to live precariously at the mercy of their children’s filial sentiments. Those who live alone complain of loneliness and boredom. Those who need nursing care are often shuffled from one adult child’s household to another every few months. Even those who live permanently in stem families find they are powerless dependents rather than household heads (Fong, 2004). Grandparents have more difficulty taking responsibility for household chores. This goes against their upbringing and experience. Being traditionally brought up, they expected that in old age they would be given rest, freedom from chores, and continual respect. But now, they are responsible for household chores and their adult children are free to earn money (Fong, 2004).

Mercier and Powers (1984) assert that the aged do not live in isolation from the rest of the society. However, changes in the basic institutions of the family as well as demographic shifts in longevity have significantly altered the natural support system to meet the needs of the elderly. More and more married women are now working outside the home. With more emphasis on the nuclear family, children will no longer live in the same community – let alone under the same roof – as their parents. Changes in family size will drastically affect the availability of adult children to care for the number of aging parents. With China’s One-Child policy, which began in 1979, many grandchildren now see that they have two sets of grandparents to look after.

The need to look after the elders is a universal issue, not confined to China alone. “There are no uniquely rural problems or solutions, just matters of degree...the problems of the elderly, and possible solutions to these problems, are not unique to nonmetropolitan settings” (Mercier & Power, 1984: 342). Family has been and continues to be an important source of support and fulfilling the needs of the aged. In later life, especially after the death of the spouse, children often play an important role in providing service and emotional support often caused by the void left because of the death of the spouse (Lopata, 1980). Nevertheless, aging parents in rural China are facing an uncertain future, as economic and social changes shift the ground beneath their feet.

1.6 Contribution of the Study

The economic benefits resulting from the labour of countless migrant workers has catapulted China to prominence in the global economy, and its position has been well documented by numerous studies. Since the 1970s a wide range of research on out-migration in China has focused on issues such as: brain-drain effect; alleviation of land dependency; poverty reduction and increased living standards through remittances; improved distribution of labour and resources among regions; and modernization of rural China as a result of diffusion of cultural, technological, and economic resources (Davin, 1999; Murphy, 2002; Pieke and Mallee, 1999; West and Zhao, 2000). These studies also have looked at migration through the lens of economic development and social transformation, such as the empowerment of women (Caetano and Jacka, 2004; Murphy, 2002). Existing research to a great extent has contributed significantly to the general knowledge of modern Chinese studies that focus on the political and socio-economic qualities. However, what is under-researched and easily overlooked by many of these studies are less quantifiable factors in relation to family relationship intimacy in the

midst of migration. This study does not focus on the “social economic indicators” such as the increase in living standards, better livelihood from remittances, or higher employment wages. Rather, the author intends to address the “non-tangible” characteristics of family that are influenced by migration, such as changing familial roles, affective attention to aging parents, changing gender dynamics, and the changing nature of filial piety itself.

Besides the political and economic developments, Western scholars have become more and more interested in the social and cultural transformation in China, and in particular in the factor of migration, both internal and cross-border, as a contributing force. As previously indicated, migration studies on China have mainly focused on issues such as policy, urban settings, remittances, and economic development due to migration; but the impact of migration on family life and how families deal with these changes requires more in-depth analysis.

The structure of the Chinese family is undergoing significant changes and challenges in familial dynamics, communications, and interactions. The effects of migration can be said to have touched the very core of the family. What does it mean for family when a member leaves the household to find work elsewhere? As migrants depart, they are confounded with anxiety about the consequences of familial separation. What does this separation mean to the husband and wife, parent and child, and adult children and their elderly parents? What strategies will the family implement to determine who leaves and who stays? What are the roles and expectation of those who migrated? What of those who stayed behind? Being left-behind by their parents, how will these children grow up in the absence of the father, mother, or both parents? When these young adult parents leave the village, their elderly parents are challenged by the willingness and ability to parent again with the left-behind (grand)children. What joys and struggles will

these elderly grandparents encounter in the process? Under the traditional Confucian society, as they are aging, Chinese elders could expect their children to support them through their senior years. But now that their children are away how is this expectation being met? Given limited current social welfare for rural elderly Chinese how do they manage financially and socially for themselves?

These are some of the questions raised in this current study. They will be presented more systematically in Chapter 2, when discussing the research questions and methodology. Answers to these research questions are gleaned from interviews, observations, and interpretation of qualitative fieldwork data. Some are answered from specific quantitative ethnographic fieldwork.

The purposes of the study are two-fold: 1) to provide insight into the day-to-day dynamics of rural Chinese migrant families; and 2) to detail how these families maintain the inter-generational contract between the migrated and the left-behind. The study captures the broad outline of family changes due to modernization and migration through the lens of familial piety. There is benefit in understanding how migration is affecting family life and the practice of filial piety since there are very limited studies that address the issues that touch on the most intimate sphere of family life: the impact felt by left-behind children; how spouses interact; how migrants perceive themselves as active agents in fulfilling their filial role to their elderly parents and to their children.

This study offers an ethnographic lens on migration and its tensions with the Confucian tradition of filial piety. It will present observations of how families strategize and negotiate the challenges of migratory effects. It attempts to fill the gap in the literature on patriarchal preference for sons versus daughters, who when they become migrant workers often become the income bearer for the family. It examines how the

notion of filial piety is confronted by each member of the family, and whether there are patterns of coping to be discovered among rural Chinese families.

1.7 Road Map for the Study

After this introductory chapter, the thesis is organized into six main chapters.

The summary of the remaining chapters is as follows:

Chapter 2 presents the methodological framework for the study. It provides a detailed account of my fieldwork experience in China and how I ended up in Meijia and my account of being there. Here I will discuss nuances of conducting fieldwork and China and examine the role of assistant and collaborator in the field as well as looking at opportunity and challenges of ethnographic research and being on the ground.

Chapter 3 introduces the reader to socioeconomic and political change at three levels: China, Sichuan, and Meijiexiang, the fieldwork site. Meijiexiang is located in Nanbu county of Nanchong prefecture in the northeast corner of Sichuan Province. The chapter explores the changing position of petty commodity producers and smaller-scale farming within the socioeconomic transition in China. It analyzes the historical and structural environment in which rural people strive to obtain resources for attaining livelihoods. It looks at the strategies migrants and their families have employed in response to these socioeconomic transitions, how these strategies have increasingly led to mass out-migration of rural workers to obtain resources for improving livelihood for themselves and/or their families. As a way of linking the theoretical and conceptual concepts examines in the first three chapters, I will present a portrait of the migrant families that were interviewed for the study. Here I offer the intimate details of how families in Meijia deal with life as they go out adapting to the new structure with family out-migration and the lack of support from the state.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 comprise my empirical findings from fieldwork, analysis, and interpretation.

Chapter 4 examines the family and lineage structure and how the family as a unit is in flux, due to pressure of modernization and migration. It provides insights into the relationship of interdependency between migrants and left behind family members. It examines how migration affects the day-to-day family dynamics and how members at home cope in the absence of migrant members. The chapter provides a foundation for the next two chapters, which examine filial piety as the core notion of interdependency and family relationships.

Chapter 5 analyzes the practice of filial piety in terms of conflicting perspectives and priorities emerging from pressures of migration. This is the continuation of the previous chapter where it delves deeper into the filial relationship in the family. It analyzes and provides a comparison between the ideological/traditional understanding of filial piety with current perception and practice of both the elderly parents and the younger migrant children.

Chapter 6 focuses on core family relationships, using ethnographic data and interviews to highlight the role of gender in current practices of filial piety in looking at how sons and daughter differ in fulfilling their filial duties. It then looks more specifically into the roles of mother and daughter-in-law in light of tensions over duties and expectations. Finally, it explores how the actions of daughters are transforming the age-old Chinese preference for male children, and thereby changing the concept of filial piety in unexpected ways.

Chapter 7 concludes the study by summarizing key findings of practice and discourse of filial practice in modern day rural China and considers the contributions that the study makes to the field of filial piety, migration studies, and Chinese studies in

general. It examines in particular policy implications, suggesting areas of future research. I also evaluate research strategy and limitations of the study. It is hoped that the study will provide an in-depth, if partial portrayal of Chinese family life and the impact that migration has on redefining core family relations, duties, and norms as well as the ideology underlying traditional family life.

1.8 Conclusion

What impacts do these changes have on the understanding and practice of filial piety for the elderly in rural China? Elizabeth Croll (2006) reported that parents are now questioning or reasserting the validity of what to expect from the younger generation. Though the elderly still express a sense of entitlement in terms of material and non-material support, these expectations have been tempered with concerns that such entitlements can no longer be taken for granted. Are attitudes and behaviours of filial practices by the young so different from the expectations of their elders to warrant concern from the elderly?

My final reflections are based on my study of both the older and younger generation. I argue that migrants perceive migrations, the often painful decision to work away from the family, increasingly as manifestations of filial duty toward their parents and the family at large. I also argue such a conceptual shift has multiple implications. This entails a complex process of give and take between generations that is played out at the intersection of personal, familial, and national changes that constitutes important aspects of a modernizing Chinese society.

Chapter Two

Methodology, Ethnography, and Collaboration

2.1 Introduction

Mass out-flow of migration from the countryside to the city to search for employment has significantly altered the landscape of Chinese rural families. As discussed in the previous chapter, migration has brought about a better livelihood for migrants and those left-behind family members, but it has also led to family rupture and separation. To survive economically as a family, migrants have to leave their home and travel hundreds of miles to the city and toil in unfamiliar settings, while the left-behind elderly are called upon to look after the land and to take on the role of parenting their young grandchildren instead of relaxing in their old age. Though young children are looked after by their elderly grandparents, in many ways, they are on their own since elderly grandparents often have not learned the necessary skills to accompany the younger generation in a modernizing and rapidly changing society. Clearly migration has significantly improved the economic outlook of the rural family, but at what cost? How do migrant families adapt to and reconcile this rupture? As China moves away from the planned economy, what roles do the community and the State play in this transition and how do they go about helping the family deal with this rupture? Are there local and national policies in place to help vulnerable families, especially the elderly to cope with changes through modernization?

This chapter provides the methodological framework for the study and a detailed account of my fieldwork experience in China. The chapter begins by looking at the research objectives in detail. Then, I examine ways in which my research questions and

objectives have evolved along the way and how I adapted and readjusted the methodology while I was in the field. Since this is an ethnographic case study, I will explain the significance of the roles of assistant, minder, and collaborator while in the field. I also present my experience and the challenges of living with a migrant family while conducting fieldwork. Next, I explain how I collected and processed data for the study. Finally, I examine the dilemmas and challenges of doing fieldwork in rural China and offer insights I have learned from the process.

2.2 Research Objectives

The focus of the study is to examine the changing landscape of family life due to out-migration by working children and the extent to which these changes affect the well-being of Chinese rural families. In doing so, I hope to shed light on the multi-faceted day-to-day practices and traditions of the rural migrant family. The study looks at the relationship between migration and family life and how migrant families reconcile and continue the long-standing Confucian tradition of filial piety.

The research objective and questions will be examined through the lens of filial piety, the cornerstone of Confucian thought and moral way of life through thousands of years. Filial piety provides a moral template, structuring intergenerational behavior between family members. Children must show respect and reverence for their parents and ancestors. Filial piety, however, goes beyond respect and reverence. It encompasses the idea of ensuring the well-being of one's family and protecting the family's good name. Yet, with modernization, this cornerstone which once permeated many aspects of Chinese culture and society is slowly eroding. Filial piety is based on reciprocity. An individual's existence is a parental gift. Bringing a child into the world, parents are obliged to educate and provide the basic necessities until the child reaches adulthood. In

turn, children are expected to unconditionally love, honor, and respect their parents throughout their lives. Have parents' expectations regarding the notion of filial practice changed due to modernization and development? Are the social and economic conditions of the elderly better or worse because of out-migration of adult children? From the children's perspective, is unconditional support to one's parents an important part of filial practice nowadays? Is migration a means to fulfill one's filial duty to support the elderly parents as well as one's own children? China's one-child policy and the age-old preference for a male child also have an impact on the practice of filial piety. How do sons fulfill their filial duties? How do daughters fulfill theirs? How are changing circumstances affecting gender expectations? In particular, how has migration altered the core mother- and daughter-in-law relationship and the implications for a mother-in-law due to the absence of a daughter-in-law?

More specifically, the micro questions that the study explores are:

Family:

- What does it mean for a family when a member leaves the household to find work elsewhere?
- How do left-behind family members cope with anxiety and the consequences of familial separation?
- What are the interdependency relationships between migrant and left-behind family members?
- What are the anxieties and consequences of familial separation?
- What are the roles and expectations of those who migrated? Of those who stay behind?

Filial Piety

- How is out-migration and modernization affecting the care of the elderly in the village?
- Are there priorities and conflicts that migrants have when it comes to obligations to their elderly parents and care for their young school age children?
- How have State-implemented policies such as One-Child and *hukou* (household registration) affected the practice of filial piety?
- Are there conflicting perspectives between the generations when it comes to the practice of filial piety?

Elderly

- Is care for the elderly a responsibility of individual children or the government?
- What are the joys and struggles that left-behind elderly grandparents encounter in the process of looking after their grandchildren?
- What social protection policies are in place to help the vulnerable elderly in the villages?

Gender

- Are there gender differences when it comes to filial obligation to elderly parents?
- How has migration altered the core mother- and daughter-in-law relationship?

2.3 Project Development

As we learned from the previous chapter, out-migration in China since market reform is well documented in the field of Chinese studies. The majority of these studies look at migration through the lenses of economic development and social transformation through issues such as brain-drain effect, alleviation of land dependency, poverty reduction and increased living and educational standards through remittances, empowerment of women, and the modernization of rural China. However, there remains a gap in the study of the rural family as a unit and the “non-tangible” dimensions of family life in the midst of migration. These non-tangible dimensions concern the intimate day-to-day moments of family life and how the left-behind members cope with life in the village.

When I first set out to explore the relationship between out-migration and rural Chinese families, my initial goals were to seek a comprehensive understanding of how rural migrant families deal with life’s day-to-day activities due to the absence of migrant members. Accordingly, this study seeks to understand the impact of migration upon family structure and its function as couple interaction, parent-children relationship, and the perceptions of migration by family members. The rationale behind this is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how migrants and families reconcile the ruptures in

family cohesion created by economic necessity and social policy. However, as the project progressed, I realized that the scope is too broad for a doctoral thesis. There have been continuing tweaks and fine-tuning along the way, even during fieldwork, to make the thesis tighter so that eventually it reached the current form of migration, filial piety, and mobility. The current objectives of exploring the relationship between migration, filial piety, and the impact on the elderly emerge from two recent phenomena in contemporary China. First, there is the lack of a safety net for the elderly in the rural China. Farmers are self-employed and self-sustaining so they do not pay into the retirement pension system like their counterparts in the city. For the most part rural China is underdeveloped and governments do not have the means to fully support aging elderly. Without a safety net and facing a diminished income, the elderly have to rely on their own family for support, but with mass out-migration of young people they have to face a new challenge of looking after themselves.

A second, unplanned consequence of the implementation of the one-child policy has led to two ramifications on the practice of filial piety and elderly well-being. With limited birth growth and the imminent decline in the size of the work force, China is facing a long term problem of providing adequate care for the elderly population. And the rate of ageing in China is much faster than in most countries because of limited birth growth. The One-Child policy allows for parents in the city to have only one child and parents in the rural areas to have an additional child if the first-born is a girl. Without the safety net from the state, how will elderly parents cope when their only child is a girl? Traditionally, married daughters were considered as outsiders and no longer a part of the family, having joined their husband's family. The One-Child and *hukou* policies are now changing the age-old preference for sons. The implications of the One-Child policy will be addressed in Section 3.4.

2.4 Fieldwork in China – Challenges for Researchers

Researchers conducting fieldwork in China often faced three set of challenges: political and social sensibility (Hansen, 2006), positionality in the field (Kjellgren, 2006), and language barrier (Thogersen, 2006). Until the 1990s, access to fieldwork was limited through official government sponsorship. Though fieldwork in China has become more common, gaining access to suitable fieldwork sites can still be a challenge for even seasoned researchers.

2.4.1 Political and Social Sensibility

When conducting fieldwork in China, the researcher first and foremost must seek appropriate affiliation often through an academic institution. Affiliation is important since the institute you are associated with often helps to sponsor your research visa. More importantly, affiliation helps to establish a sense of institutional legitimacy through a *danwei* 单位 or a *guanxi* 关系. *Danwei* is understood as a name given to a work unit or a place of employment in China. Though the term *danwei* remains in use in China today, it is more properly used to refer to a work unit during the period of planned economy before the opening up of the market in the late 1970s. *Guanxi*, are personalized networks or connections of relationships designed to provide support and cooperation among the parties so that one is able to prevail upon another to perform a service or favor. *Guanxi* can be an informal network of families and friends, people from the same hometown, school, or work. Through institutional affiliation, you became part of the *danwei* and *guanxi* network which would allow access to spaces which you otherwise would not have since you are treated as an outsider. Potential interviewees might be hesitant to participate or open up to you if they are suspicious of your non-affiliation status. On the other hand, in certain situations, non-affiliation can also open up the conversation. We

shall examine this more in detail in section 2.13 when I explain the affiliation between official and non-official government collaborator.

Even if you have successfully secured an institution to sponsor your visa, the visa application still needs to be approved by the *waiban* 外办, the foreign affairs office in charge of approving foreign researchers in China. The process of getting visa approval can take months or at times can be denied if the *waiban* office deems that your research project is too sensitive. Though my topic was not a sensitive topic, at the time of my preparing for fieldwork in the spring of 2010, there were political and labor unrests in China. One of my supervisors at the time advised that my application should not allude to anything that is associated with employment of labor in China. Through her *guanxi* in China she informed me that labor researchers who submitted application for a visa invitation will be turned down. In addition, those who know my religious background at times were hesitant to affiliate with me since this could also be a sensitive aspect.

2.4.2 Positionality in the Field

The second set of challenges awaiting the researcher is positionality in the field.

Gregory et al. (2009, 556) define positionality as:

The fact that a researcher's social, cultural and subject positions (and other psychological processes) affect: the questions they ask [and] how they frame them... their relations with those they research in the field or through interviews; [the] interpretations they place on empirical evidence; [and their] access to data, institutions and outlets for research dissemination; and the likelihood that they will be listened to and heard.

If affiliation helps a researcher to establish institutional legitimacy, *guanxi* helps connect the researcher with participants in the field. Having the right local contact in the field is crucial to how a researcher gains access to interviewees. The local contact can play several pertinent roles for a researcher coming from the outside. The local contact can take on the roles of an assistant who helps collect data, a guide to manoeuvre through

local politics, a collaborator, and an interpreter. As we shall discover later in section 2.12 the interviewees and data I was able to access in the field depended on the *guanxi* between the assistant and the participants. *Guanxi* is an importation social notion in Chinese culture. Having the right *guanxi* or connection will open many doors for people.

2.4.3 Language barrier

The third and final challenge facing researching and conducting fieldwork in China is the language barrier. The language barrier can be a frustrating experience not only for Western researchers but also for the native Chinese. Being able to speak Mandarin, or *Putonghua* 普通话 in Chinese, does not mean that a researcher is able to communicate effectively with people in the village since there are dialect and language variations across the provinces—even within the province if there is sufficient ethnic diversity in that particular province.

In the village, when an outsider speaks, the elderly might be able to understand what the outsider is saying since the person is speaking *putonghua*, the “common speech” which the people speak. The reason for this understanding is the frequent exposure to national television programs which broadcast in standardized *putonghua*. However, when the elderly speak, they speak in the local dialect. Hence, communication in the village between the researcher and the elderly can be one-way. Dialects are not taught in school so the only way to be familiar with a specific dialect is to immerse oneself in the environment where the dialect is spoken—this requires considerable investment of time and energy. At many coach stations in small towns, there usually are signs which ask people to use *Putonghua* when conducting business with the staff. The author will make clear the significance of being able to speak the local dialect in section 2.15.

2.5 Site Selections

In March 2010, I had the opportunity to present my research proposal at the British Academy PhD and Early Careers Researchers Workshop at Cambridge University. It was there that I established *guanxi* for my fieldwork. During the conference I made contacts with people who have a similar research interest as mine and asked for assistance with sponsorship. One of the first contacts who offered to assist with fieldwork was Dr. Liu Yiping of the Sichuan Academy of Social Science. Through the kindness of Dr. Liu I was able to begin my fieldwork in Sichuan in July 2010.

Though I also accepted invitations from three other provinces for fieldwork, I decided to select Sichuan as the first of my fieldwork sites because Dr. Liu also offered to arrange for a translator and accommodation with a migrant family in one of the villages in Sichuan. As a first time researcher in rural China, this opportunity was too good to miss. Additionally, I had planned to select at one least of my fieldwork sites in the inland provinces. Sichuan fitted the criteria. Moreover, Sichuan is the second largest province in China and the fourth most populated with 81.07 million people (NBS, 2014). Though Sichuan is known as the Land of Abundance and is rich in agricultural resources, the per capita GDP is relatively poor compared with other provinces. It ranks 25th out of 31 provinces and direct-control municipalities under the central government.

My fieldwork in China consisted of three stages (see Appendix 1). The first stage took place from late July to early September 2010. During the second stage from November 2010 to February 2011, I was in Anhui and Shanxi provinces, and for part of December I was back in Sichuan to follow up with data collection. The third and final stage from April to August 2011 I was based in Hong Kong. In this final stage I began to analyze data and made frequent trips back to the mainland to clarify questions that

arose from the fieldwork transcript and follow up on the exploratory research about Sichuan that I had intended to do at the beginning of fieldwork.

2.6 Approach to the Study and Research Instruments

Even though I conducted fieldwork in three villages in three different provinces, the data I used for my writing up of this thesis is mainly from my time in Sichuan. The reason for only using the Sichuan data will be made clear in subsequent sections of this chapter. Hence, the result of this is based on my adaptation of a case study approach which involved ethnographic study and in-depth interviews with migrant families. Case study research attempts to examine closely a particular instance of people, topics, issues, or programs (Hays, 2004). Its “aim is to illustrate the general by looking at the particular” (Denscombe, 2003: 30). That is, insights gained from looking at individual cases can have wider implications for society.

Dru Gladney (2003) having spent 20 plus years of field research in China suggests that it is unwise to do multi-sited research especially when it comes to China. The rationale for this is based on the maxim that “the structuralist tradition attempted to carry out extensive analyses of one community, generally a village, that was as inclusive as possible of every possible aspects of social life. In China anthropology, this was generally translated to mean that any single village, commune, or lineage could be studied as an abstraction to the “whole” of Chinese Society in General” (2003: 3). Further, Gladney suggests “that one should work in one site, with one people, or at least problem, over a specific period of time. By working with [multiple people], the projects seeks to be less focused on the nation-state, than on the issues facing the peoples caught between two or more nation-states” (2003: 4).

When it comes to fieldwork in China, I am inclined to agree with Gladney's assessment of single-sited rather than multi-sited research. With regional variations in economic, social, and political development and dialect, conducting multi-sited research in China can lead to challenges.

Case study is by no mean a representation of society as a whole, especially for a country the size of China. In addition to having spent time on the ground in three different fieldwork sites, I also travelled extensively in China. During my travels, I was able to engage with people from many provinces of China and observed the variations in culture, climate, terrain, transportation, which in turn have an impact on people's life. These environmental and social factors in turn affect how people migrate. For example, the location of Meijia, my fieldwork site, is remote and still underdeveloped. The village has a population of 13,000 but it has not reached a stage where it can function by itself in term of daily market activities. The centre of the city has a number of shops for dry and durable goods, but the village only gathers for a wet market nine times a month³. On market days, products such as meat, fruits, and perishable goods are transported in. By contrast, the villages in Anhui and Shanxi are more developed, so people can easily access markets on a daily basis. There are big contrasts in lifestyle and comfort levels between Meijia and the other two sites. Families in Meijia do not have refrigerators. Some do not own a telephone. In the villages of Anhui and Shanxi, however, most families have refrigerators and all have telephones. The economic situation and geographic location also affect migration patterns. Economically, Meijia is not as well to do as the other two fieldwork locations and migrants there are yearlong migrants rather than seasonal. In Shanxi, many of the migrants are seasonal. Migrants only go out in the slow season. That is the period between planting and harvesting. There is not much

³ Market days occur on dates that end in 2, 5, 8: 2nd, 5th, 8th, 12th, 15th, 18, 22nd, 25th, and 28th

work to do on a farm during this period. Farming still contributes a significant part to their income. People go out to work to supplement household income. As seasonal migrants, they do not migrate so far as the people in Meijia. These migrants have more face-to-face contact with their families than the migrants in Sichuan.

My study is not a comprehensive or definitive study of migrant families in China, but a sample of families in Meijia during this period of rapid economic transition and modernization in their life. My role there was to study how their lives were shaped in the changing world. Although the case study approach of a particular village is not intended to portray or represent Chinese society as a whole, Yan (2003) suggests that since all the Chinese have lived under the same socialist state since 1949, most social issues and dilemmas that families are dealing with are similar for people everywhere in China. These issues do not exist in the vacuum of China, but are relevant to people around the world.

In my case study of migrant families in Meijia, I used multiple sources of evidence. My primary data is based on the ethnographic experience of living with a migrant family and in-depth interviews with 39 families in Meijia. In addition to these primary data, I also relied on the secondary data of government statistics, documentation, and news reports to supplement my primary data. When I first planned for fieldwork, I planned for a two-stage research in the field. The first stage would be the exploratory stage where I would explore the social and environment context of the fieldwork site. The second stage would be the actual interviews with migrant families.

The aim of the exploratory stage would be to seek an understanding of the social, economic, and political settings in the village that I would be studying through talking with village officials and looking at archival materials such as village and census data in order to obtain the big picture of village life. This would be used as the background for

my analysis. As Davis and Harrell (1993) have suggested, no research in Chinese studies can be complete unless it is also concerned with the state and with the economy. Exploratory research examines key variables in detail to gain insight into a developing approach to an existing situation (Brink & Wood, 1998).

Seeking to understand local structure and village life, and insights gained from interactions with local officials, observation, and archival materials would help in identifying the course of action in selecting families for in-depth interview. During this exploratory stage, the intention would be not to study the family themselves, but to seek to understand issues that deal with migrant families. Seeking to understand local structure and village life, and insights gained from interactions with local officials, observation, and archival materials would help in identifying the course of action in selecting families for in-depth interview. During this exploratory stage, the intention would be not to study the families themselves, but to seek to understand issues that deal with migrant families.

Due to time and social constraints that would require extensive preliminary preparation both on my part and on that of my sponsor, I was not able to conduct fieldwork in this two-stage process. I did not have the luxury of spending time on the ground to survey the setting of the land, talking with village officials, and studying archival material, since my assistant was only able to come home during the summer and in academic breaks. Once I arrived in Meijia my assistant and I went directly into interviewing migrant families.

My research instrument (Appendix 2 – Fieldwork Topic Guide) consisted of a thematic guideline which I developed based on the objectives of the study listed above to engage in conversation with interviewees. The interviews were semi-structured and began with general conversation about migration and livelihood before dwelling on

specific details. Although I carried the topic guide as I interviewed people, it was rarely referred to since my assistant and I were well versed in the topics that we wanted to cover. Often there were questions that we did not ask but we picked up information from the conversation.

One of the advantages of not having a questionnaire is the freedom to engage with the interviewees. It is said that the Chinese government keeps extensive data on rural China and that surveys are often carried out in China. Sometimes people do not or cannot distinguish whether a specific study is being conducted by academic researchers or by a government agency. This confusion is due to the fact that academic researchers are not free to roam around freely to conduct interviews themselves. In some cases, a government official or delegate would accompany the academic researcher during the interview process. For this reason I decided against using a formal research instrument. In *Doing Fieldwork in China*, previous researchers such as Solinger (2006) also suggest that the interview process needs to be informal. Occasionally notes might be taken, especially when respondents said things (ideas, concepts, places, and names) that the interviewer might not understand or be familiar with; so respondents helped by writing down a word for the researcher to look up later. This served as a clarification tool for the researcher rather than a method of recording data.

Because of dialect problems, I worked with my assistant to go over my topic guide and to translate it into Chinese. We first translated it into standard Chinese and then set it aside for a few days, but later came back and translated it from that version into Sichuan dialect and simplified it into ordinary language, so that villagers could understand it. We set aside a few days to discuss the topic guide in detail so that my assistant would fully understand the questions.

2.7 Assistant and Collaborator in the Field

The first step of conducting fieldwork in China is to seek sponsorship.

Sponsorship often arranges for assistants in the field. Good assistants are invaluable since they are the researcher's collaborators in the field. Assistants can have multiple roles: informant, translator, and guide. In an ideal situation, the assistant would hold all three roles. Let me briefly describe what these three roles entail:

- (1) An *informant* is a participant in the interview/study who answers the researcher's questions in the study. The informant provides data which the researcher utilizes for the study.
- (2) A *translator* opens up the communication between the researcher and the informants. The translator is a go-between the researcher and the informants/participants. The translator is important for fieldwork in China not so much because of the language barrier between English and Chinese, but because of regional dialect variations between provinces. A researcher can be fluent in Mandarin, yet may be helpless in rural areas due to dialects. This is even true for native Chinese researchers when they enter places which do not share the same dialect as their own. It is important to have a translator who understands your research objective because sometimes through their act of translation they interpret the conversation between researcher and informant. This at times can influence the outcome of the interview in ways which are not the intention of the researcher.
- (3) A *guide* acts as a local contact who introduces the researcher to the community. Guides not only introduce the researcher to the community but at times also help select informants for the researcher.

I was fortunate to have Ms. Wen Mengchuan, a postgraduate at the Sichuan Academy of Social Science, as my assistant and collaborator during my fieldwork in

Meijia. She was my informant, guide, and translator. All my interview sessions in Meijia went very smoothly because Ms. Wen knew every single family in the village and was very comfortable with them. We usually began by having Ms. Wen to introduce me to the villagers and explain my interest in learning about their lives.

Often we started the interview by inquiring about their health, well-being, and missing migrant members. By slow transitions in the conversation Ms. Wen then asked for information about migrant members – where they were currently working, how long, what they were doing, etc. She would ask people questions about income, how much they made, and how much money they received from their children. This approach allowed us to elicit information from our participants without too direct questioning and helping interviewees feel at ease.

For those able to understand standard mandarin I would be the one asking the questions, but for the elderly in the village, my assistant would ask the questions in the local dialect. I could follow keywords. From time to time I would stop and ask her to translate the conversation and then we would continue our conversation. Since she knew all the interviewees, almost all the interviews seemed more like conversations than interviews.

The research questions were mine, but her ways of engaging, interpreting, and inviting people to respond were very different from my experience in the other villages where local authorities/cadres assisted me.

The interview process in Meijia was a collaborative process between my assistant and me. When interviewing migrant workers and young parents who were once themselves migrants, I asked the questions since they were able to understand and respond in standard *putonghua*, whereas, when interviewing the elderly, my assistant took the lead in asking questions.

We had no time limit for the interview and just sat and chatted until the conversation was exhausted or it was time for people to get back to other tasks. Sometimes this was three or four hours later. At the end of each interview, we would enter family data onto a spreadsheet program. People were excited to look at the computer; for many of the villagers this was the first time they had seen a computer in real life.

Figure 1. Mrs. Song Pei Xiu observing Ms. Wen Mengchuan entering data into the computer.



As explained earlier in this section, it is important to have a research assistant/collaborator who clearly understands your own research questions and objectives, since they can, through their translation/interpretation, color your investigation. As we will discuss below, this was evident in Shanxi – where my dependence on local officials very much influenced my ability to contact and interview

village informants. My experience in Meijia was ideal because Ms. Wen was not only a translator and guide, but she was a member of the village, so people trusted her implicitly. Living in the same household as my assistant/collaborator, I had continual access to her expertise. We were able to remain in constant dialogue. My inquiry about a particular informant/topic did not end with the interview/conversation with the informant. When we were at home, I was able to go over the interview notes/data and continue the conversation with Ms. Wen about the day's sessions. She not only helped explain what the informant said, but also provided information about the particular person/family that we had interviewed during the day. At times when she could not provide answers to my inquiry, her parents contributed. In many ways, Ms. Wen was not my only collaborator – her parents, too, provided crucial information through many informal conversations about village life and particular families. This was not available in my experience in Shanxi.

Figure 2. Mrs. Wen helping Ms. Wen clarifying data from the village during dinner time.



2.8 The Ethnographic Experience: Being on the Ground

In all my interviews I found that people were extremely hospitable. No matter what activities they were engaged in at the time, they dropped everything and attended to my assistant and me. Not a single person refused our interview. In many instances it seemed that time did not exist since we stayed and chatted for three to four hours on contemporary social issues. Many people were curious and stopped and joined in the conversations during the interviews

I found the rural people to be honest, straight-forward, and easy to talk with. They were not afraid to speak their mind. For example, when I asked my host family's mother if she was happy that her husband was at home, she replied that she was happy

but would be happier if the husband brought home more money. She was not the only one who said this during the course of my fieldwork/interview in the village.

Only once did I feel that I was intruding on people's lives – when a man went and fetched a nail clipper to clip his toe nails. His behavior was normal for rural village people, but for a researcher like me who is accustomed to a Western lifestyle, this was something that one only does in private, so it did feel like intruding.

People in Meijia were curious to see a foreigner coming to their village to conduct fieldwork. They often asked about whether I was able to adjust to the simple lifestyle of rural life. I answered that while I was growing up in similar social conditions in Vietnam, I had also encountered situations like theirs. Having a similar background to the villagers, I found it was easier to talk with them. At times it seemed that there was no boundary between them and me. In some instances, we just sat and conversed until the sky turned dark and then had to hurry home. There are no streetlights in Meijia; the only light comes from people's houses which is sparse since houses are very few and far apart. There are no paved roads from house to house. Houses are separated by fields and walking paths are dykes between fields.

Sometimes people saw us going to other people's houses for interview and would stop us on the road or stop by my assistant's house and ask when we would be interviewing them. People were quite curious. Often they asked us to stay and have a meal with them. I felt that their invitations were quite sincere perhaps because they knew that I could easily adapt to their simple lifestyle, or because they had not seen my assistant for some time and wanted to catch up with her to learn about life in the city. For these reasons, they would invite us to linger a bit longer to talk about her life and her study in Chengdu and my life in the UK and the US. Village life is mundane and our presence perhaps brought fresh perspective to their conversations.

2.9 My host family

By my estimation I would say that my host family was one of the poorest in the village. Their house was still made of mud wall since they did not have money to build a modern house like their neighbors'. The roof of the kitchen and the living room where I slept often leaked whenever there was a big rain storm. The father had been in construction work in Chengdu, but had not been paid for about two months, so left early after a disagreement with the foreman. The father first went to Chengdu for work in 2004 at the age of 51, an age where most migrant workers would be winding down their work, rather than just beginning to migrate for work. The reason for him going out to work was that their daughter, my assistant, began college so they needed money to pay for her tuition. So far, the family had borrowed over 20,000 Yuan to finance her education. At the time when she first began college, her family was so poor that they could not afford to pay for the electricity. In order to read at night she had to light a candle. She was the first woman on either side of her family to attend college, so the family was proud of her. Her maternal grandmother had opposed the idea of her attending college because she thought that girls did not need education. Due to her success, her grandmother had a change of heart and has now moved to Nanbu to look after one of her cousins, who is in her last year of secondary school and is now preparing for a university examination.

Figure 3. Mr & Mrs. Wen Zeyou and Ms. Wen Mengchuan, my host family and my assistant.



Figure 4. Front view of the Wen's family home, my host family.



The mother maintains the house and does most of the farming by herself. In addition to farming, she supplements her income by selling eggs in a market. On a typical day she spends more than two hours in each direction from her home to the market and back. When she reaches the market, she buys eggs from a wholesaler and resells them to individual shoppers. It normally takes her three to four hours to sell 200 eggs and net income is about 20 RMB (3 USD/2GBP) a day. Upon returning home, she works on the farm. The family has limited resources indeed.

Living with a host family in the village has its pros and cons. I would say that the pros outweigh the cons. I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to live with a local family where I was able to observe the day to day life activity of my host family and did not have to formally interview them. I got to watch television and discuss current events with her family. It is through television that village people get to connect with the outside world. Meals with the family were social and learning time for me. Each day I would ask the name of the dish and ask how much it would cost to buy the ingredients to prepare the meal. Often the mother and daughter would compare the prices between village and city.

In a remote place like rural China where daily activity is still pre-modern in many ways, farming people are conscious about using resources that would cost money. My assistant's mother was very conscious about using electricity since it cost money. No matter whether it was light or dark outside, when it was cloudy and raining I would sit in the family room with the light on, and the mother would come in turn off the light. Her rationale was that it is daytime so not necessary to turn on the light since it consumes electricity. On average the electric bill came to around 20 RMB a month which is equal to one day's wage.

We had a lot of jokes and fun in the family. For example, I would bathe (with a basin) everyday in front of their yard, and at first the father or daughter would come out and fan me because of mosquitoes. I demurred, so eventually they stopped. But I had to fight with the mother for a few days because I washed my own clothes after I bathed. The mother then kidded me, saying that I washed my own clothes because I thought she didn't wash my clothes well enough.

Figure 5. The author bathing at night in the front of the Wen's family courtyard.



Figure 6. The author washing clothes after the evening bath.



2.10 Blending in with the Locals

Though people in Meijia began to migrate soon after economic reform in China, Meijia remains an underdeveloped place (the social/economic conditions of Meijia are discussed in the next chapter). People do not have running water or modern facilities. Water is pumped from the ground into containers stored in the kitchen, toilets are outhouses, and bathing is done by washing oneself with a basin inside the storage area or in the yard. A number of families still live in straw thatched roof or mud houses, including my host family. Up to now, I have been to China on a number of occasions for personal travel, language studies, and conferences, but this was my first stay in a rural village, so I did not know how to prepare for it. I struggled with several allergies and rashes while in Meijia during my first month.

I tried to blend in and adapt to local living conditions. My host family was relatively poor so I tried not to impose on them while I was with them. I resisted having them prepare special meals and asked that I only eat what they would normally eat. Our meals were very simple. Often there was rice mixed with vegetable to enhance the flavor. At other times it would be just corn, rice and one vegetable dish. When the father was home, we would have meat from time to time. I was not sure if the meat was for me or for the father, but when I asked my assistant about it, she said that her father liked to eat meat and drink alcohol.

Figure 7. The Wen's family living/dining room which also served as my sleeping quarters.



Living with a host family can create misunderstandings among the villagers. Our meal was quite simple so that neighbors who dropped by to visit my host were surprised at the bare necessity of my living conditions (social visits in rural China are

unannounced. People come and go as convenient. They come and chat until they are ready to move on). If people happened to drop by during mealtimes, my host would set another place and invite them to share our meal. Sometimes people refused and at other times they would join in. Many people were surprised that my host only served simple meals without meat, which they would need to spend considerable amount of money to buy.

Figure 8. Dinner with the Wen family sometimes as simple as just boiled sweetcorns.



One of the challenges that I faced at meal times was to discern how much food I should eat. My host was extremely gracious. She persistently wanted to refill my plate. If I ate too much of a certain type of food she might think that I might prefer that food so would feel obliged to buy more of that type. With no running water, there are no bathroom facilities like the West. The bathroom is often an outhouse next to the house

and some families have piggens next to it. Eating too much during the day would surely require a visit to the toilet during the night, which I did not look forward to since the outhouse was a breeding ground for mosquitoes. However, not eating all the prepared food was also a problem. Unlike city life, resources in rural areas are scarce. Most families in Meijia do not have a refrigerator, which could keep and preserve leftover food. Rural people preserve leftover food by putting it in a double-layer container and placing it in the water tank to keep cool at room temperature.

Figure 9. The Wen's family kitchen.



Figure 10. Rural “refrigerator” in the Wen’s family.



I observed that some people did not bath every day nor wash their clothes, but being used to taking a shower everyday and because I had brought only two changes of clothes while I was in the village, I showered and washed my clothes every day. When hanging my clothes to dry, I would hang in the normal way of inside in and outside out, but my host kept reversing my clothes by hanging them outside in and the inside out. The reason was that they wanted the outside to be clean when they wear their clothes, but for me, I was not too concerned with having the outside clean because I was washing it every day. I was more concerned with keeping the inside in because I did not want to get any bugs on me.

Since Meijia is a remote place, I reckon it would be difficult for Caucasians to be in the village for an extended length of time for it would attract attention, especially in

some of the places where I was. Many people have not seen a foreigner, let alone a Caucasian foreigner.

2.11 Consent, Data Collection and Processing

In this study, I only use data from the Sichuan fieldwork site for my analysis. Data from the Anhui and Shanxi provinces are only used in a contextual setting to enrich and inform my understanding of China.

Initially I wanted to utilize snowball sampling techniques and recruit approximately 30 families to study. Families were to be selected with the following characteristics: families with a returned migrant, families with both parents as migrants, families with mothers as migrants, families without migrants. This approach was to gather a variety of family samples for the purpose of comparison. However, having arrived at Meijia and learned about the lay-out of the village, I concluded that it was more suitable to utilize clustering techniques. The three communes neighboring my assistant/interpreter's house were selected (since she knew every family in these three communes) and then every family in these three communes was recruited for interview. Not only were all the families willing to participate, but some also stopped by my assistant's house and inquired when we would be coming to their house.

Participants' consent was verbal since written consent was not appropriate for rural areas (and many parts of China) due to cultural and political reasons. Chinese rural informants are wary of official letters and forms in general since the government offices often carry out various surveys. In addition, there is the illiteracy issue, and asking rural Chinese people to sign consent will raise unnecessary suspicions among both the participants and also the local authority. In many instances of research interviews in rural China, consent was given by participants and by the local authority since the

researcher was accompanied by a local minder/authority during the interview process. Local contact and the minder provide additional assurance of researcher competence and consent by the participants. In Sichuan Province, I was accompanied by a local resident acting as interpreter, whereas, in Anhui and Shanxi Provinces I was accompanied by an official minder from the local authority.

The interviews took place not only in homes but also in the fields where people were working. On several occasions we also went to the lake shore where people were washing their clothes and had conversations with people there.

As I explained early in the assistant/collaborator section, every day I would look over my field notes jotting down impressions that I had on the family we interviewed and would ask my assistant to fill in the gaps regarding the parts that I had missed earlier. At times during the interview, if I thought of new questions, I would ask my assistant to help with these questions.

I carried a voice recorder with me all the time. With the consent of the informants, all my interviews/conversations with the villagers were recorded. These interviews were transcribed by one of Ms. Wen's colleagues at the Sichuan Academy of Social Science. Though I am more or less able to read the Chinese transcription, for the accuracy of translation/interpretation I sought the help of Ms. Zhang Xi, a former MSc student in the Oxford University Social Policy and Intervention department to help translate the transcript line-by-line into English. It was these Chinese/English transcripts that I utilized to analyze my data.

2.12 Dilemmas and Challenges of Fieldwork in Rural China

Many Western researchers have acknowledged that doing fieldwork in China poses many challenges and dilemmas due to political circumstances (see *Doing*

Fieldwork in China by Heimer & Thogersen, 2006). Fieldwork in China is a challenge even to native researchers because of the complexities of the political environment. I had to take this into consideration during my field work.

Heimer's *Doing Fieldwork in China* (2006) reports that the Chinese government has a long history of carrying out fieldwork such as surveys at the lowest level of society. As a result, informants may be suspicious of academic research since many think that whatever the researcher investigates is nothing but an extension of a government survey. This confusion is due to the fact that academic researchers are not free to roam around to conduct interviews freely themselves. In some cases, a government official or delegate would accompany the academic researchers during the interview process.

2.13 Unhindered Access versus Official Minders

In China, it is very difficult for outsiders, especially researchers, to enter a village and conduct fieldwork without first consulting the appropriate authorities. My sponsors at the Sichuan Academy of Social Science, the East China University of Science and Technology, and the Shanxi Academy of Social Science helped set up local contacts and wrote referral letters that my local contacts carried with them during the duration of fieldwork.

As a foreigner going to rural China doing fieldwork, one must be extra vigilant about it. In many places, unless you have clearance from the government, you will not be able to engage with locals or you will be monitored and reported. When I first arrived in the village, a number of people mistook me for a government official and thought that I had connections with the higher-ups so at times sought for assistance from me. They likely thought that my presence there was sanctioned by the government.

Murphy (2002) and Wahyuni (2000) report that when interview sessions were accompanied by village or local officials they could provide valuable assistance in helping to arrange the site, set up the interview, and open up new avenues for inquiry (Murphy 2002). However, it can be a hindrance to the study, and it can be disruptive. The village official can help the respondent answer particular questions or translate questions into a local dialect to make them clearer to the respondents. However, the official might become too involved in the interview and take over the role of the researcher. Having experienced fieldwork in three different provinces under different circumstances, I can testify that local officials can be both an asset and a hindrance. Often, they would answer questions without being asked, or at times respond that the particular information was not important so did not need to be interpreted.

A number of people likely believed that, “since he can do research, he must have some relationship at the top. He must help us,” or “he must know somebody and that is why he can investigate around” or “since he is going from house, he must have some relationship with the top.” Since people perceived that I had an affiliation with a government official, they often sought my help in claiming benefits (earthquake and flood assistance) from the central government that have not reached them due to the siphoning off of funds by the local cadre. Others mistook me for a reporter working for Xinhua News Agency. In all these encounters, I had to politely decline their requests and simply stated that I am just a student doing research for my doctoral thesis.

The data sets from my three fieldwork sites clearly indicate that there were differences between having an assistant who was a local resident and an assistant who was an official minder. Conversations between the villagers and my assistant and me were open and honest. People were not holding back their views of the local government. They were not hesitant to voice their concerns, frustrations, and perceived injustices

dealt to them by the local cadres. Bribery, corruption, and unaccountability were common themes of complaint among the villagers.

In Meijia, I was given unhindered access to villagers as opposed to the other places where I was accompanied by cadres and local assistants. I can see how the people in Meijia mistook me for a government official conducting a household survey or having connection with government officials, because it is unusual for outsiders to roam freely in a rural village asking questions about family life.

In China, information about such topics as migration, development, and family life can be deemed as sensitive materials and is highly guarded by the government. It is understood that such information is a state secret and can only be revealed by government. Even though researchers are given access to conduct fieldwork and gathering data, it does not mean that one is freely able to publish the information. Therefore, in highly bureaucratic places such as Anhui and Shanxi Provinces, government official and cadres were more sensitive in sharing information with outsiders. On my very first day in Anhui Province, for reasons unknown to my local contact (the deputy director of the local family planning unit), I was asked by the local police not to conduct fieldwork in the area that my local contact had arranged. I was only in that village less than an hour when the police came and escorted me to another village. They said that particular village is not suitable for my interviews and took me to another village. Likewise, in Shanxi where I was officially sponsored by the Shanxi Academy of Social Science, on several occasions my assistant was asked by the local cadres whether I had been cleared and it was safe for them to talk to me.

In Shanxi and Anhui, I relied on official guides/translators, and so conversations were different in many ways. First, the fact that I was working with officials could have affected the selection of informants (though it appeared to be random), the questions

asked and the responses given. In addition, interview sessions were intensely formal. Questions and answers were strikingly succinct and to the point. It required considerable effort to obtain more in-depth, qualitative information. I was forced to rely on my topics guide checklist to a greater extent. Conversely, interview sessions in Meijia were informal and friendly, and respondents were much more loquacious. Our conversations with the neighbors were like friends catching up with each other after a long period of separation. We just let the conversation run its course until it was natural to move on because people were about to have meals or sunset forced us to hurry home rather than find our way home through darkening rice fields. Indeed, it was friends catching up with each other who have not seen each other for a while. My assistant brought news from the outside world to the villagers, the villagers filled her in about people and events that occurred since the last time they met. My role was to bring news from afar, from another universe which they only heard about on television.

2.14 Bystander or Passive Communal Participation

In rural China, researchers have to weigh answers not only from the respondent of the interview, but also from interpreters and bystanders. Translators sometimes inject their own interpretation or do not translate answers fully. This was the case for me in Shanxi where I would ask the questions in *Putonghua* and many people understood the questions, but their answers were in dialect and, as I might not understand them because of my limited knowledge of *Putonghua*, I had to rely on a translator. In general I understood the response, but from time to time I would check with my assistant for confirmation of what the responder just said – and at times, my assistant would say “it is not important” and not translate for me. This was confirmed by one of my assistants in

Sichuan who helped transcribe my transcripts. In many instances she said that the translator had not translated fully or mistranslated.

The interpreters or bystanders often would also answer the questions. Interpreters would ask questions or give comments which could interfere with the direction I wanted to pursue. As for private conversations and one-on-one interviews, this notion is also different from what researchers normally experience in the West. In my time in rural China, people just stopped by to listen and talk. In many instances, bystanders would freely volunteer to answer even if the questions were not intended for them. Fieldwork in rural China requires a different mindset than an urban setting. In the village like Meijia where everything is communal, you might not have a private setting like you have in other places.

In rural China, it is difficult to explain to people the concept of giving signed consent or individual private interview. First, many elderly are illiterate so they can't understand what they sign. Second, unlike the west, signing a document in rural China is very formal since many people do not know how to write their name, they will have to depend on those who are literate to read and explain to them what they are signing. Finally, Chinese writing is complex, so people often accompany signing their name with a jade/stone seal and fingerprint as a substitute for the signature. The process is like a notary seal in the West.

With bystanders and different interpretations by translators, one must carefully interpret what respondents want to say given the constraints of the interview context. It is definitely a case of "reading between the lines." Boundaries are fluid in rural China: the part of the village where I conducted my fieldwork was quite isolated. Boundaries are well defined by the river to the south, mountainous hills to both east and west, and on towards the north a wide road separated the community formed by the three dui (队).

Dui is a Chinese word meaning a brigade, a squad, a team, or a unit such as military, police corps, or a sports team. In our situation, it designated a production team/unit. The term was used during the collectivism period to divide village households into production units.

Due to its isolation, people in Meijia still live a very communal lifestyle and privacy boundaries are fluid. Families that do not have a telephone will rely on using their neighbor's when needed. The concept of privacy and individual interview do not exist in Meijia. During my interviews with participants, neighbors would drop by and chat, often chiming into the conversations. People would come and go. Therefore, most of my sessions with my participants were in the form of conversations rather than formal interview sessions where a researcher checks off a list. It was from these conversations that I extracted the data for the thesis.

2.15 Reading Between the Lines

If the interviewer knows the interviewees well, as in the case of Meijia where my assistant was from the area, people will converse and answer your questions readily. For places like Anhui and Shanxi where neither I or the local cadre who accompanied me knew the participants well, informants were less comfortable, and their answers were sometimes indirect or they would just reply to my questions in the form of the question that I had just asked them. In order to get clear answers from interviewees, one needs to give examples to clarify questions, keep questions simple and specific, and sometimes press people for direct responses. All of these strategies are more difficult to implement, however, when there is a lack of familiarity between interviewers, translators and informants.

In Meijia, Sichuan, I was very fortunate to have an assistant who was not only my translator, but also my entree into village life. I stayed with her family and observed their everyday life. I got the chance to visit her grandmother and aunt in the city where I interviewed her cousins who were preparing for university exams.

Respondents may not answer questions directly. They might reply to what you just asked them in the form of a question. At times, for complex questions, my assistant and I would need to give examples to people to help clarify the question. Research needs to be able to speak the language of the people: both questions and vocabulary need to be in the context of the villagers so they can understand what you are talking about. For example, when I first gave my assistant my research questionnaire, which I had prepared before arriving in Meijia, my assistant laughed at me. She said that no one in the village would understand my academic language. She helped me revise the materials so that villagers would easily understand them.

2.16 Conclusion and Acknowledgement

Fieldwork in China is a difficult maze to navigate. It requires patience and sufficient time to line up the proper paper work. Even if you make it to the village, village officials might not allow you to work there. In ideal settings, the researcher would be able to speak the local dialect so as not to depend on an assistant for translation and accessibility. Living with a host family is a tremendous advantage, but also brings concerns about gossip and concern by the neighbors. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to live with my assistant's family during my time in Sichuan. This privilege allowed me to observe and experience the intimacy and close up of the day-to-day activity of a migrant family. Through her family, I had first-hand knowledge and was

able to experience the day-to-day activities of how a contemporary migrant family in rural China adjusts to changes as it is trying to catch up with modernity.

Chapter Three

Meijia: in the Context of Local and National Environments

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the socioeconomic and political environments of Meijia, Sichuan province. It serves as background and context in light of the research questions that are addressed and how the results are analyzed and interpreted. The purpose is to provide insight into local and national policies that impact rural families and furthermore explain how rural families respond to the circumstances that eventually led to mass out-migration of labourers obtaining resources for livelihood and survival.

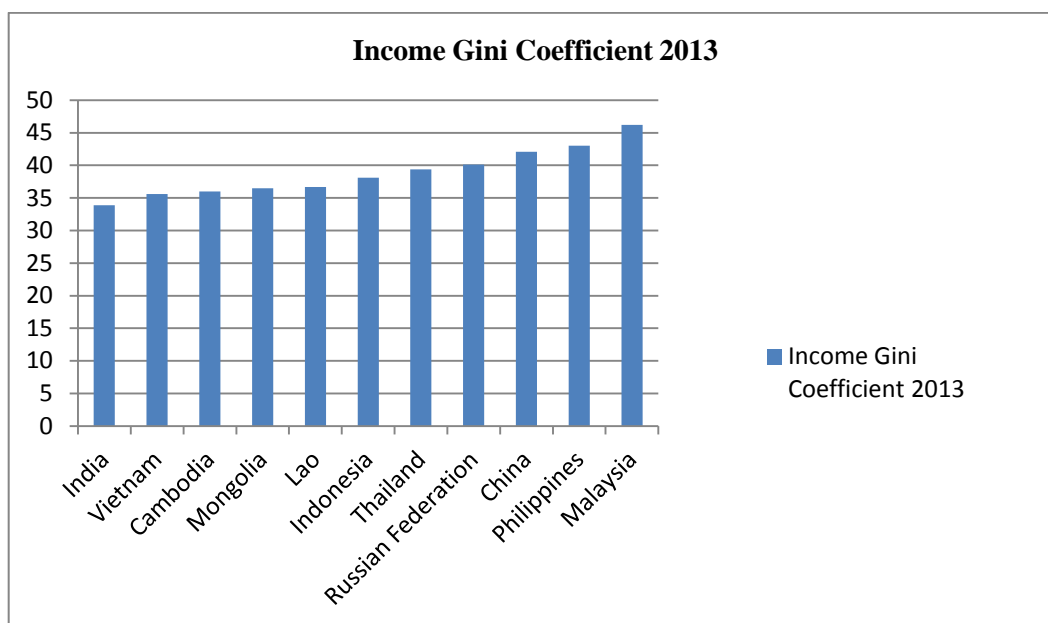
Demographic, economic, and social indicators of China, Sichuan Province, and Meijia Township will be presented. We will revisit the One-Child policy and the *hukou* policy, and their impacts on rural families. The chapter consists of eight sections. After this introductory section, section two examines economic indicators since market-reforms in China. Sections three and four revisit the *hukou* and One-Child policies. Section five examines recent changes in national policies—land tenure, agricultural reform, tax reform, peasant burden, and corruption—which have implications for rural household. Section six looks the geographical landscape of China and presents social and demographic data on Meijia Township. Section seven concludes the chapter with a brief portrait of 25 families that were interviewed for the study.

3.2 Economic Indicators of China since Market Reforms

It is nearly unimaginable that in just 30 years, China has moved from an egalitarian centrally planned economy to one of the world's most inequitable in its spatial and class distribution of income and wealth. In 2013, it had an income Gini

coefficient of 42.1. China's inequality stands higher than most of its neighbours. A comparison of China's Gini index with its neighbours is illustrated in Figure 11. China's Gini index exceeds that of most of its neighbours' except for the Philippines and Malaysia.

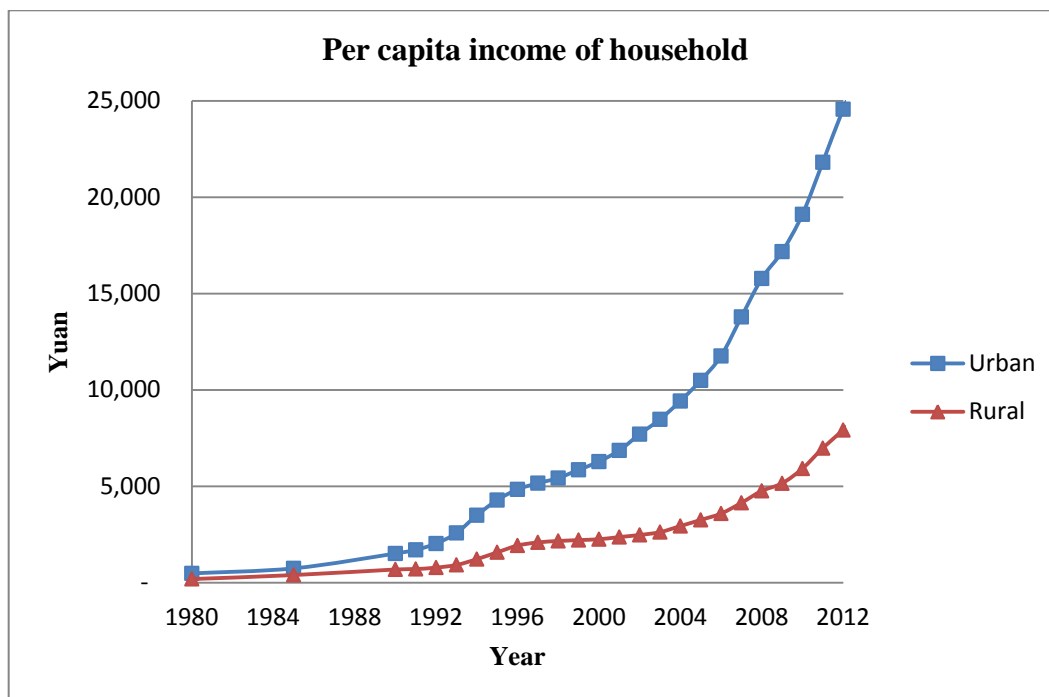
Figure 11. Comparison of Gini inequality of China and its neighbours.



Source: *World Development Indicators 2013*, World Bank (2013)

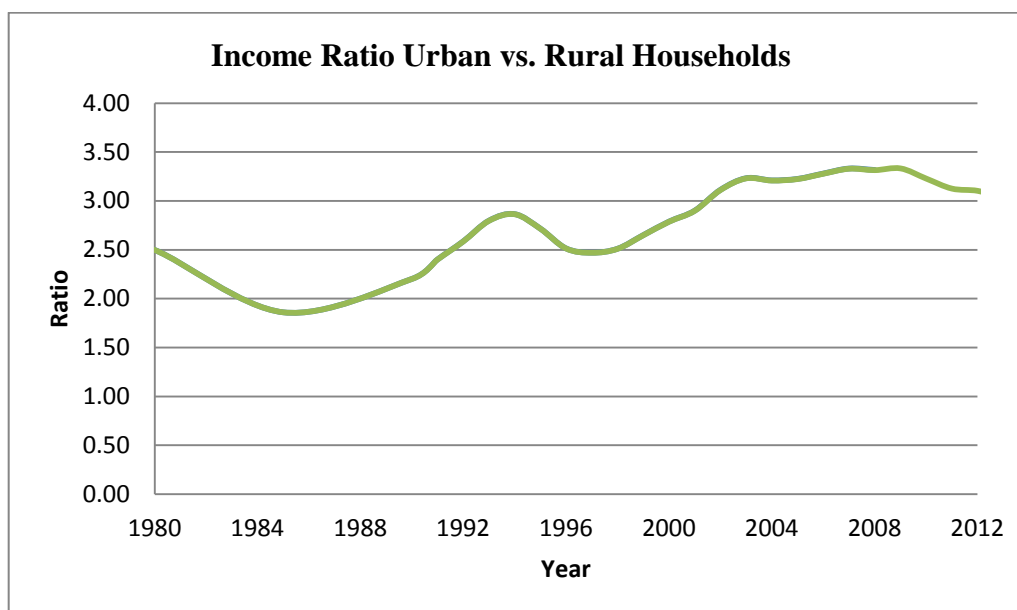
With unprecedented economic growth, China's per capita household income for both urban and rural households has increased more than 40 times since market reforms. While there is significant increase in both sectors, income has consistently been higher for urban than for rural households. In 1980, urban households had a per capita income of 478 yuan while rural households had 197 yuan. Three decades later, in 2012 these figures increased to 24,565 and 7,917 yuan respectively (NBS, 2014). Income inequality between urban and rural households can be seen in Figure 12 which illustrates income inequalities between urban and rural households since market reforms.

Figure 12. Per capita income for urban and rural household since market reforms



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2014

The ratio of per capital income of urban to rural households has increased from 2.50 in 1980 to 3.10 in 2012 (Figure 13). Since 2002, rural household income has been about one third of urban household income. Thus, income inequality has widened since the market reforms.

Figure 13. Income ratio of urban and rural households

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2014

The inequalities in Chinese household incomes have increased considerably as China's economy grows. Inequalities first occurred in the rural (agricultural) sector beginning with decollectivization where some farmers accumulated surplus goods beyond what others did. In the urban sector, the movement started in the early 1990s as the national economy opened up to foreign direct investment and the number of people employed in the state-owned-enterprises (SOEs) with egalitarian pay structures decreased. Inequality levels started off at a very low level, but over time have increased significantly (OECD, 2010).

3.2.1 Economic Indicators of Sichuan

The market plays an important role in the increase of household income inequalities, but political and social conditions are major factors which contribute to the widening of the gap. Sichuan is one of the most populated provinces in China. In 2013 it had a population of 81.07 million people, ranked 4th out of 31 provinces and

municipalities in China. It had a GDP of 2.38 trillion yuan, ranked 9th in the country. In 1978, Sichuan per capita income was 262 *yuan*, 119 *yuan* (31.23%) less than the national average of 381 *yuan*. In 2013, the per capita income increased to 32,454 *yuan* as compare to 41,908 *yuan* (77%) of national average, and was ranked 24th in the nation (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2014).

It has seen considerable economic progress in the past three decades. From 1978 to 1999 it had an annual GDP growth rate from 1978 to 1999 of 9.8, just a bit lower than the national average of 9.9. From 2000 to 2012 its GDP growth rate of 12.4 was better than the national average of 10.1. Sichuan has done better than the national average since 2000 with the implementation of the Open Up the West Campaign. Even though GDP growth rate is better than the national average, GDP per capita is still low relative to the country average. Figure 14 compares the GDP growth rate of Sichuan and China between 1980 and 2012.

Figure 14. Sichuan vs. China GDP growth rate, 1980-2012



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2014

Sichuan, the birthplace of Deng Xiaoping⁴, became the first province to abolish collective agriculture and initiated state-owned enterprise reforms, and has done well, but overall still lags behind the national average, especially compared with those of the eastern provinces. McNally (2004) suggests four factors contributed to this lagging. First, Sichuan failed to capture foreign investment by not increasing their branding and competitiveness on the national and international stages. At the same time, Sichuan's large population (fourth largest province in terms of population) became an important market for firms from eastern coastal provinces. Second, throughout China's history Sichuan has always been a recipient of migrants, but with market reform it faced increased population pressures. Agricultural reforms and technological advances led to a large labour surplus. Between 1990 and 2005 Sichuan was the largest net exporter of migrant labour which accounted for 10 percent of the national net inter-provincial migration (Chan, 2008). Third, the continuous mismanagement of natural resources, such as overgrazing in high altitude grasslands areas, caused rapid environmental degradation and diminishing returns in productivity. Finally, persisting bureaucratic and local interests caused difficulty in transforming state-owned sectors.

Recognizing the disparities between the eastern seaboard and the interior western provinces, in 1999 the Central Government began the Open Up the West campaign 西部大开发 (xibu da kaifa) (McNally, 2004). The campaign is also known as the China Western Development campaign. It is a policy adapted for the western region of China which consists of Gansu, Guizhou, Qinghai, Shaanxi, and Sichuan Provinces, as well as the Yunnan, Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet, and Xinjiang Autonomous Regions, and Chongqing Municipality (see Map 4).

⁴ As noted in the previous chapters, it was Deng who instituted economic and market reforms in China after the death of Mao.

Map 4. The western region of China, 1997



Source: Bramall, 2009

These areas cover 71% of mainland China with a total population of 400 million people or 29% of the country (McNally, 2004). This vast area is rich in resources, but is comparatively less developed due to natural, social, and historical conditions. Most of China's poor populations are located in this region. The aim of the campaign is to boost China's western area so that it may catch up with the more economically prosperous eastern coastal provinces. Attempts to improve include the development of infrastructure, enticement of foreign development, increased environmental and ecological efforts such as tackling deforestation, promotion of education, and greater retention of talent flowing to richer areas (Bramall, 2009).

Sichuan province, the largest in terms of population and economic output in the western region, has greatly benefited from the campaign with rapid physical infrastructure development in its provincial capital, Chengdu; however, “the campaign has failed to reach one of its supposed objectives – to narrow the large development gap [within the area]. Income and development differentials have thus continued to increase, widening the gap between Sichuan’s affluent basin cities and their poor mountain cousins” (McNally, 2004: 30).

Sichuan’s intra-regional disparities mirror that of China’s East and West gap. The four factors (lack of outside investment, large migrant labour, environmental degradation, and bureaucratic inefficiency) suggested by McNally are dominant factors that contribute to the lagging behind of Sichuan compared to the eastern seaboard. This can also be applied to the lagging behind of Meijia Township when compared to the urban development of Sichuan.

Before discussing the social and economic development of Meijia Township we continue to examine national policies which have implications for the development of Meijia. In the next three sections, we continue to examine the *Hukou* household registration as well as looking at land tenure, agricultural and tax reform, peasant burden, and corruption at the local level.

3.3 The *Hukou* Household Registration System

In the past 60 years, the *hukou* household registration is probably the most contested policy implemented in China. The *hukou* system was introduced in the 1950s as part of the planned economy. Hansen (2001) called it a “de facto internal passport mechanism” restricting migration between rural and urban areas. It was the principal instrument used to enforce the collectivization of agriculture by keeping peasants on the

farm so that they could provide sufficient and cheap food for urban populations. The system discouraged the movement of rural populations into town since their livelihood and means of survival depended on provisions supplied by their local government. Having a *hukou* registration corresponding with one's place of residence was very important since it allowed the person to obtain housing, jobs, grain rations, education, health care, and other social benefits (Solinger, 1999; Chan & Buckingham, 2008).

After market reforms in 1978, the centrally planned economy was abandoned and state-owned-enterprises were gradually privatized. With enterprises run by the private sector, peasants were able to move into the city and seek work in these private enterprises without the requirement of a valid permit. As economic reforms deepened and the economy grew, pressure for cheap labour from inland and rural areas increased and local governments began to turn a blind eye and did not enforce regulations on these rural migrant workers since their labour benefitted the economy.

Three decades have passed since economic reforms first began and the planned economy has been abolished, yet the *hukou* registration system continues to exist. With the increased demand for labour mobility, the government has eased restrictions on *hukou* registration. The majority of peasants are now able to travel and migrate across the country. By simply filling out the appropriate paperwork and paying a fee, peasants can now officially register as temporary urban residents. Although rightfully registered as temporary residents, migrants cannot fully participate in the urban welfare system or receive other basic social benefits provided to local permanent residents (Hansen, 2001; Zhao & Li, 2008). Local governments are free to deny services and also the permits that are necessary for employment and property rental. They may also legally discriminate between permanent local residents and migrants. Scholars have argued that the social

status of these migrants parallels the status of illegal aliens living in foreign countries (Solinger, 1997).

Since the 1980s, vast numbers of migrants have left their rural villages so they can work and live in the city. It is estimated that the number of migrants has now exceeded 245 million (NBS, 2014). Many of these migrants have been in cities from the early 1980s but are still being treated as “foreigners.” The system not only discriminates against rural migrants, but also anyone who accompanies them into the city. Even children who were born in the city to migrant parents are not considered urban citizens.

Realizing that education increases productivity, local governments in recent years have pushed to ensure that all children complete their primary education. From this perspective, urban children greatly benefit, whereas rural/migrant children lose out on education (Zhao & Li, 2008). Technically, city schools are open to all children, but migrant children have to pay higher fees than local children. As result, a large proportion of the children of migrants are left behind in the villages with their grandparents. Another educational difficulty associated with *hukou* registration is the government stipulation that students must take the university entrance exams at places where they are legally registered. The content of exams varies across the country and is based on the local syllabus (OECD 2010).

Since 2000, the central government has introduced a series documents outlining China’s urbanization strategy and has stipulated that migrants and their immediate family members can obtain an urban *hukou* if they have a fixed residence and stable work in their urban location. In decentralizing the allocation of *hukou* registration, the central government now allows local offices to set up their own criteria for transfer of *hukou* registration. This stipulation does not, however, apply to the majority of migrants who do not meet the conditions set by local government.

Hukou devolution has made it more difficult for poor rural migrants to obtain urban registration. For example, in Shenzhen, Guangdong, only professionals, college graduates, major investors, and those eligible under certain national criteria are allowed to transfer their *hukou* registration (Zhao & Li, 2008). Under this policy, labour migrants are virtually excluded since most of them are poor. By only accepting those with endowed human and social capital, cities like Shenzhen continue to raise the income inequality between urban and rural regions. In 2007, Guangdong's GDP measured \$422 billion at market price, surpassing Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan, and exceeding 13 members of OECD countries (OECD 2010).

Hukou policy makes permanent migration difficult not just from villages to towns/cities, but also between cities. Official sanctions of permanent changes of residence amount to only a small percent of the population annually—this figure includes both rural to urban and inter-urban applications. It is the city government that resists allowing migrants to change registration since in doing so it would be responsible for spending extra funds to expand social benefits to them.

Migrants who lack a local *hukou* not only lose on social benefits reserved for permanent local registrants, but are also being taken advantage of in their work place. Since many migrants do not have labour contracts, they are susceptible to abuse by their employers and are not paid into social security programs (Zhang, 2003).

Owning urban *hukou* brings many benefits to parents of school age children. The primary benefit for parents of school age children is the ability to send their children to city schools since the quality of education in the countryside is quite poor. Those who have the money will send their children to township or city schools. The rest go to school in the neighboring village because education in that school is better although parents need to pay to enroll their children there. As we shall see in the next chapter, a

mother said in interview that her son told her “to send him to school [in the neighboring village where education is better] because sooner or later the family will have to pay. If we pay now, which is cheaper in middle school, then we do not have to pay higher fee in high school if he does well on his entrance exam.” As we learned earlier, students can only gain admission to high school if they achieve a certain percent on their high school exam; if they do not have the required mark, they can still attend high school, but at the town level, rather than city. Teaching quality at the town level is lower/inferior than the city schools. Students can still get into a city school if parents are willing to pay an “entrance fee”.

When migrants buy a house in the city, they risk having their lands in the village taken away because they have to transfer their *hukou*, though this is not uniformly enforced across the country or even within the province. Yet holding on to land is an important source of security for farmers (section 3.5 discusses the important of land usage). For families that are able to buy a house or apartment in the city, only the son/daughter would transfer their *hukou* to the city. The other family members will continue to retain rural *hukou* in order to continue receive benefits that are due to farmers. This economic constraint limits the mobility of migrant families and the ability of multiple generations to live together. A middle-aged parent who was once a migrant, when asked if he would like to move to the city, responded, “we are sure to move to the city if we have enough money”.

3.4 China’s One-Child policy

After the *hukou* registration, One-Child could be considered as the second most contested policy in China: with explosive population growth and low standards of living, the central government implemented the one-child-per-family policy in 1979 to alleviate

social, economic, and environmental stress. One of the demographic consequences of the drastic implementation of this policy is that China is now one of the most rapidly aging countries in the world.

Figure 15 lists projected median age, life expectancy and dependency ratio of China's population from 1950 to the year 2100. Though total population will eventually shrink, median age and life expectancy increase. Between now and 2050, child dependency (0-14 years) ratio varies between 23.4 and 26.0 dependants per 100 persons of working age (15-64). Likewise, old-age dependency increases from 13.1 to 39.0 dependants per 100 persons. These figures drastically increase to 26.8 for child dependency and 49.8 for old-age dependency. Total dependency of the non-working age (0-14 and 65 years or over) population to the working age population (15-65 years) will increase to 63.0 in 2050 and 76.6 in 2100.

Figure 15. Demographic Data – Life expectancy and Dependency Ratio

	1950	1970	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2030	2050	2075	2100
Total Population (millions)	543.8	814.4	1,165.4	1,280.4	1,318.2	1,401.6	1,432.9	1,453.3	1,453.3	1,385.0	1,205.8	1,085.6
Median age (years)	23.7	19.4	24.8	29.6	32.2	34.6	36.0	37.7	42.1	46.3	47.1	46.9
Life expectancy at birth (years)	44.6	59.4	68.9	70.9	73.4	74.4	75.3	76.0	77.4	79.9	82.7	85.4
Dependency ratio (per 100)												
Total dependency ratio (a)	63.3	79.3	54.0	48.1	39.2	36.0	38.2	42.7	47.2	63.0	71.6	76.6
Child dependency ratio (b)	56.0	72.2	45.1	37.9	28.6	24.7	25.1	26.0	23.4	24.0	25.4	26.8
Old-age dependency ratio (c)	7.3	7.1	8.9	10.2	10.7	11.4	13.1	16.7	23.8	39.0	46.2	49.8

(a) The total dependency ratio is the ratio of the population aged 0-14 and that aged 65+ to the population aged 15-64. They are presented as number of dependants per 100 persons of working age (15-64).

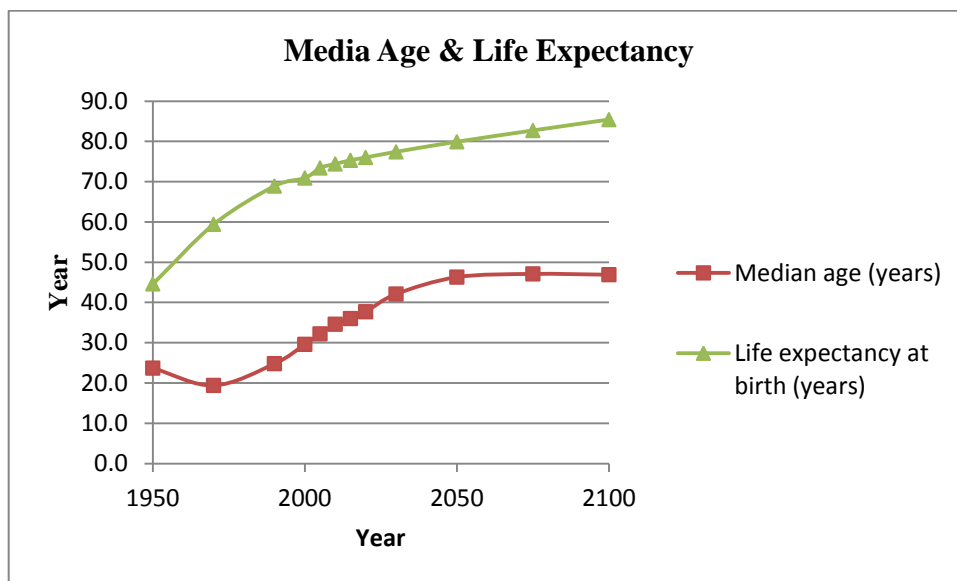
(b) The child dependency ratio is the ratio of the population aged 0-14 to the population aged 15-64. They are presented as number of dependants per 100 persons of working age (15-64).

(c) The old-age dependency ratio is the ratio of the population aged 65 years or over to the population aged 15-64. They are presented as number of dependants per 100 persons of working age (15-64).

Source: World Population Prospects, *The 2012 Revision*

Figure 16 illustrates increasing median age and life expectancy as time goes on for Chinese people.

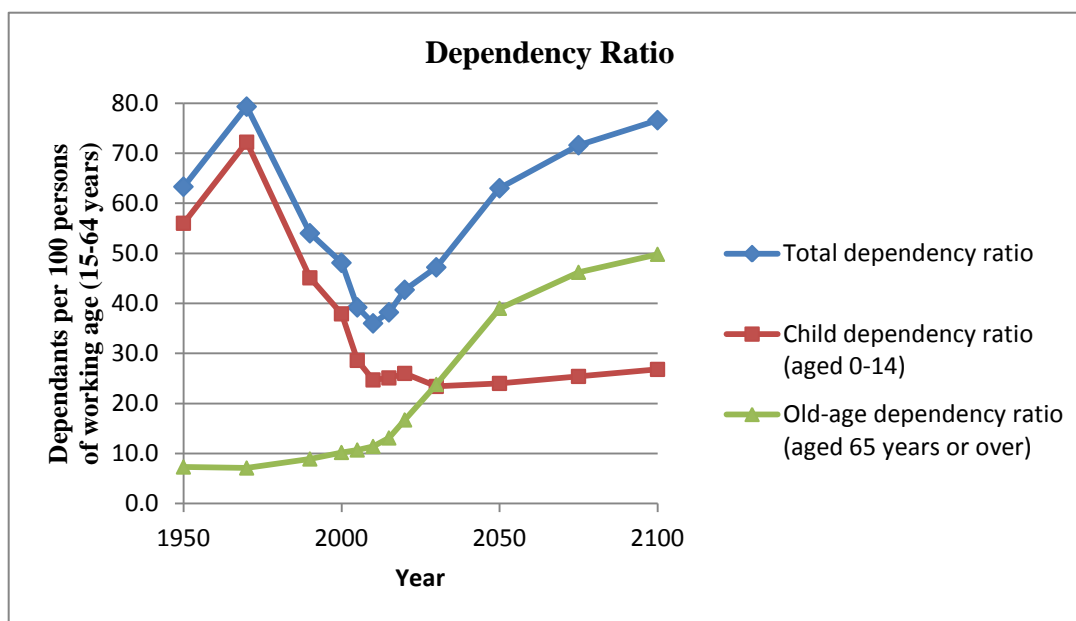
Figure 16. Median Age & Life Expectancy, 1950-2100



Source: World Population Prospects, *The 2012 Revision*

Figure 17 illustrates the dependency ratio for child dependency and old-age dependency. Child dependency will flatten out over time at the ratio of about 25 dependants per 100 persons of working age (15-64). However, old-age dependency has risen significantly with time. Total dependency ratio for both child and old-age dependencies will increase to about 76.6 in the year 2010.

Figure 17. Dependency Ratio per 100 Persons of Working Age (15-64)



Source: World Population Prospects, *The 2012 Revision*

The One-Child policy is now entering its fourth decade. Those who were born during the programme's first inception are now facing the problem of providing for their parents and four grandparents. As time goes on, there is significant pressure for children to support their elderly parents.

Urban elders fare better since they can rely on the social pension as a source of income, whereas rural elders are facing difficulties since there is no social pension scheme for them. If a child is not able to provide for his/her parents and grandparents, then the older generation inevitably suffers impoverishment, which has become the case for many rural elders when their child has migrated.

The Chinese family has always had a preference for sons over daughters since sons are thought to be more helpful than daughters in farm work. In the Confucian tradition, sons were preferred over daughters since they carried on the family name and provided primary financial support for their parents in their old age. There are thus implications and complications of the One-Child policy for a society whose core cultural

values are based largely on family relations and an emphasis on the filial obligation to assure family continuity through future generations – an act that requires a male offspring.

These implications are not as prevalent in cities since retirees and elders are able to collect pensions from the state or the companies for which they worked. In the country, however, no social welfare exists which causes a challenge for many elderly Chinese. Another factor adding to social disparities is the fact that people are living longer, revealing a larger elder population. Smaller family size is adding more burdens to the younger generation, especially the children of rural migrants. The safety net of support from the family is disintegrating. There has been much discussion about the 4-2-1 problem, that is, one child will need to support two parents and four elderly grandparents. However, when this child gets married and has a child of his own, he and his wife will have expanded their responsibilities to that of 2-1-4-8; two adults/couple, one child, four parents, and eight grandparents to support.

3.5 National Policies regarding Rural China

3.5.1 Land Tenure

In China, the people do not own the land. In the cities (including towns), the land is owned by the state and in the rural areas, land is owned by the village collectively, which then portioned it out to the households depending on the size of the family (Ding, 2004). The current land allocation does not allow for permanent migration. The allotted land would be taken away if all family members permanently migrated.

Since the mid-1980s, a series of laws was implemented to establish the rights of farmers. In 1998, a 30-year land lease was set up in which no land reallocations would occur during the lease period. The 2002 Land Management Act and the 2007 Property Law aimed to improve security for farmers by making the land their property rather than

just a contractual right. Many places have not implemented these laws. As of 2008, only half of the lease-holders have successfully obtained a contract from their village collective or a use-certificate from their provincial government (Li, Rozelle, & Brandt, 1998; Thaxton, 2008; OECD 2010).

Mass out-migration created a market for use-right transfer of rural lands. Families with a high proportion of non-agricultural income would likely want to transfer or lease-out their land, whereas those depending on farming income would lease more land to increase their household income. At present the outright sale of leases is forbidden. Therefore transactions occur between relatives or people of the same village.

As of now, rural residents do not have the same property rights as urban residents. In urban areas, residents have 40-70 year leases and are allowed to sell and mortgage the use-right of their property (Ding, 2014: 344). Rural residents have much more restricted options with their land.

Land is the lifeline of rural families in rural China. At times, it is the only asset of rural families (Du et al. 2004). Though rural families cannot rely just on farming for survival since there are expenditures associated with modern life such as health care and education which exceed incomes from land. However, migrants will continue to rely on land when they are unable to find a job or when they reach the age when they are unable to work outside the village. While the migrants are working in the cities, the left-behind elderly continue to work on the land. In the survey of 1445 elderly people aged 65 or over in Anhui, Hebei, and Henan provinces, Du et al. found that 65% of the elderly were still taking on agriculture work.

Since land is collectively held by the village and is allocated to families according to the number of members, with out-migration, there are areas where land is unused; however, some local governments will not allow the unused land to be

“officially” transferred to others in the villages. As a result, some people would just allow other families to use it for free; in other areas, near urban development, there are often cases of local government misappropriation of the common land by selling or allowing private enterprise to use the land and pocketing the proceeds instead of contributing to the local income. As part of the environmental and ecological improvement goal under the Open Up the West campaign, governments have encouraged farmers to restore agricultural land to grazing and forest land (退耕还林). This scheme has helped redress deforestation in Sichuan and has prevented heavy flooding. In addition, it also has provided much needed income to elderly people who are no longer able to farm.

Since there are few young people who stay at home in Meijia, land became abandoned; in contrast to the pre-migration period, when people quarreled to get land. Many households even planted crops on the steep slopes of the hillside. But now lands are allowed to lie fallow because there are not enough people to work on the land. “Most young people are gone. Grass has already grown on the mountain and often one cannot find the side road because not many people are using the road” (Zhang Jie, # 5). This was the case for my assistant and me. We went away for two weeks, and by the time we returned, my assistant and I had a difficult time finding our way back for follow-up interviews.

Figure 18. Abandoned land in Meijia being cleaned up due to flooding.



3.5.2 Agricultural reform

China's agricultural reform began at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party held in December 1978. Following the reform, the price of agricultural products was increased while the price of industrial inputs was decreased. Gradually until 1978, the collective commune people's commune system 人民公社 (renmin gongshe) was replaced by the "household responsibility for management system" 包干到户只 (baogan daohu zhi) and the "household responsibility for output system" 包产到户只 (baochan daohuzi). Previously rural people were assigned to a commune to work together as a production team and the total income of the team was either divided equally among the members or as predetermined by the

production leader. Now state-owned land is directly under the control of individuals⁵. Under the new system, individuals and households are permitted to sell surplus grain on the open market once they have delivered their grain quota to their local government (Yamamoto 2000). Between 1978 and 1984, China's crop output increased by 42%; about half of this was attributed to HRS.

The dismantling of the communes has freed rural farmers from the collective coercive institutional units of the state. On the one hand, this allowed rural Chinese people more control of their own lives, but on the other hand it placed more burdens on people especially in poor areas where they have to rely on themselves and their families rather than the safety net that the state provided up to now. With limited opportunity to work in the village, people began to make their move to the city to seek employment. Thus began the mass out-migration from the country-side to the city in search for work.

3.5.3 Tax reform

China has long been an agricultural nation and the collecting of agriculture tax was an important contribution to the state fiscal system. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 agricultural tax at times contributed to as much as 40 percent of the state's fiscal income (Wang 2014). But with rapid development in the past three and half decades China has gradually shifted from an agriculture-based to an industrial country. As it made the shift to an industrial country, China experienced a great divergence of inequality between urban and rural families' income levels. In 2002, the per capita net income for an urban family was 7702.8 *yuan* while its counterpart in

⁵ For more details about the abolishing of the commune system see Kate Xiao Zhou's *How the Farmers Changed China: Power of the People*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996. The commune system was not officially abolished until 1982, but was initiated in Sichuan and Anhui provinces right after Mao's death. Provincial leaders Zhao Ziyang of Sichuan and Wan Li of Anhui approved the experiments of assigning land to a small number of households. Officially, individual households were not allowed to participate but some of the experiments did so by bribing local cadres.

the country was only 2475.6 *yuan*. Urban income was more than three times higher than rural income. At the same time, rural agricultural tax has now decreased to only 2 percent of the country's total fiscal income (*ibid*). Recognizing the increase in inequality between urban and rural areas along with the insignificant contribution of agricultural tax to the overall state's fiscal income, the central government decided to abolish agricultural tax to farmers as from January 2006.

The abolishing of agricultural tax has greatly benefited rural households. Based on an analysis of a national survey of rural households for the period of 2004-2005 Wang (2014) found that a decrease of one percent point in agricultural tax rate increased per capita income by 8 percent. Not having to pay agricultural tax has brought relief to poor families in rural areas; however, China's decentralized and regressive fiscal policies have led to poor areas, especially rural areas, being starved for funds (Ho, Eyferth & Vermeer 2004).

3.5.4 Peasant Burden

The state's intentions in abolishing all fees and agricultural tax were good; however, this aggravated the fiscal problems of townships and villages (Oi et al, 2012). To counter this lack of fiscal income, local government instituted a new approach to collecting funds from rural farmers to pay for social services. This new form of "taxation" on the farmers is known popularly as the "peasant burden" (*nongming fudan*). This has become a new source of income for local government to pay for social services in the area. This new so-called "peasant burden" has truly created burdens for people in rural areas. For example, Li (2004) reports that in one village in Hubei province, families had to pay as much as 13 percent of their household income in 1997 for all kinds of charges made by the local authority; however, only three percent of this is recorded as

official charges for the so-called three *tiliu* 提留 and five *tongchou*. 统筹. *Tiliu* is the farmer's "contribution" or financial obligation to local government at the village level; *tongchou* are contributions at the township level. Because villages are not considered an official level of government, they do not receive budgets from any upper level government official. So *tiliu* is the income that village officials collect from households. Fees collected under the *three tiliu* and *five tongchou* include fees for irrigation and electricity as well as supplementary fees for education, social help, family planning, collective transport, public accumulation fund, public welfare fund, and administrative fees.

Li (2004) found that in some places this amount comes to more than 100% of household income. Though central government set *tiliu* ceiling of five per cent of household income, often local cadres raise the levies to meet local needs. "The poorer the village, the more likely peasants will be pressed for more fee" (Gabriel, 2006:35). The system does contribute to corruption.

3.5.5 Corruption

China has four levels of administration under the central government. The first level consists of the 33 provincial-level governments which includes 22 provinces 省 (sheng), five autonomous regions 自治区 (zizhiqu), four municipalities, and the two special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau. The second level includes more than 300 prefecture-level administrative units 地区 (diqu). The third level includes nearly 3,000 counties 县 (xian) and county-level cities. The lowest level is made up of approximately 40,000 townships and 乡 (xian) and towns 镇 (zhen). There is another

level, the villages 村 (cun), which are not part of the formal administrative structure, but are considered as mass organizations of self-management at the grass root level (Saich, 2011).

Meijia Township is at the lowest administrative level. Township officials are not elected by the people, but are appointed by higher-level officials from the county level. This is a political appointment and township officials do not necessarily live in the village. As a result, they have no interest in the day to day life of the rural families in Meijia and are unaccountable to the people. “The tenure of and promotion of lower-level officials are decided by their higher-level counterparts; they are held more accountable to higher-level officials than to the public and thus are more likely to suffer pressure from above. When facing conflicting interests of higher-level official and the public, local officials often attend to the former at the expense of the latter. On the other hand, since they are less constrained by the people, local officials enjoy considerable autonomy in pursuing their personal goals if supervision by higher-level is absent” (Cai, 1998: 784). In the next chapter we will examine first-hand knowledge of how families in Meijia experience these pressures of *tiliu* on their day to day life.

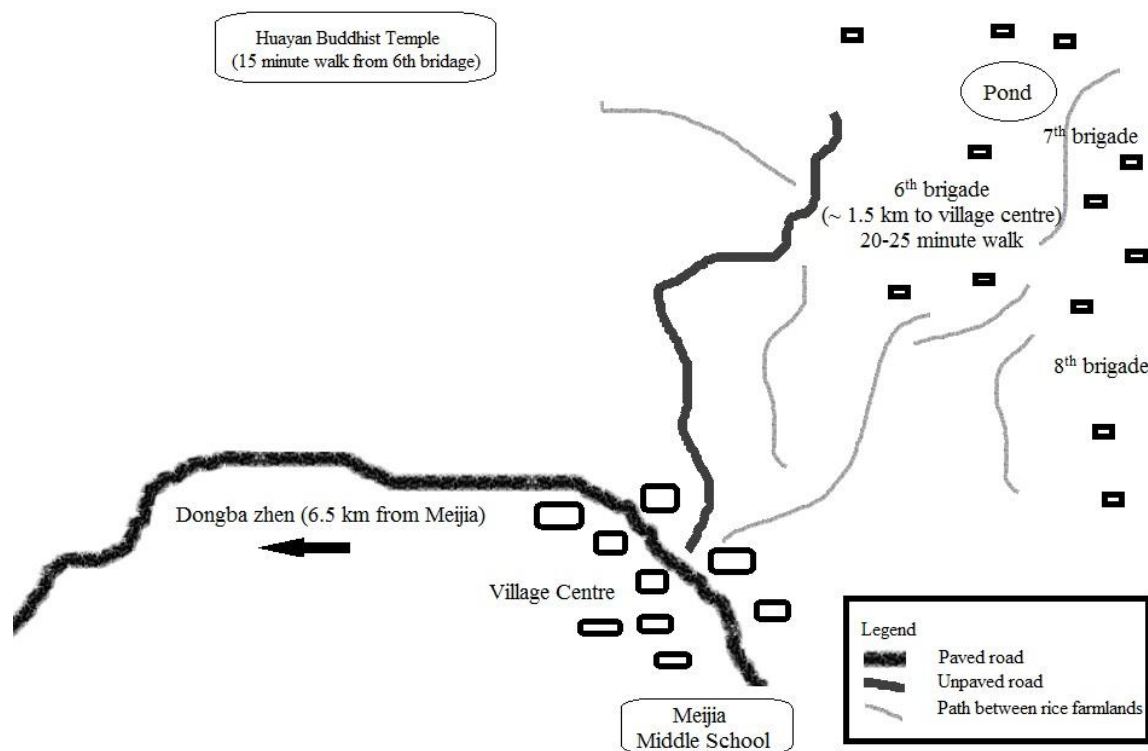
3.6 Meijia – Fieldwork Site

3.6.1 Geographical Landscape of Meijia, Sichuan

We now return to the geographic landscape of Meijia. Meijia is located in a hillside area and is isolated from the modernization and urban development of other parts of Sichuan. Meijia Township is approximately 300 kilometers from Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province. It is situated in a hilly area in the northeast corner of the Sichuan basin. It is under the administration of Nanbu county and Nanchong City. Meijia has an area of 26.7 square kilometers and is home to 13,532 people. The township administers

15 villages and consists of 128 communes. It has 12,480 *mu* (8.32 square kilometers) of arable land and 7,337 *mu* (4.89 square kilometers) of woodlands.⁶

Map 5. Map of Meijia



Source: The Author.

⁶ 1 *mu* (亩) equals 1/6 of an acre or 0.00066667 of a square kilometre.

Figure 19. Meijia Market Place.



Figure 20. Meijia farmland.



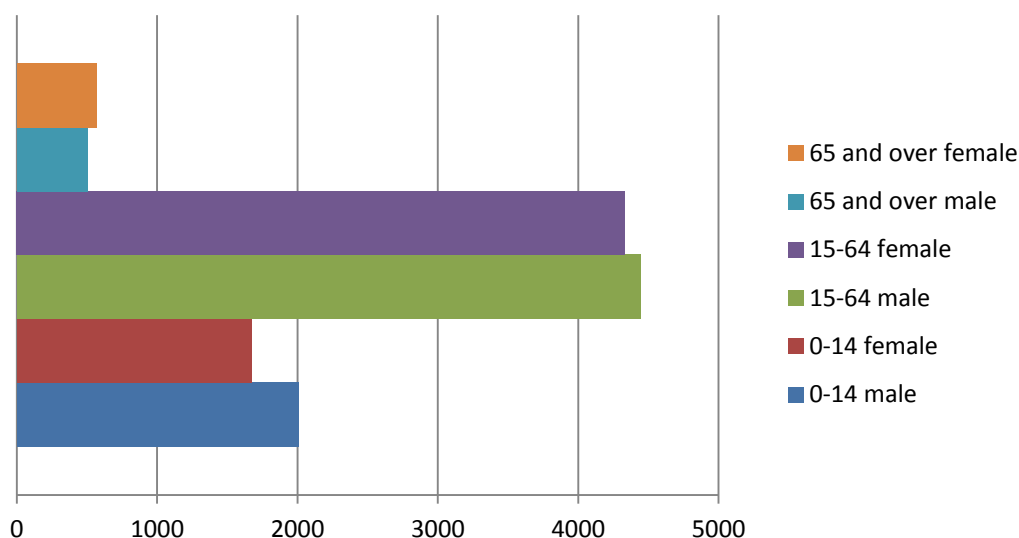
In 2006 Meijia had a GDP of 41.7 million yuan with a per capita of 3,108 yuan. Even by Sichuan's standard this is relatively poor. Wage laborers contributed 23.4 million yuan, more than half of the total GDP. The staple crops in Meijia are rice, wheat, and corn. In 2006 it produced 6,922 tons of grain. Cash crops consisted of peanuts and canola. Besides traditional farming, villagers also raise pigs, silkworms, and poultry. In recent years, farmers have begun to experiment with planting grapes and walnuts.

Meijia has a total population of 13,532. There are 5,122 migrant laborers in Meijia. This figure accounts for 37.85 percent of the total population of Meijia and 58.36 percent of people in the 15-64 age group. Demographic data for Meijia are listed in Table 3.1 and displayed by graph in Figure 21.

Table 3.1 Demographic Data for Meijia

Population	13,532
Number of males	6,957
Number females	6,575
Number of households	3,602
Average household size	3.75
Total for 0-14 years	3,681
0-14 years (male)	2,008
0-14 years (female)	1,673
Total for 15-64 years	8,777
15-64 (male)	4,444
15-64 (female)	4,333
Total for 65 and over	1,074
65 and over (male)	505
65 and over (female)	569
Number of migrant laborers	5,122

Source: Meijia Township data, 2010.

Figure 21. Demographic Distribution of Meijia

3.6.2 Limited Infrastructure and Transportation

Although Meijia is only 300 kilometers from the provincial capital, Chengdu, a typical journey would take more than half a day. The journey from Chengdu begins with a train ride to Nanchong 南充 City, the prefecture-level city in which Meijia is located.

The fast train takes just over 1.5 hours while the slow train takes 3 hours or longer (231 km). A ticket for this leg of the journey costs about 70 yuan. Traveling from Nanchong city to Dongba Zhen 东坝镇 takes about 75 minutes by coach which costs 40 yuan.

From Dongba Zhen to Meijia, the journey takes 30 to 45 minutes using a rural transport 12-seat van. However, one might need to wait more than an hour for the van to fill up with passengers. Tickets for this last leg cost 5 yuan. The final destination is the Meijia market area. From there it would take an additional 25-30 minutes to walk into the village. The total journey can take anywhere from 4 to 6 hours, with a cost of at least 115 yuan.

On my very first journey to Meijia, it was a rainy day and a portion of the road to Meijia was unpaved road. The van was unable to move past part of the unpaved road, so we ended up disembarking and walking for 50 minutes to the village. This anecdote illustrates the geographical isolation of Meijia that in many ways separates life in Meijia from the outside world. In Meijia, life seems to stand still while people in towns such as Dongba Zhen continue to advance through modernization and their connections to civilization. The journey's cost is prohibitive for the people in the villages of Meijia. For family members living in the city either as laborers or students, it can be financially challenging to return home regularly to visit the left-behind members. In 2010, the journey cost more than 100 yuan which is a day's wage for many laborers. As we learned from the previous chapter, my host family's mother travels everyday from her home in the village to Dongba Zhen to sell eggs in the market. By her return trip she has spent close to 4.5 hours each day walking and she earns 20 yuan a day⁷. She would have spent half her earnings if she utilized the rural transport van.

⁷ In August 2010, 1 USD equals 6.72 RMB or 1 GBP equals 10.53 RMB.

Figure 22. Unpaved road in Meijia.



Figure 23. Rural transport linking Meijia to Dongba and the outside world.



The township government has built 80 kilometers of road to link the villages; however, road conditions are quite poor and can only be utilized on sunny days. This seems to be problematic since Meijia has a monsoon climate with close to 140 days of precipitation annually, particularly from May to September. Transportation is not only an issue in taking people from point A to point B, but also with transporting crops.

Figure 24. On the way to market using a path between farmlands.



Figure 25. Narrow pathway between farmlands.



3.7 Conclusion

The chapter begins by examining the social and economic development of China and Sichuan in the past three decades. Decollectivisation and market reforms lead to a free-for-all economy. Deng's policy of the 'trickling down' effect of pro-coastal

development did not equalize the hinterland, rather creating inequality between coastal provinces and western hinterland. Though one of the largest in size and population Sichuan continued to lag behind coastal provinces due to its social, political and environment conditions. Recognize the widening of the income between coastal and western areas, Central Government initiated the China Western Development campaign to boost and develop China's western area. Since then the Sichuan economy has performed well and at time has surpassed the national average.

Its large population and limited agricultural and industrial development has led to large out migration of laborers from Sichuan to the coastal provinces. However, the long standing *hukou* policy has continued to discriminate and create inequality between urban and rural citizen. The One-child policy has now entered its fourth decade. Low birthrate and rapid aging now lead to labor shortages which result in a higher ratio of dependency between the elderly and their working age children.

Agricultural and tax reforms have lessened the burden on the rural population; however, township and village governments are now facing fiscal shortages. Though peasant tax has been eliminated, local governments now have passed on this burden to the farmer with peasant "burdens and contribution". Due to arbitrary policy which varies from place to place, corruption occurs as a consequence.

Having examined national and local social and economic development we then turned to the setting of Meijia. This setting serves as a lens through which we enter into the lives of the Meijia rural migration families and learn how families deal and cope with modernization.

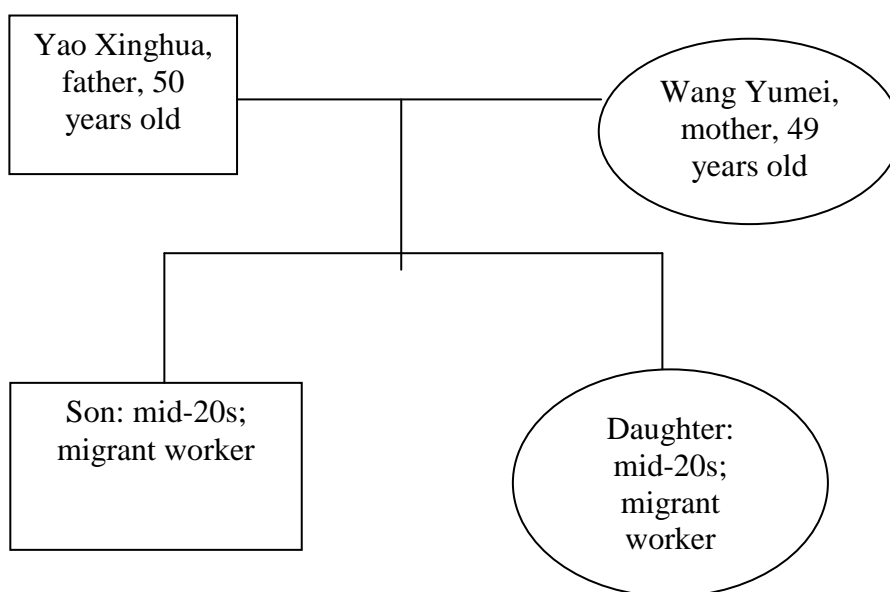
As way of linking these first three introductory chapters to the analytical chapters of the thesis, I now introduce a brief background and context for the interviewees and their families.

Portrait of Migrant Families in Meijia **ts rev 020615**

Portrait of Migrant Families in Meijia

1. Cai Guozhong and Wang Yumei

“Our daughter was accepted into medical school, but did not pursue it because at the time our family did not have money.”



Cai Guozhong works as a stone grinder in the next village. Wang Yumei, his wife, looks after the farm. The husband works long shifts, sometimes as long as 20 hours a day. They used to struggle financially but now are doing better; however, they still not doing well financially so they have not built a new house. Their daughter gained a place at university to study medicine but the family did not have money at the time. As a result, their daughter went out to work as a migrant worker. She has been working outside for some years as a hairdresser in Chongqing, Guangzhou, and Nanbu. Son has bought a house in Nanbu city. Wang Yumei went and lived in the city for a while, but did not like it because she does not think that it is convenient and worried about not being able to afford food in the city. Since their son has bought a house in the city, he only comes home to visit every two to three years and does not send money to his parents regularly.

Figure 26. Wang Yumei spreading out corn to dry.

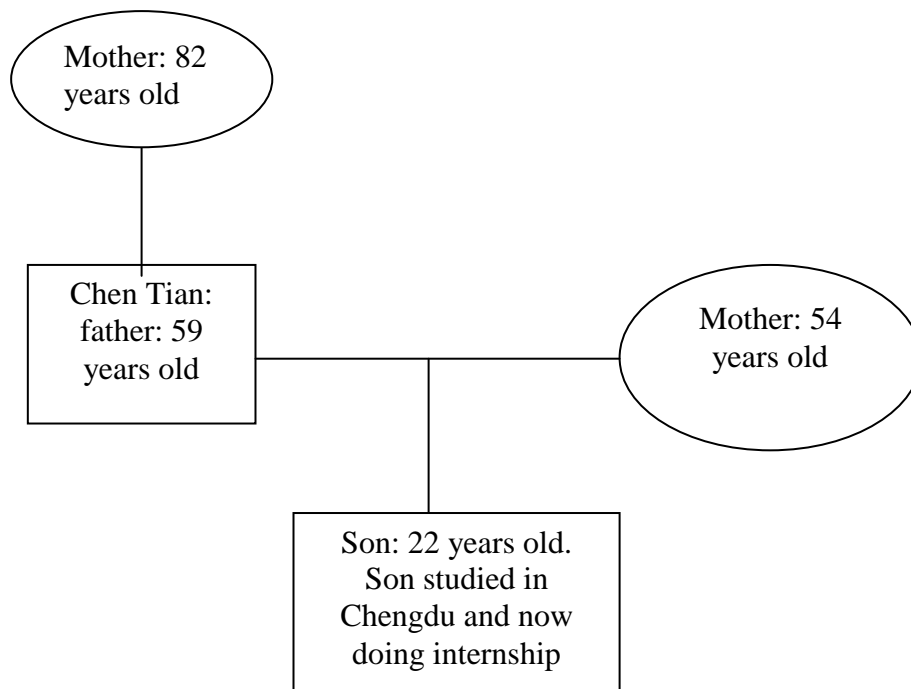


Figure 27. The Cai family has not built a new house.



2. Chen Tian & wife

“Our son has not given us any money, but he is very filial. As long as he graduates and finds a job, life will be easy for us since we will no longer have to feed him.”



Chen Tian is 59 years old and his wife is 54. Chen’s mother is 82 years old and lives with them. The mother is healthy and still able to prepare meals. Chen Tian is a furniture maker. He buys wood local, transports it to Dongba for splitting into board wood, then back to Meijia to make furniture. He has high blood pressure and often gets headaches; he constantly needs medication which costs around 100 yuan a month. They have a 22 years old son living in Chengdu. The son has studied computer programming and has graduated, but is currently doing an internship so his parents still need to support his living expenses. Since the son is a singleton, the Chen family expresses special care for the son, “Our son has not made any money. He neither has found a career nor has he married. He is like a new born sparrow, who has just made his first flight in life.” Although the son has not given his parents any financial support, the parents take the view that their son is filial for he has finished studying; as they say, “now that he has graduated, life is easier for us since we do not need to support him as much.”

They have favorable views toward the policies of the central government. “In the past we paid tax of 300-500 yuan a year. At times we even had to turn in our crops so we did not have much left over for food. But now the policy is good, we even receive money from the government. Our Chairman is good towards us farmers, but it is the cadres here who are bad. They are corrupt. They feel upset and helpless that there are people in the village who have big families and are well off yet they still receive welfare benefit. I want to reason with the cadres about this, but I have learned my lesson and given up.”

Figure 28. The Chen family relaxing in front of their house.

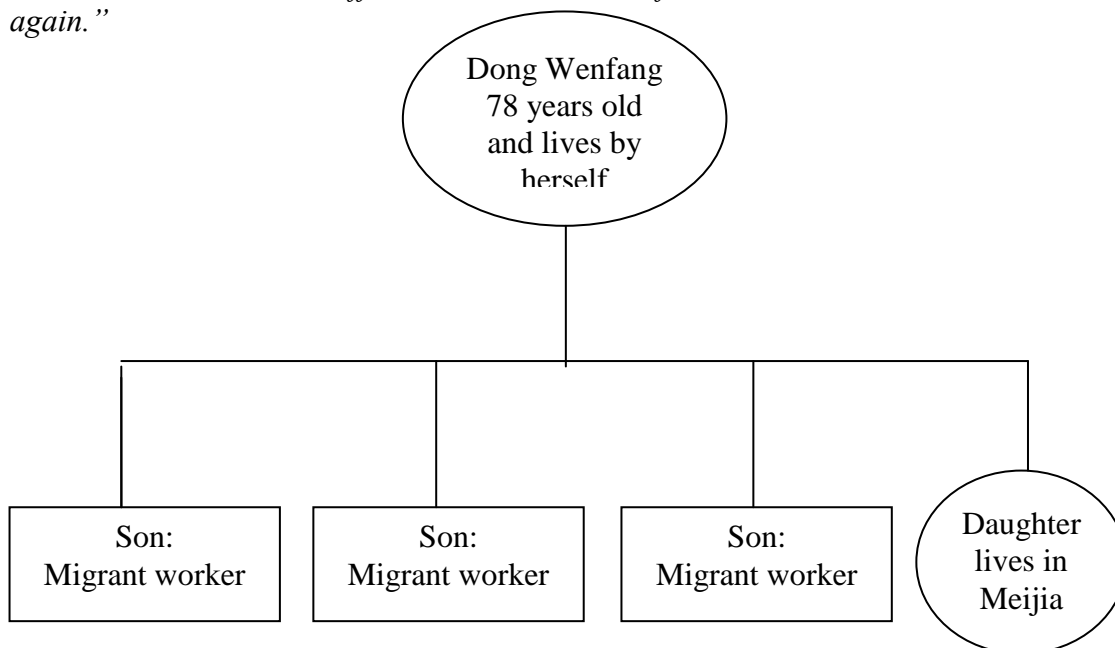


Figure 29. Front courtyard of the Chen family house.



3. Dong Wenfang (Xian Zhengjun)

“I do not know about his affairs. He called once after he went out and never called back again.”



Dong Wenfang is 78 years old and lives by herself. She has four children including 1 daughter. She does not have regular contact with her children except for her daughter, who lives in another village of Meijia. When asked about her sons' affairs she said that she does not know much about them particular the one in Guangzhou, "I do not know about his affairs. He called once after he went out and never called back again." She used to "float around" living with her sons in the city but did not like the arrangement so decided to come back to Meijia and live alone. Although her sons seldom keep contact, they do send her money when she asks. And when she is sick one of the sons or the daughter-in-law will come back and look after her. She is a bit embarrassed because she feels that her sons could be more filial towards her. Whereas she thinks her daughter is quite filial. Although the daughter is married, as she lives nearby this allows her daughter to see her regularly. On market days, mother and daughter would meet in the town centre and the daughter provides her with rice and subsistence.

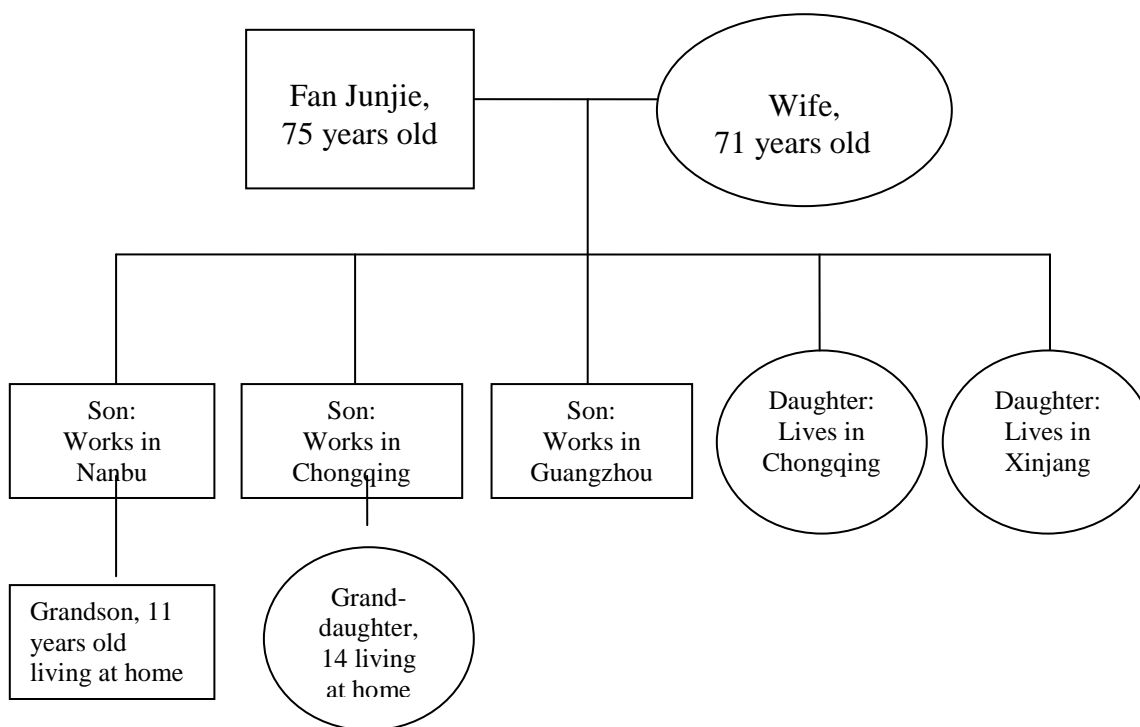
Though she is still in good health, she does feel lonely. "I am used to living alone, but when you're 78 it is not fun to be alone at home." Like other villagers, she thinks that national policy is good toward people like her, but at the local level, the cadres are not good. "Our basic living insurance system is not equitable. It used to be the case that the basic allowance was for the poor, but now it is for the rich. The programme has a good name, but mainly the rich benefit from it."

Figure 30. Dong Wenfang on her way to the market in the village centre.



4. Fan Junjie and wife

“Life is better now with endless food and money.”



Fan Junjie is 75 years old and his wife is 71. They have five adult children, 3 sons and 2 daughters. Both the daughters are married; they live in Chongqing and Xinjiang. The daughter in Xinjiang has not visited them for some years, but she call home regularly. They have many grandchildren, but only one 11 year old grandson and one 14 year old grand-daughter are currently living with them. (These two grandchildren used to live in the city with their parents, but school fees, the school bus, and lunches cost too much so they returned to the village to live with the grandparents.) Their children often send them money. They have a harmonious relationship with their children. For them filial piety has changed. “Traditionally, being filial is to live side-by-side and serve the parents, but with societal changes, nowadays being filial is to go out to earn money and help your parents with daily expenses.”

Fan Junjie thinks that going out to work is actually a blessing for the children since the younger generation nowadays does not have to work in the fields like when he was young. Also, it is better for the family since there is less quarrelling between the generations and the siblings.

Though already over 70, they are healthy enough to work on the farm and grow their own food. They are one of the well to do’s of the village. They have lived through the hardships of Mao’s era so are much more appreciative of life nowadays. They said that “life is better now with endless food and money. The country has given us plenty of money and we get subsidies every year.” But on the other hand, they do not appreciate the local cadres due to corruption. “The country has given us earthquake subsidies four times, but we have only just received it now. The money we have received is much less than the original funds from the government.”

Figure 31. Fan Junjie, his wife, and grandson, Fan Wei



Figure 32. Fan Junjie and his wife having lunch

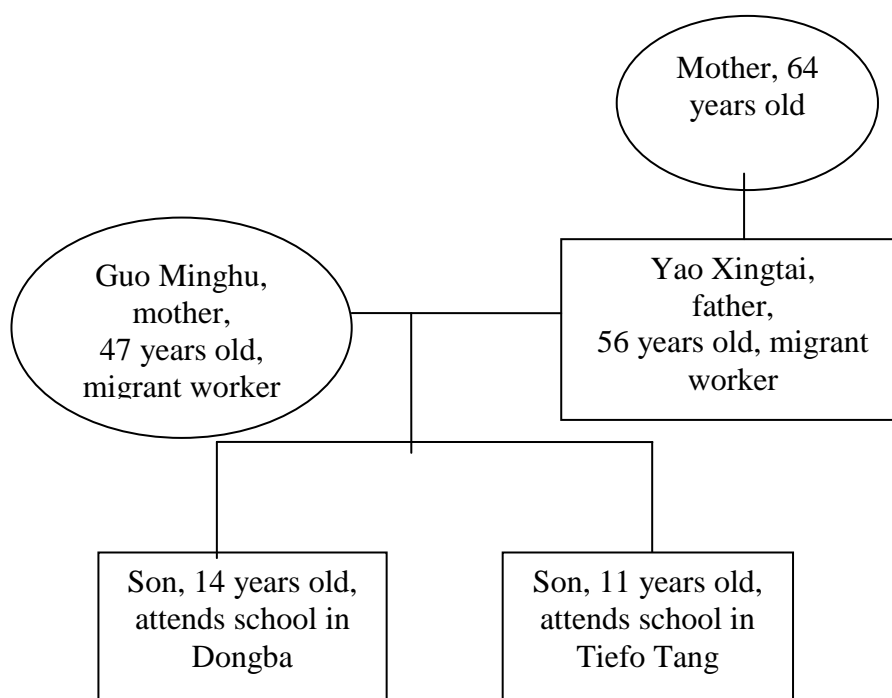


Figure 33. Buddha altar in the Fan family



5. Guo Mingzhu, wife of Xiang Huaizhong

“You must transfer me to Tiefu Tang. I can work harder there.”



Guo Minghu is 47 years old and her husband, Yao Xingtai is 56 years old. They both work outside, but are currently at home for the summer break. They have two sons and both are doing well in school. The older son, 14 years old, is studying in Dongba; the younger one, 11 years old, is studying in Tiefu Tang, a next door village. The family has made sacrifices for their sons to attend school outside Meijia since education in Meijia is not good. “The teacher in Meijia did nothing except play cards.” Initially, the family was reluctant to send their sons to school outside the village because they wanted to save money to build a house. However their sons kept begging them to allow them to attend school outside so they could get a better education. Her 11 year old son told her, “I want to study. You must transfer me to Tiefu Tang. I can work harder there. Things could be worse if I do not get high marks here. In the long run we will be paying higher tuition in high school if I don’t do well in middle school.”

Figure 34. Guo Mingzhu, washing clothes at the brigade's pond



Figure 35. Pond where local people wash their clothes

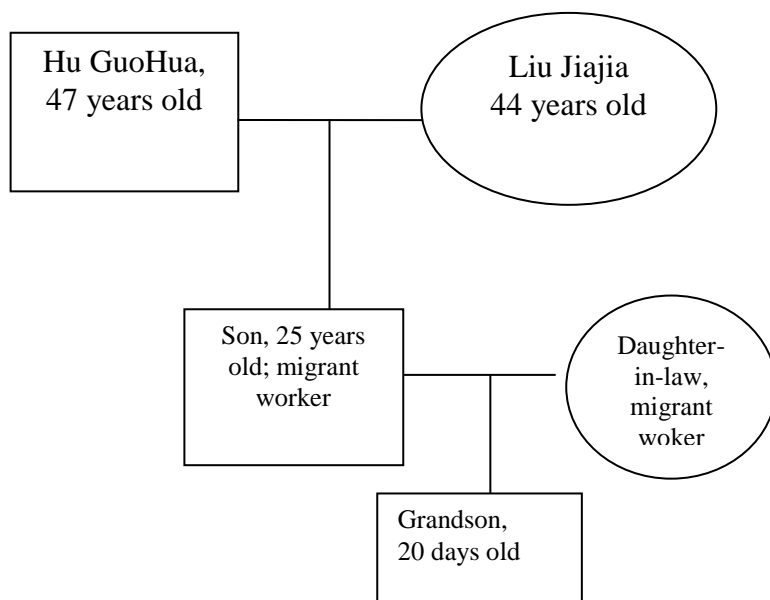


Figure 36. Communal washing time.



6. Hu Guohua & Liu Jiajia

“Young people nowadays need to focus on their career in the city. We older generation need to guard the house and look after the children.”



Hu Guohua is 47 years old and his wife Liu Jiajia is 44 years old. This couple had a business in Chongqing when they were young so were able to save money early and built the most beautiful house in the village. Their only son went to work right after junior high school and recently got married. Although only in their forties, they are happy being grandparents.

Now that they have already built a house and their son is married they do not feel that they have other pressures in life to worry about. They feel satisfied with life. “Young people nowadays need to focus on their career in the city. We older generation need to guard the house and look after the children.” “Our task now is to raise our grandchildren so that they will look after us when we are old.”

As a couple they are content with life; however, they feel that life is unjust for ordinary people like them. “The reality is so cruel. When we were young, we were together with our parents, but nowadays young people have no choice but to go away and earn money so they raise a family. Who will raise the grandchildren if we don’t look after them? Only so could their parents rest their hearts.”

“Life is not for us ordinary farmers. It is really difficult. How can you live well in this society unless you are government officials? All the cadres in our brigade have houses in the city. In fact many of them do not even live in the village. They drive in to work. They are real hypocrites. All the money issued by the state for us is taken by them. The government has given out money several times for the 2008 earthquake and we have not yet received a single kuai. The cadres gave every family a blank piece of paper asking us to stamp our seals and fingerprints. They got the paper after we all signed them. They in turn could write whatever they wanted. In this way they would keep all the money to themselves. We get bullied if we don’t sign the paper for them. But what can we do?”

Figure 37. Hu Guohua and Liu Jiajia in front of their house.

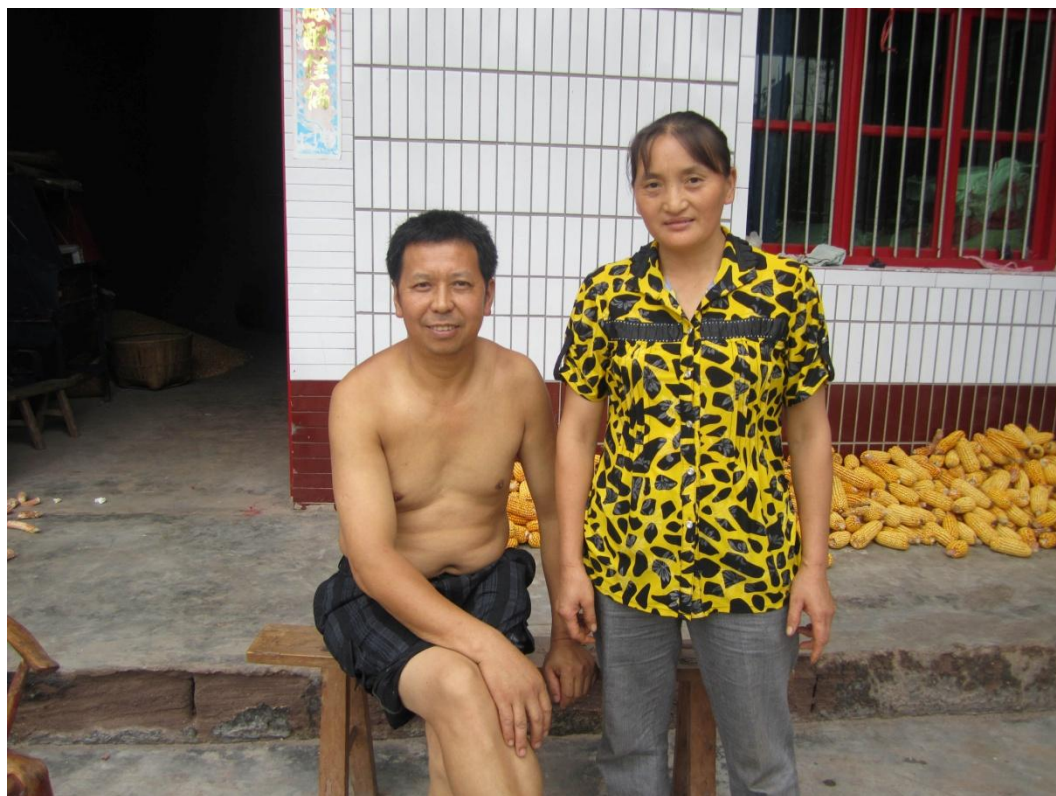
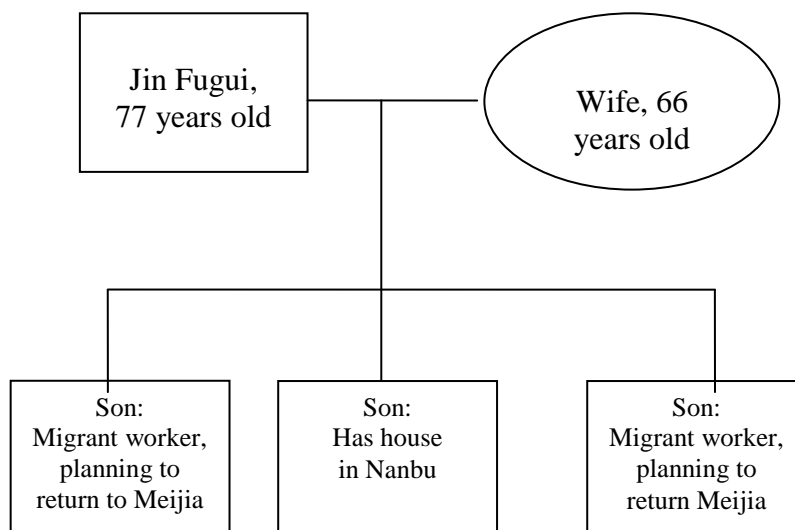


Figure 38. The Hu's family house is considered one of the beautiful houses in the village.



7. Jin Fugui (Yao Xiansong)

“How dare young cadres nowadays tell me what is and isn’t good after I have been through all the happiness and sorrows of the past 70 years.”



Jin Fugui is 77 years old and his wife is 66 years old. His family is one of the two families in the brigades attending the Buddhist temple. He has six sons but three of them starved to death during the great famine. His second son bought a house in Chengdu while his first and third sons want to return and build houses in Meijia. Though he has three sons working outside, he does not receive much support from his sons since they have their own families to look after and none of the grandchildren stay with him. He and his wife are still able to plan basic crops. They borrowed money and bought two pigs. He does not have much in the way of expenses except for medicine which costs more than 1,000 yuan each year. When he was taken to hospital by ambulance, the bill was several thousand yuan but his sons paid for it.

He experiences constant injustice and bullying from the town officials. He is due to receive subsidies and welfare assistance that is owed to him but has not received the money. He believes in the vision of the central government. “Our country has good social policies towards farmers, but they are not carried out well by our local cadres... these local cadres must be exposed and reported to provincial and central governments so they can make things right. Only by exposing their corruption in the newspapers can things be changed.” He thinks that he has nothing to lose in fighting with the local officials. “You cannot rob the poor for they have nothing but dignity.”

Figure 39. Jin Fuigui at his house

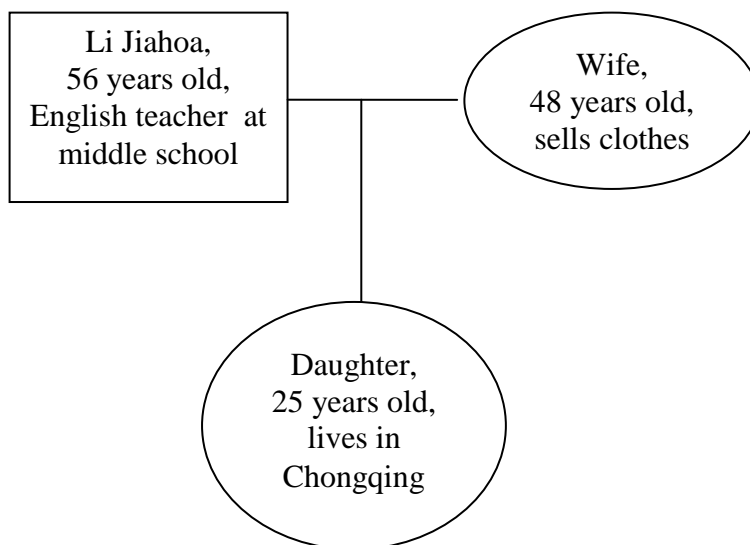


Figure 40. Buddhist altar in the Jin family house



8. Li Jiahao

“It is up to the students themselves. They do well if they like to study. It doesn't matter whether their parent are home.”



Li Jiahao is 51 years old and his wife is 48 years old. He teaches English at the village school. He was the teacher of my assistant when she was young. His wife sells clothes. His daughter lives in Chongqing and works in information technology. His house is provided by the school. His family does not do any farming. He does not have much work during the summer and likes to play mahjong.

Teacher Li has been a teacher for close to 30 years. He believes that even though parents might not have the knowledge to help their children with school work, nevertheless their presence gives stability to the students' lives. When parents are home they have more control and put a structure into the children's lives; whereas grandparents have allowed the grandchildren to be 'free range' and do whatever pleases them. Being better off has lead to more desire for leisure activities rather than studying. The presence of parents helps to give stability, but it is up to the student themselves to apply themselves.

Figure 41. Wen Mengchuan, my assistant, visiting Mrs. Li at her clothes shop.

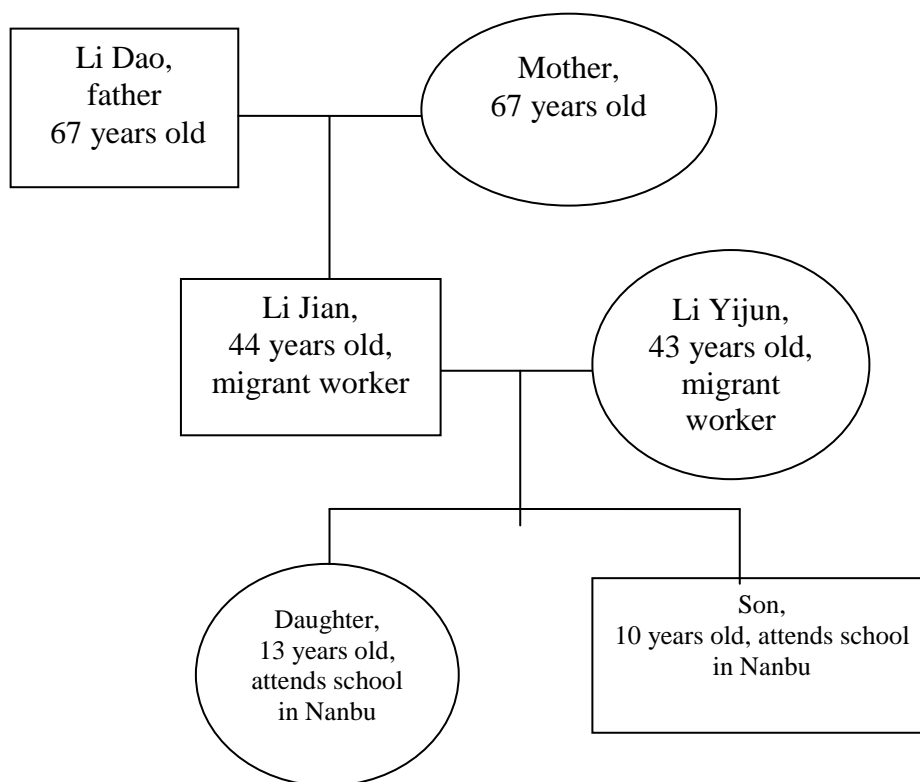


Figure 42. Dinner at teacher Li's home – as a government official he has a higher disposable income than other villagers, hence the food is more elaborate.



9. Li Jian & Liu Yijun

“As a civil servant he is paid by the country. Everything he gets is from us peasants. His duty is to help us peasants when we encounter trouble, but he is very available.”



Li Jian is 44 years old and Liu Yijun is 43 years old. Their daughter (13) and son (10) attend school in Nanbu. Li Jian's parents are both 67. The 2008 earthquake damaged their house so they are in the process of rebuilding. They have spent more than 20 years working in Gansu, Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan, Hunan, Yunnan, and Zhejiang provinces. They had business dealings with officials in these provinces and found them to be hospitable. However, they find the local officials in Meijia are most corrupt. They are very vocal in their dissatisfaction with the local cadres but they feel helpless because their concerns are not being heard. Last year when their pigs were having health problems the father went to the local government to ask for help repeatedly, but no official would come. Finally the father knelt down, pulling on the clothes of the official [as a suppliant], and begged for help; however, he was threatened by the official. "I will beat you to death if you pull me again."

They have travelled widely in China and have an optimistic outlook on life. They would like young people like my assistant to come back and help make the village a better place. "I have a dream that our generation came back and rebuilt our village. We have rich resources in the land. Our hands are the resources we have. Human force is gold so if we are all united in one mind our hometown will be a much better place. We can hire agriculturalists to come and teach us what is suitable for us to plant here; however, that is no good because our local cadres here refuse to build road."

Figure 43. Li Jian and Liu Yijun in their makeshift home in a tent.



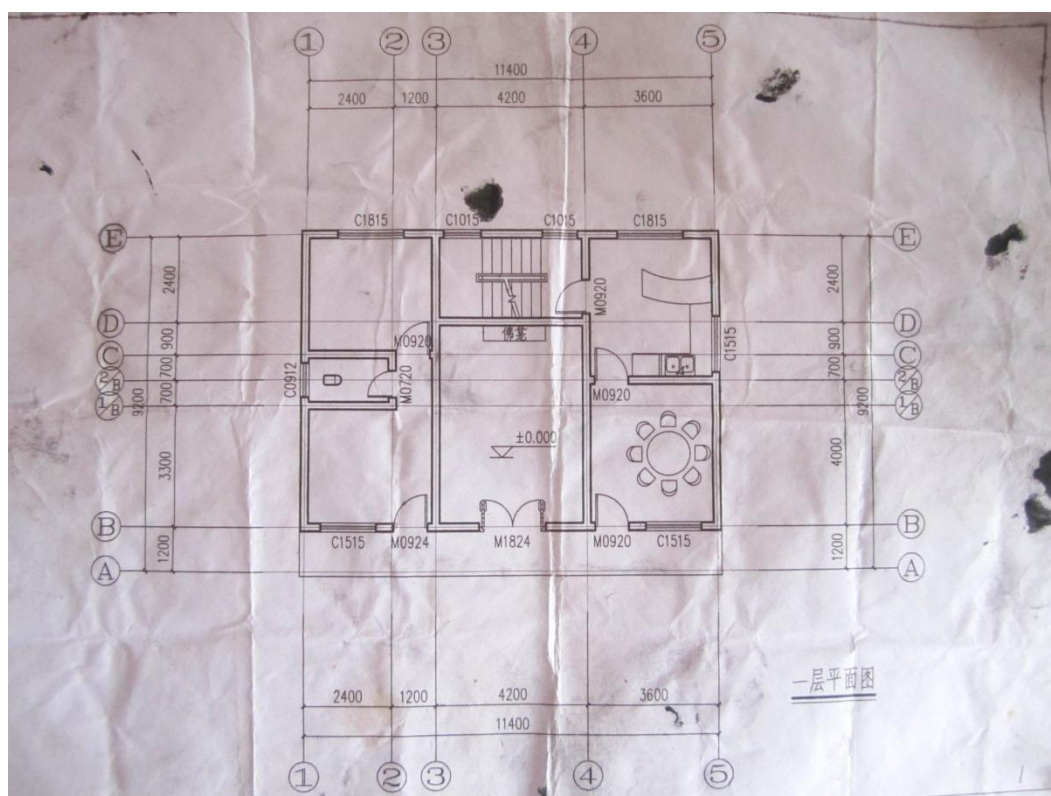
Figure 44. Three generations of the Li family under one roof.



Figure 45. The Li's family house under construction.

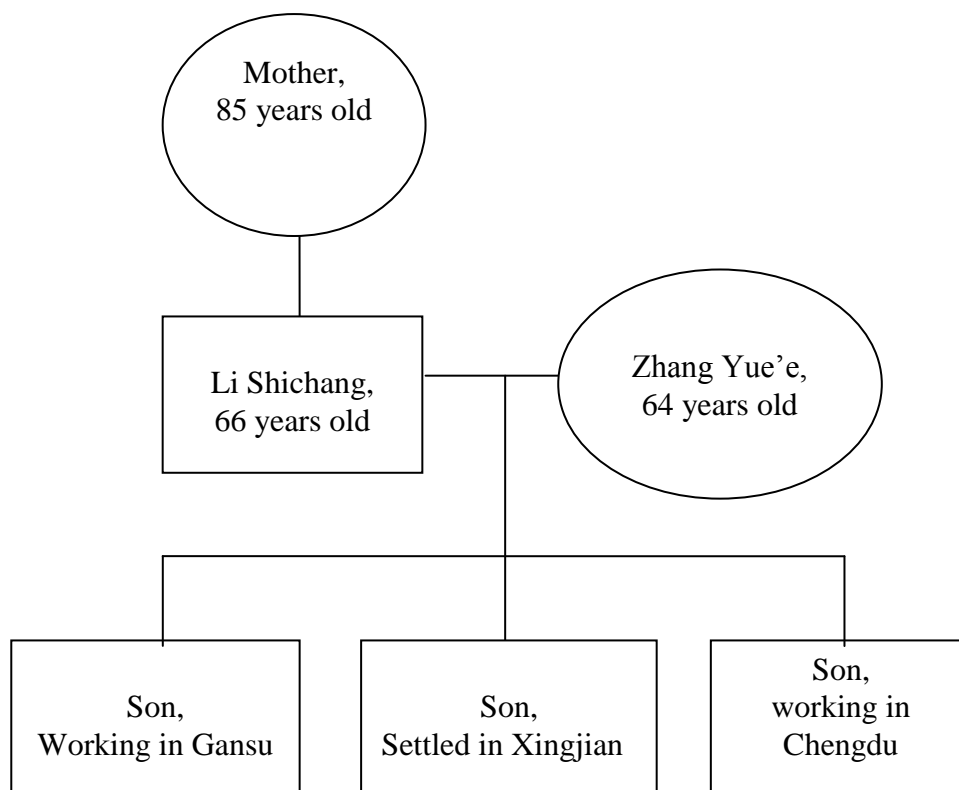


Figure 46. Diagram for the Li's family house construction.



10. Li Shichang & Zhang Yue-e

“We should use our children’s money since we have raised them.”



Li Shichang is 66 years old and his wife, Zhang Yue'e is 64 years old. Li Shichang's mother is also living with them. The wife is partially paralyzed and the family has spent over 20,000 yuan on medical expenses, but now has given up on seeking treatment due to cost and limited results. Their grandchildren used to stay with them and their sons regularly remit money. However, since Zhang Yue'e got sick the grandchildren have moved to the city to be with their parents.

They still hold the traditional view that children should reciprocate parents' love and support them in their old age. “Our children have now grown up. We should use their money since we have raised them.”

Figure 47. The Li's family house.

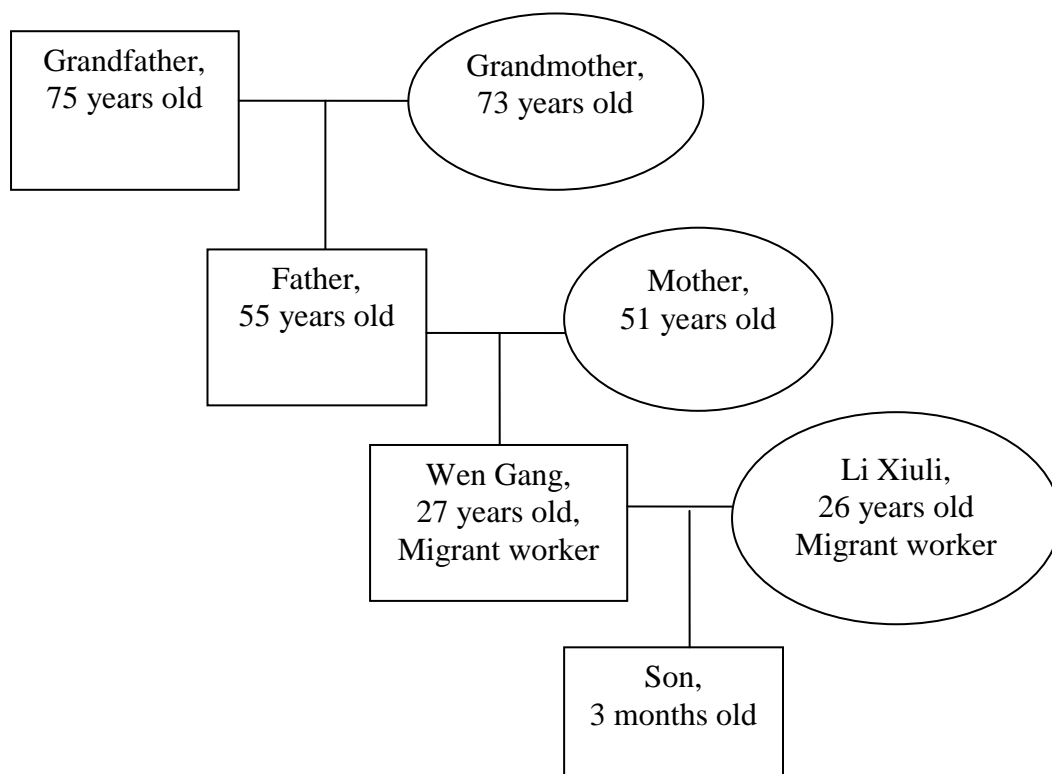


Figure 48. Grandma Du (Li Shichang's mother) and Zhang Yue'e.



11. Lu Xiuli (Yang Qin)

“It would be un-filial to not come when my husband’s grandfather is sick.”



Lu Xiuli is 26 years old and is originally from Dongba Zhen. She got married a year ago so is now in Meijia. She did not do well in school so started working at the age of 17. She has worked in several provinces. She felt that her life has been floating away the past nine years and is a bit pessimistic about life as a migration.

She is traditional in her view of life and filial expectation. She thinks that young people nowadays are growing up without parents and are lost and adrift.

Her fuller biography can be found in the *Appendix 3 – Sample of Transcript of Interview Session*.

Figure 49. Lu Xiuli with her husband Wen Zhang and other family members.



Figure 50. Rural farmers are self-reliant, even making their own coffins!

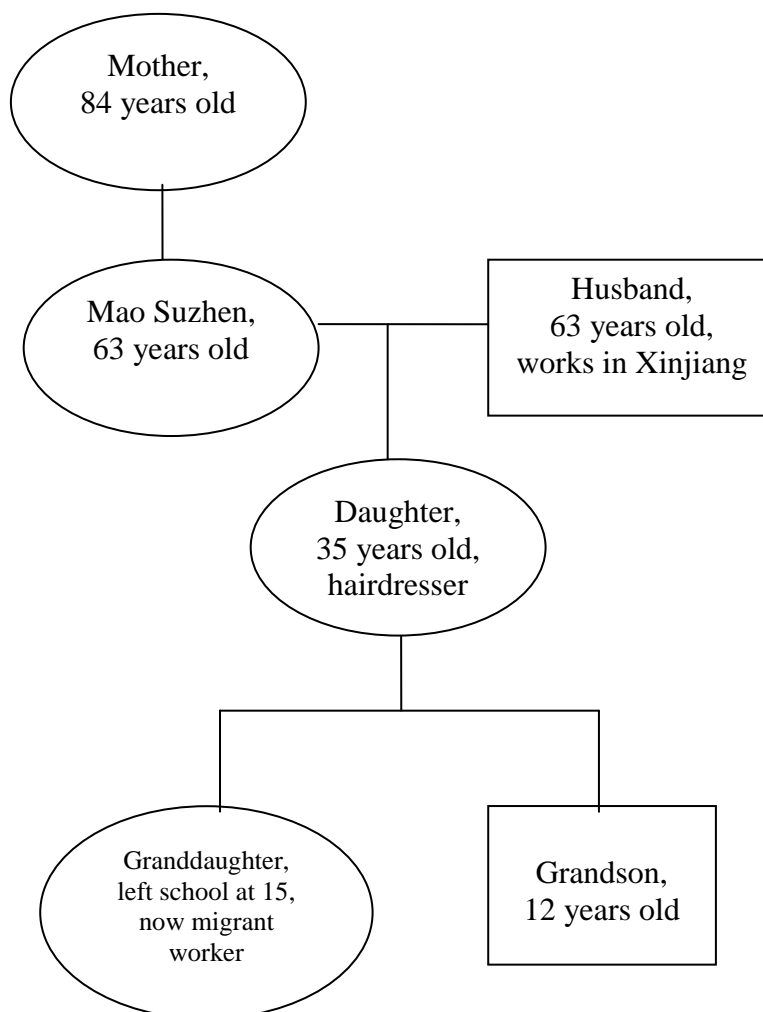


Figure 51. Wen Zhang and his grandmother grinding seeds.



12. Mao Suzhen

“Because my daughter lacked education, now her children are not doing well in school.”



Mao Suzhen is in her 63rd year and is currently taking care of her 84 year old mother and her 12 year old grandson. She feels overworked and is juggling many things. “I’m so miserable. People should be retired in their 60s but I’m still working.” Her granddaughter recently dropped out of school and has gone to work in Chengdu. She is concerned that her grandson might follow the same path. Her grandson often tells her that he has completed his school work, but she does not think so because he often does not even glance at his books. She thinks that her grandchildren are not doing well in school because their mother (her daughter) also dropped out of school early. “Because my daughter lacked education, now my grandchildren are also not doing well in school.” Though her daughter lacks education, she thinks that her daughter is very filial. “Our daughter did not go to school, but she is more pious than others who went to school. She gave all her money to her dad when she young.”

Figure 52. Mao Suzhen with her grandson and mother.



Figure 53. Mao Suzhen's mother watching Ms. Wen Mengchuan entering data on the computer.

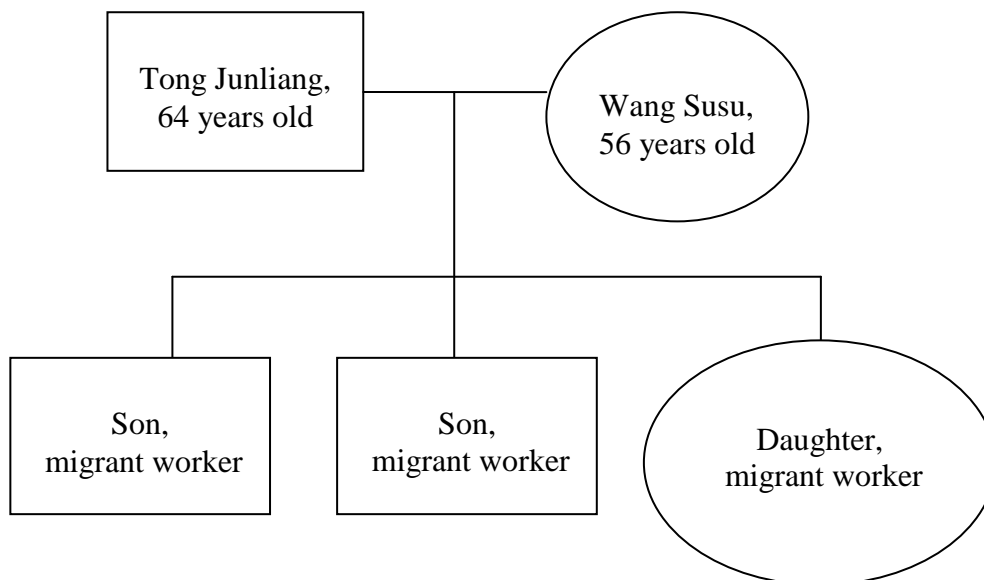


Figure 54. Yimin, 12 years old, collecting dried corn cobs for the family.



13. Tong Junliang & Wang Susu

“We will not allow you to have a good year if you do not give money.”



The husband is 64 and the wife is 56. They have two sons and one daughter. They are very supportive of their children. Although they are poor, they do not want to receive money from their children. They say that their children should save the money so that they can send the grandchildren to the best school to get a good education so they can have a better life outside of the village.

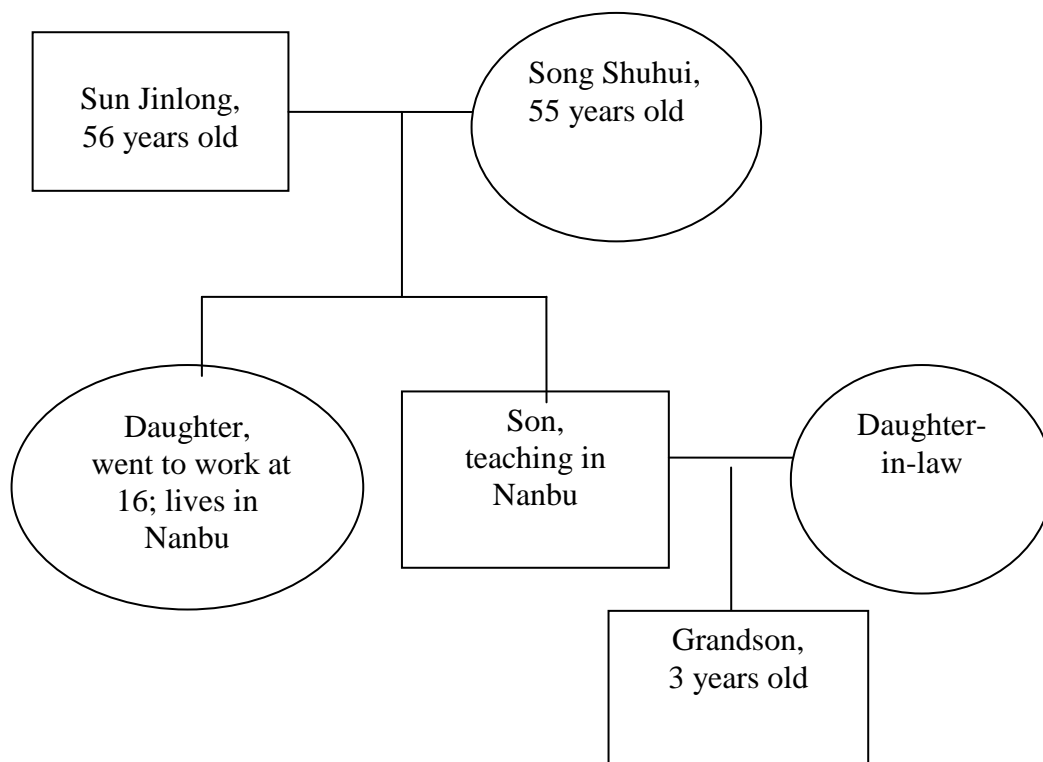
They watch the news regularly and are well informed about the politics of the province. Like others in the village, they also express concern about corruption by the local cadres. They are often bullied by the local cadres who threaten to make life hard for them. “The cadres have often said to us, ‘we will not allow you to have a good year if you do not give money.’” They are not happy about the rent seeking activities of the local cadres. They have contributed several thousand yuan to the local government for road and other public projects that have not materialized. “We have no choice other than giving money. Even they [cadres] know that our son is not working so we had to borrow money at the end. We had to give 1,400 yuan for our family. If we do not give the money they will bully us. If the roads that we gave the money for actually reach the village we would be happy because that’s in our interest.”

Figure 55. Tong Junliang and Wang Susu.



14. Sun Jinlong and Song Shuhui

“Our children are established so we have nothing to worry about.”



Sun Jinlong is 56 and Song Shuhui is 55. Sun Jinlong had worked as a stone splitter and earned good money, but now is getting old so quit for health reasons.

They have a daughter and a son. Both children are doing well. Their daughter went to work when she was 16 to help her parents build their house and send the younger brother to college. The daughter now has a successful business in Nanbu. The younger son works as a teacher in Nanbu and is making good money tutoring senior high students preparing for the university entrance exam. The 3 year old grandson of their son alternates between the grandparents every six months.

They are satisfied with life and do not have concerns about life since their children are now established and have a life of their own. They do not have to rely on their children since they are still young. “We are capable now, but will depend on our children when we are old.”

Figure 56. Sun Jinlong watching Ms Wen Mengchuan entering data on the computer.

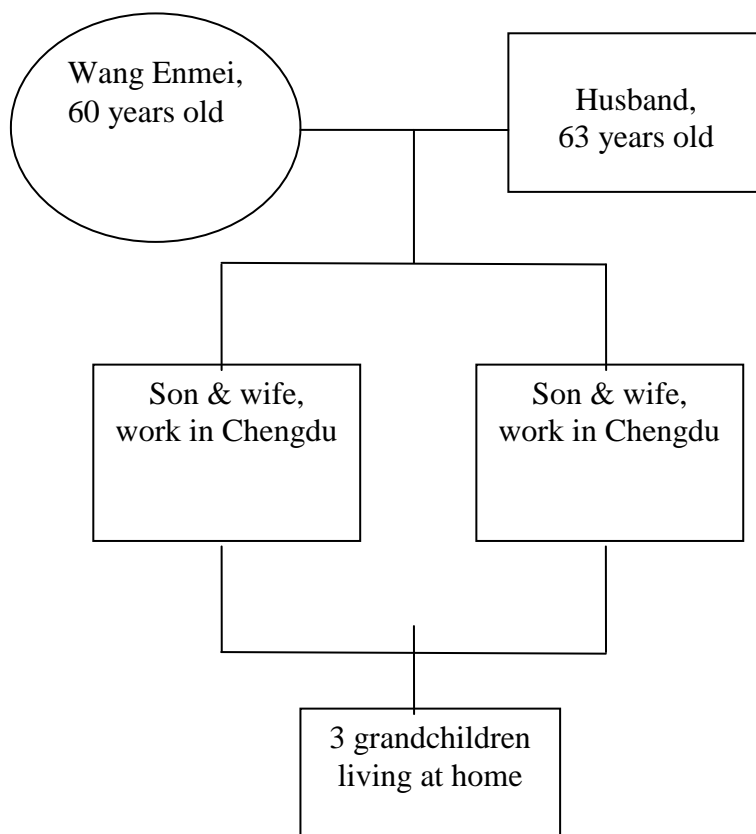


Figure 57. The author along with Sun Jinlong and Song Shuhui.



15. Wang Enmei (Xian Yuhui)

“If I plant crops at home I will have no time to take care of the children and wash their clothes.”



Wang Enmei is 60 years old and her husband is 63. They have three grandchildren living at home with them. Her husband is quite sick and the family has spent over 10,000 yuan for his treatment. He has kidney problems and requires dialysis several times a week. They depend on their children for money for daily expenses and medical treatment. “Without our children’s money what can we do? We are old and our life depends on them to support us.” Even though struggling with bad health, they are content with life and try their best to support their grandchildren.

Because some of the grandchildren are required to go to school early and stay late into the evening for extra sessions, the grandmother rents a house in the town centre near the school for them. Between taking care of her sick husband and looking after the three grandchildren she does not have much time left to work on the farm. “If I plant crops at home I will have no time to take care of the children and wash their clothes.” They often have concerns about their grandchildren growing up without their parents. “Children nowadays have lot of nerve. You cannot leave them unsupervised. If you give them money they will disappear until late evening. They won’t go to school but will use the money to play computer games in the internet café. We have to supervise them. Children today are not easy to educate.”

Figure 58. Wang Enmei with her husband and grandson.

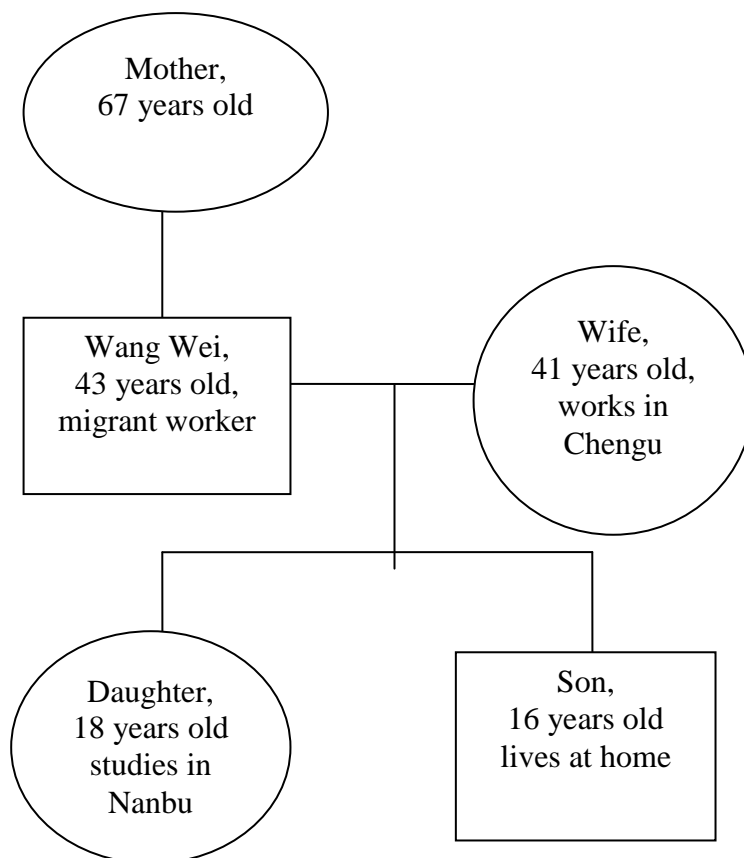


Figure 59. Wang Enmei working in the fields.



16. Wang Wei

“Our families used to be scattered in four places. My mother and son are here, my wife is working in Chengdu, my daughter studies in Nanbu, and I used to work in Guangzhou.”



Wang Wei is the uncle of my assistant. He is 43 years old. His wife is 41. He used to work in Guangzhou, but recently returned home because his father passed away. His wife currently works in Chengdu. He has a son who is mildly mentally challenged so stays at home with his mother (67 years old) in Meijia. His oldest daughter is studying in Nanbu and is preparing for the *gaokao* [university entrance examination]. He built a house in Meijia for his parents and also bought a house in Nanbu where his daughter is studying. However, the house is too far from the school so is not being used. The family rents a house near the school so the daughter can stay late at school to prepare for her entrance examination to the university.

Figure 60. Wang Wei and his mother.

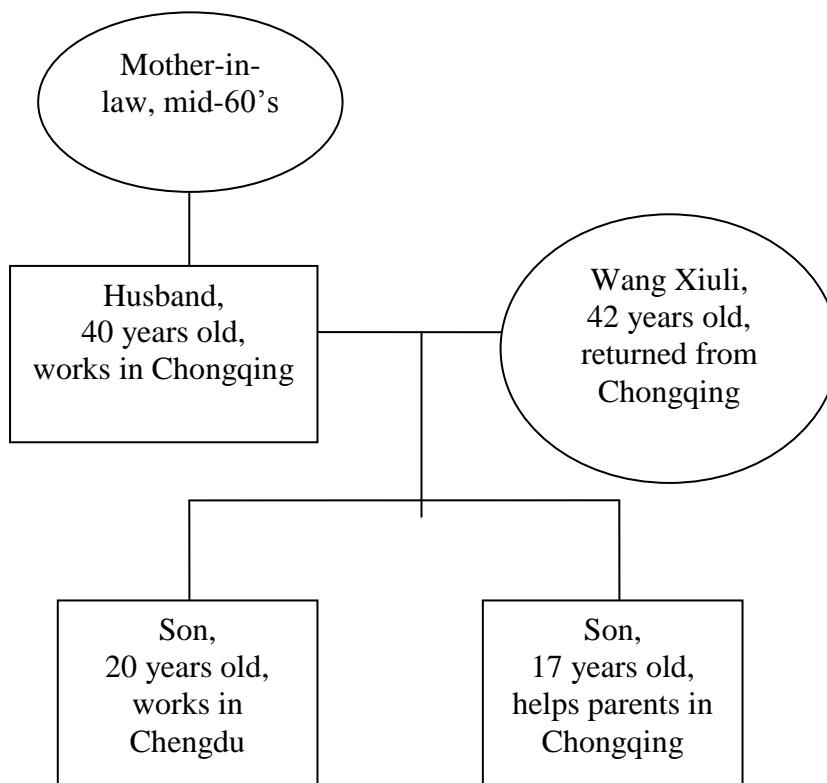


Figure 61. Religious posters in Wang Wei's home.



17. Wang Xiuling

“She can be counted as a good daughter-in-law”... “It is our duty to take care of our mother.”



Wang Xiuli is 42 years old and her husband is 40 years old. Husband and wife have a dumpling stall in Chongqing. She has returned home for six months now and is currently taking care of the mother-in-law (mid-60s) who has a brain tumor. The mother-in-law has stopped taking medicine because it was too expensive.

When talking about filial piety towards elderly parents, a neighbor who was present during the interview, said that Wang Xiuli “can be counted as a good daughter-in-law” for she returned home to take care of her mother-in-law. They have two sons. The older son, 20 years old, works as a computer programmer but his salary is only 1000 yuan so his parents still give him several hundred yuan for his expenses. The younger one, 17 years old, refused to go to school so now is helping them selling dumplings in Chongqing.

Figure 62. Wang Xiuling at home with her brother-in-law and her niece.

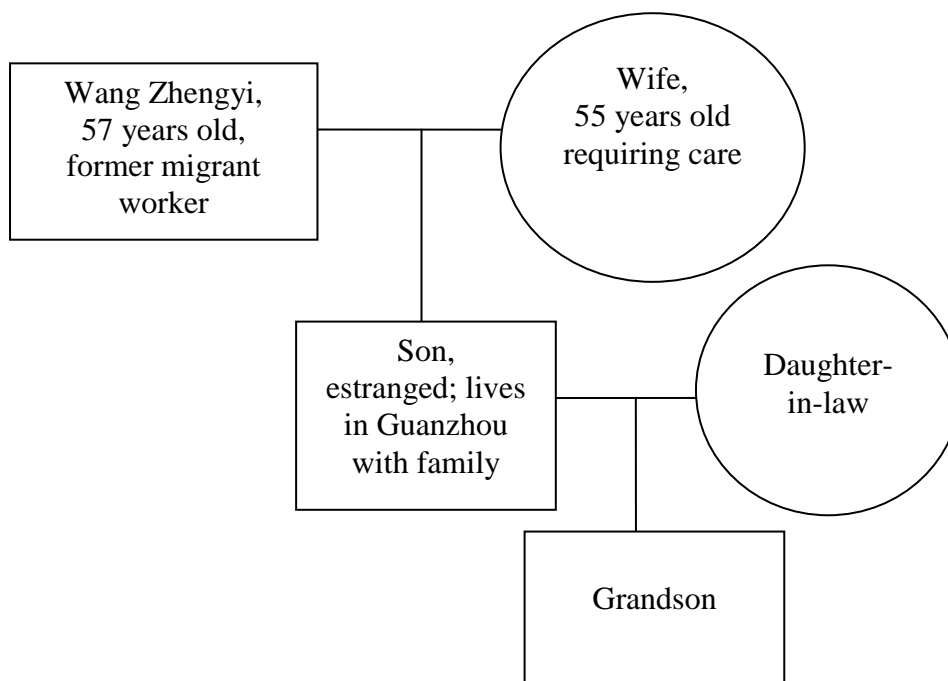


Figure 63. Wang Xiuling's home.



18. Wang Zhengyi

“I don’t worry about my son. Why should I worry? I just worry about myself and my wife.”



Wang Zheng-Yi is 57 years old and his wife is 55 year old. He was one of the first group of villagers who left the village to work in the city. While he was away his son got into a bad habit of playing cards and then eventually dropped out of school. The son is married and currently lives in Guangzhou. In recent years he has had very little contact with his son. His wife is quite sick and requires medical care. She often wanders around the village and he has to go look for her. He has asked his son for help, but his son has not given any money in recent years. He is disappointed that his son has not provided for him especially since his wife is sick and requires care which often does not give him time to work on the farm. He has borrowed money from the Co-operative credit union to buy medicines for his wife.

Figure 64. Wang Zhengyi and his wife.

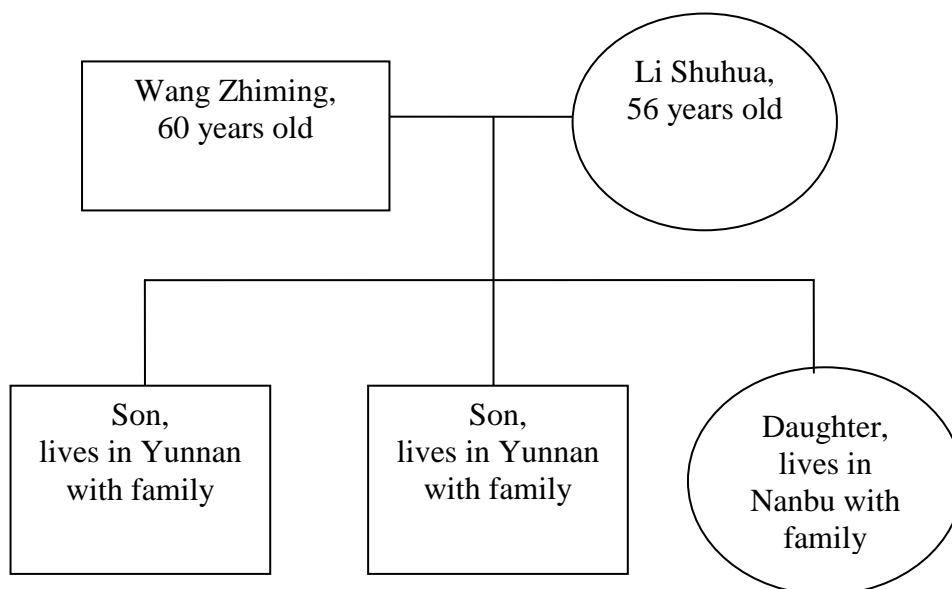


Figure 65. Wang Zhengyi's house.



19. Wang Zhiming and Li Shuhua

“You tell me. How can we be rich in the village when we have to spend all our money on medicine?”



Wang Zhiming is 60 years old and Li Shuhua, his wife, is 56. Wang Zhiming is quite ill. They have borrowed a significant amount of money from the Co-operative credit union for treatment, but have exhausted their finances so have now stopped seeking treatment. They have two sons and a daughter. Both sons work as painters in Yunnan and the daughter has bought a house in Nanbu. Part of their land was confiscated because they have a third child. They have an income of 2000-3000 yuan a year from farming and raising pigs. Though they need assistance from their children, they are hesitant to take their money. “How can we depend on our eldest son when he cannot even take care of himself?”

Figure 66. Wang Zhiming and Li Shuhua.

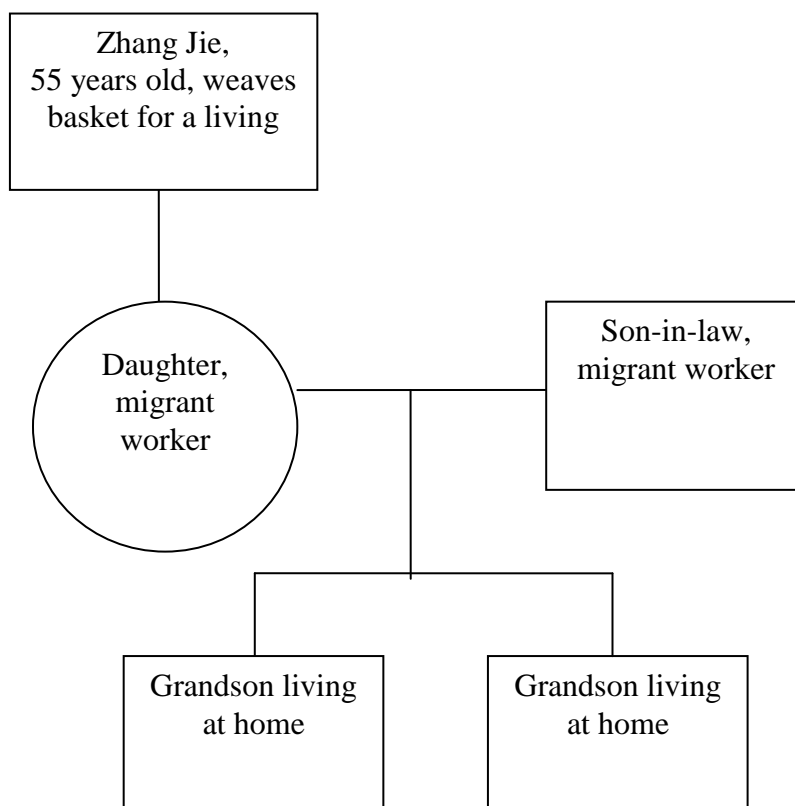


Figure 67. Wang Zhiming and Ms Wen Mengchuan conversing



20. Zhang Jie

“Only the crazy and those who do not have brains would stay at home.”

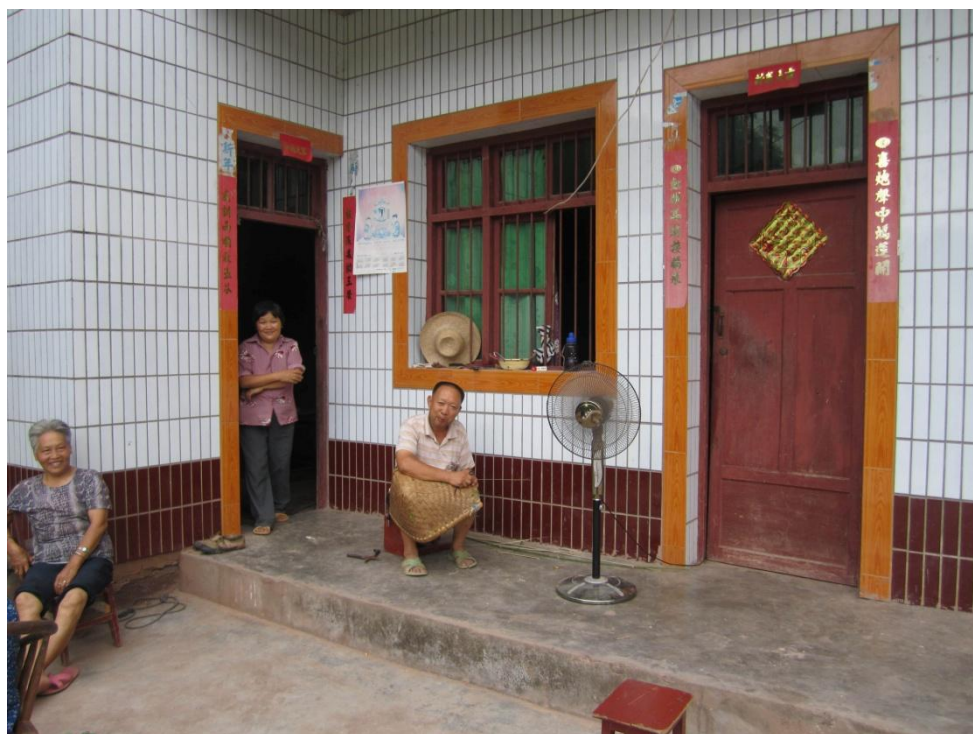


Zhang Jie is in 55years old. His wife passed away 10 years before. He is one of the few petty commodity producers in the village. He weaves baskets and sells them in the market earning between 1000 to 2000 yuan a year. He also received money from the government for converting unused land into grassland. He thinks that young people nowadays have a much better life than the previous generation and that being filial to one's parents is more than giving financial support. It involves being self-sufficient and not letting the parents worry about one's future. He believes young people should go out to work and look after themselves. *“Only the crazy and those who do not have brains would stay at home.”*

Figure 68. Zhang Jie at work weaving baskets.

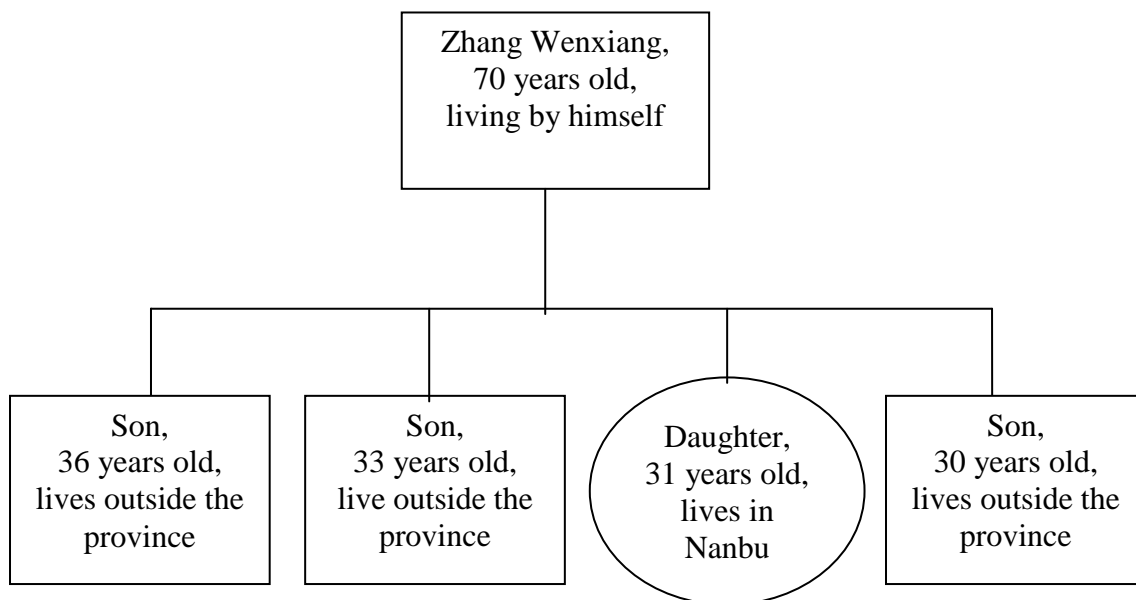


Figure 69. Zhang Jie in front in front of his house with neighbours.



21. Zhang Wenxiang

“When you are alone you need to pick up the chopsticks yourself after dinner.”



Yao Jiacheng is 70 years old and has four children. Three of his children live in other provinces so he doesn't get to see his grandchildren often. He currently lives by himself in the village. He is no longer able to do much work because of poor health. His sons give money regularly for daily expenses as well as for him to see the doctor for stomach bleeding.

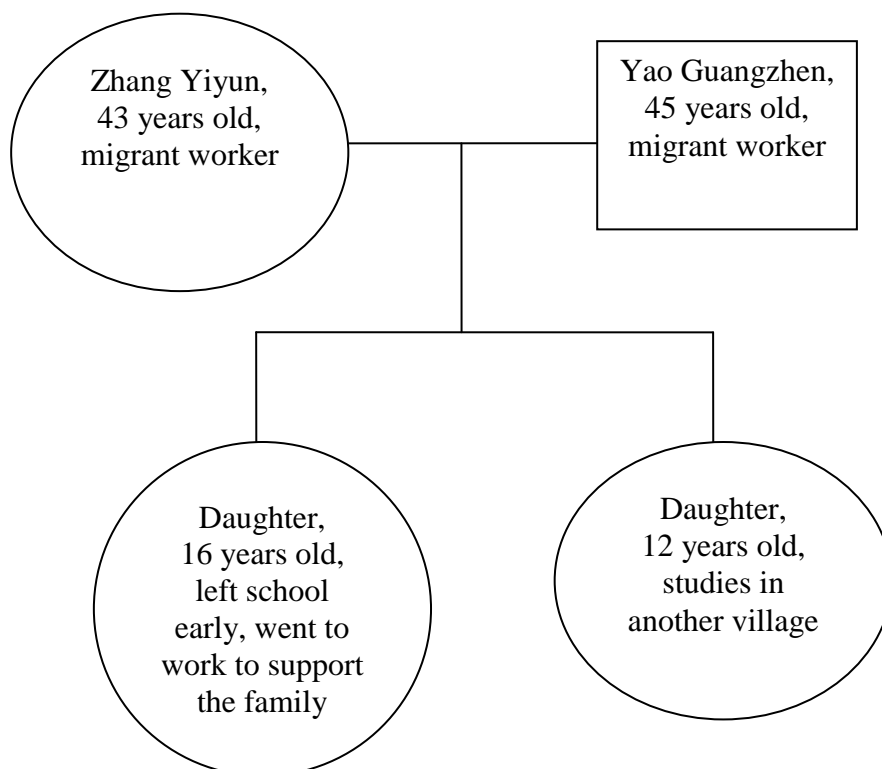
He feels life is better now than in the past materially, but he does not feel satisfied with life since his children are not around. “We old people now stay at home alone and can only find people our age to hang out with.” “Am I lonely? Certainly, but what can I do about it? It would be more convenient if we had two or three people at home where you can share responsibility, but when you are alone you need to pick up the chopsticks yourself after dinner. Furthermore, if you are sick no one is there to take care of you.” He expresses concern that his bad health might force his children to return home to take care of him.

Figure 70. Zhang Wenxiang in front of his home.



22. Zhang Yiyun and Yao Guangzheng

“Our daughter is honest and filial. She does not want us to work outside. She earns over 2,000 yuan a month and sends most of her money home.”



Zhang Yiyun is 43 years old and her husband Yao Guangzheng is 45. Her husband does house decoration and she does the painting. Up until last year they earned 20,000-30,000 yuan a year. Her husband got sick so they have been back for a year now. They have spent over 60,000 yuan on treatment, but the husband is still not doing well.

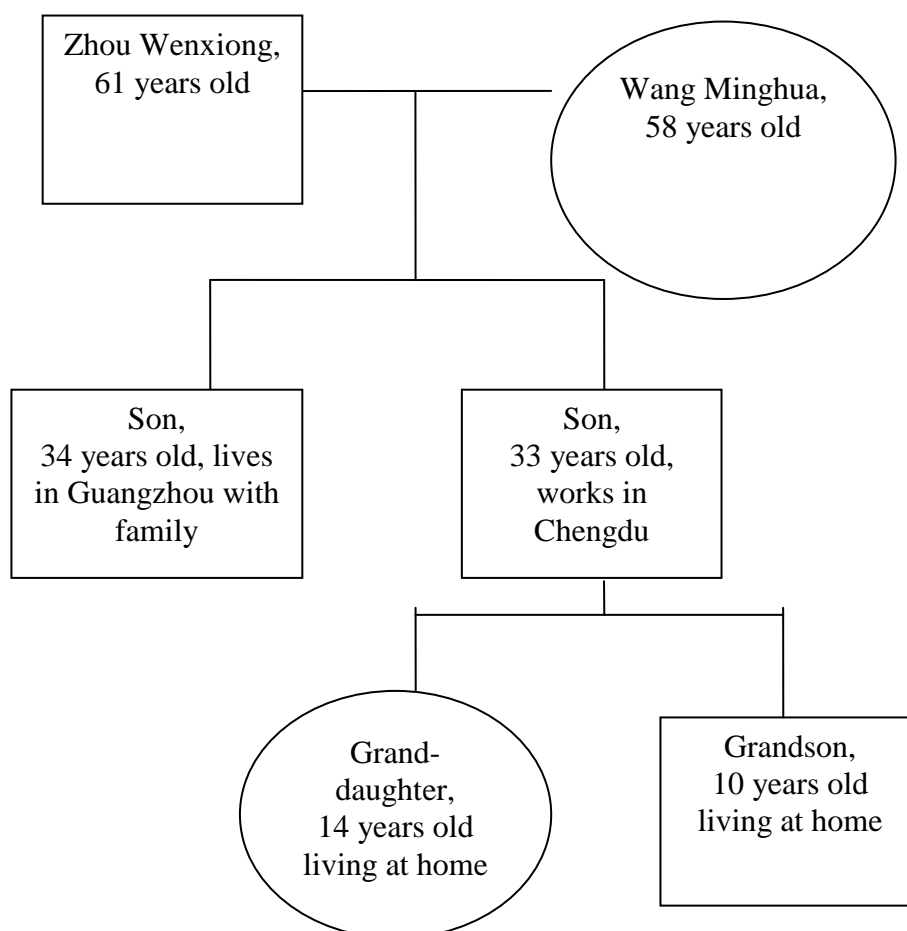
They have two daughters; both are good students. Their older daughter did well in middle school and got accepted for high school, but since the father is sick they are unable to pay school fees. They did not want the daughter to drop out of school but the daughter insisted on going to work to earn money to support the family. This daughter is currently working in Chengdu. They consider the daughter to be honest and filial. She earns over 2,000 yuan a month and sends most of her money home. The younger daughter studies in Teifo Tang and stays with her maternal-grandmother.

Figure 71. Zhang Yiyun and her second daughter.



23. Zhou Wenxiong and Wang Minghua

“Our grandson does better in school when his parents are home.”



Zhou Wenxiong is 61 years old, and Wang Minghua is 58. They have two sons. One works in Chengdu (he is 33) and the other one works in Guangzhou (he is 35). The one in Guangzhou only comes home every few years. The sons helped them build their house.

They have two grandchildren aged 14 and 10 currently staying with them. They are concerned for their grandchildren's education, but are illiterate and feel helpless. When their son is at home their grandson does better in school. But since their son went back to work the grandson has not done well in school. They do not know whether their grandson actually does his school work since he spends much of his time watching television. Their 14 year old grand-daughter fares better in school since she is more focused.

Figure 72. Zhou Wenxiong and Wang Minghua with their grandson.

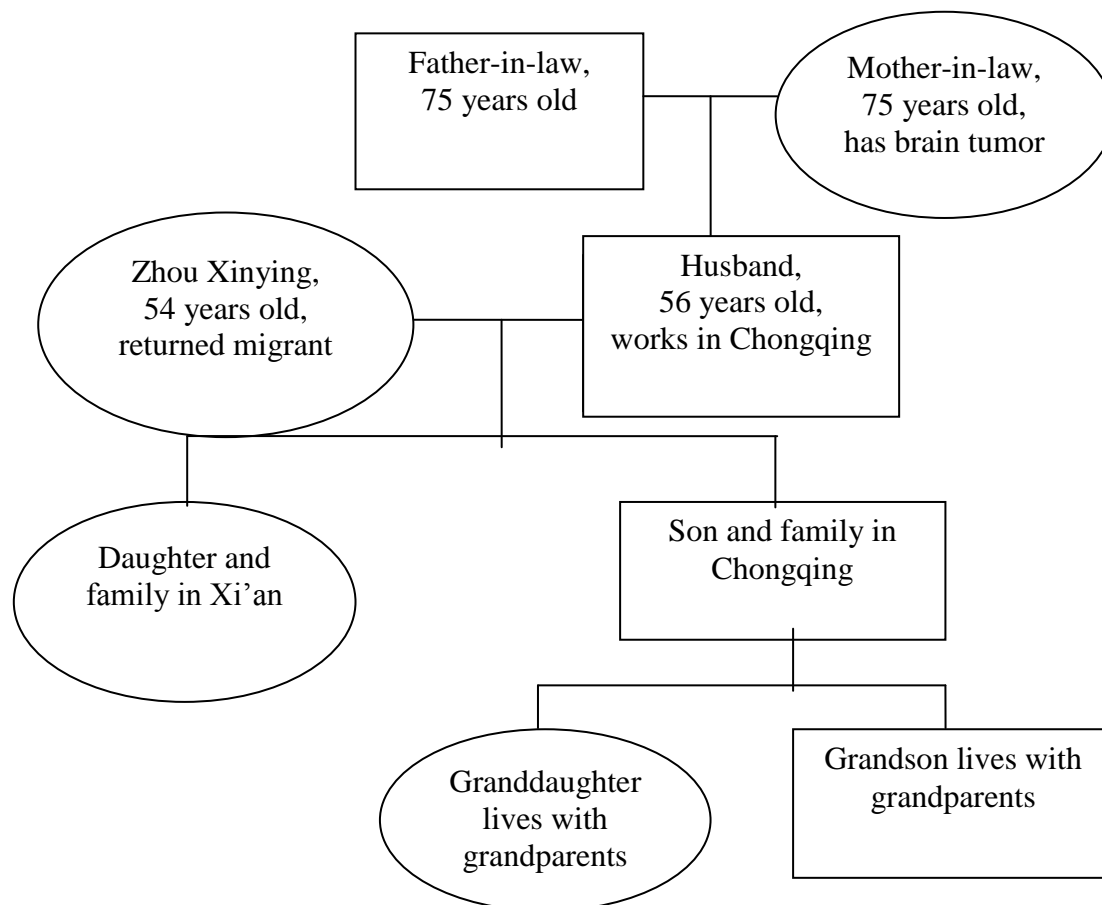


Figure 73. Front view of the Zhous' house.



24. Zhou Xiuying

“What is the purpose of having babies nowadays? Young couples want to have babies but are not willing to raise them!”



Zhou Xiuying is 54 years old and her husband is 56 years old. Both she and her husband work in Chongqing, but she has been forced to return home to take care of her mother-in-law (75 years old) who is sick. “She [her mother-in-law] said she was going to die so we came back. We have been home for three months. But it turns out she is still very much around so she deceived us!”

She is frustrated with the condition of her mother-in-law as well as with her son and daughter-in-law. She has to look after her grandchildren because her son and daughter-in-law also work in Chongqing, but don’t want to take care of their kids. She does not mind looking after one child, and the parents could raise the other one. “It is not convenient for me to raise two kids and also look after my business. Their mother [her daughter-in-law] does not even bother to come and have a look at them.”

Figure 74. Zhou Xiuying's husband and their youngest grandson.

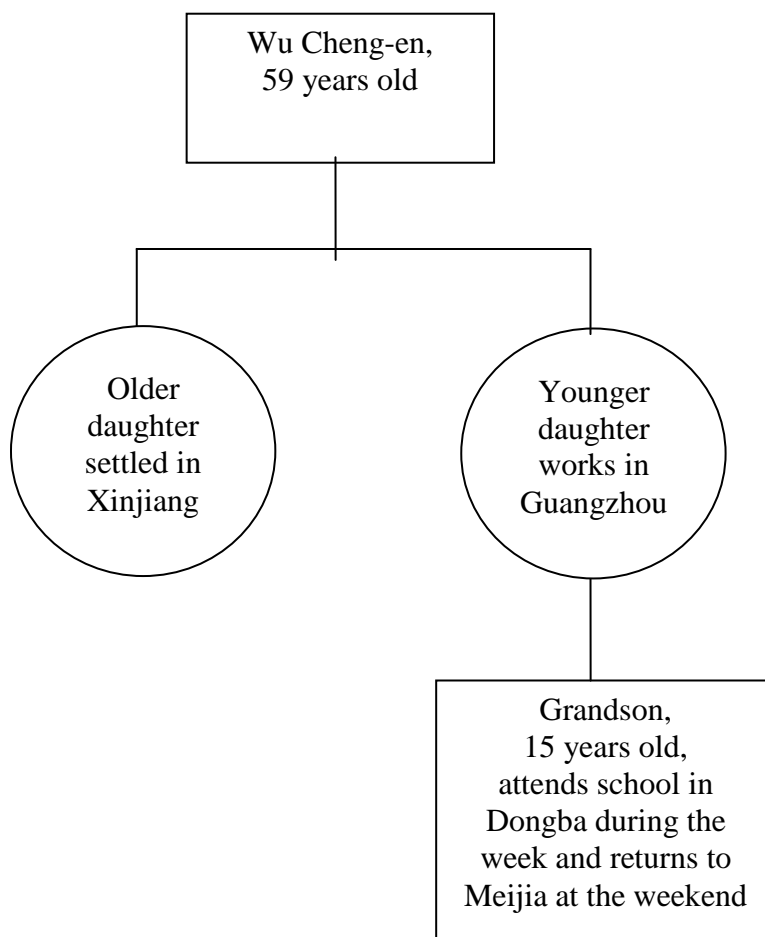


Figure 75. Chou Xiuying with her granddaughter and parents-in-law.



25. Wu Cheng-en

“I take care of him like a woman who has just delivered a baby. I feed him two eggs a day. I do not sell my eggs.”



Wu Cheng-en is 59 years old. His wife passed away four years ago. He has two daughters. One has settled in Xinjiang and the other one is working in Guangzhou. His grandson is 15 years old and goes to school in Dongba during the week. The grandson returns to Meijia and stays with him during the weekend. Every month his daughter sends home 700 yuan; half for him and half for the child. He said that since families nowadays do not have many children they should take care of the children. He pampers his grandson. “I take care of him like a woman who has just delivered a baby. I feed him two eggs a day. I do not sell my eggs.”

Figure 76. Wu Cheng-en washing clothes at the brigade's pond.



Figure 77. Wu Cheng-en at work.



Chapter Four

Portrait of the Rural Migrant Family: the Role of Migration in Influencing Household Function and Structure

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the family and livelihood arrangements and how the family as a unit is in flux due to the pressures of modernization and migration. It provides insights into the interdependency relationship between migrants and left-behind family members. It examines how migration affects the day-to-day family dynamics and how left-behind members cope in the absence of migrant members. Most importantly, it examines the motivations for migration and the decision-making process which migrants and their families undertake. Finally, education, as a unique motivating factor, is examined. The chapter provides a practical foundation for the next two chapters which will examine filial piety as the core notion which organizes and explains how migrant families adapt to changing circumstances.

4.2 The Traditional Family Unit

As we learned in the introduction, modern Chinese society, as a whole, still remains a communal society rather than individually-based as it is in other family systems in the world. Even though modernization and the diversification of social livelihood in the past 30 years has caused the fracturing of the Chinese family, nevertheless, the family unit still remains the primary aspect of life for people in rural China. For the majority of the migrant workers, leaving home to earn a living does not equate to moving on and cutting ties with left-behind family members. In fact, this is

one of the reasons why migrants go out to work – so they can continue to support their family financially. This is a part of the family's inter-generational contract.

In the feudal era, Chinese peasants, artisans, and small merchant families functioned as a unit of the patriarchal system. Members usually worked together under the direction of the household head – a father or grandfather. Sons were expected to learn and inherit the trade of their father and seldom left home as adults. If they left home and had not formally separated themselves from their family, they sent their earnings back to their parents (Lang, 1968). This truly was an economic unit where everything was held in common. The practical reasons for adhering to the joint extended family were mainly economic (Baker, 1979).

Historically great families in Europe went to great lengths to preserve the whole of their estate through the primogeniture scheme which prevented younger sons from inheriting land. By contrast, the Chinese system worked to ensure the breakdown of land so that each son would have an equal inheritance (Baker, 1979). Again, this was part of the imperial state's strategy of breaking down large noble families in order to remove possible threats to state power. Maintaining extended family networks, then, was important to the early medieval upper class, because this type of kinship structure allowed a family to solidify and expand local status and power (Knapp, 2005). In traditional China, land was the primary form of familial wealth and the most important form of property (Baker, 1979). This is an early practice of the economics of scale where the large united group could withstand vulnerability and intimidating pressures of any kind.

For some societies in the West, the family is seen as an institution which exists to help an individual to be raised and trained to prepare to go out to the world as a full contributing member of society. In turn, society celebrates the rite of passage when an

individual passes from adolescence to adulthood. Baker describes this as a break-up of the family when children reach adulthood. In China, however, the emphasis is reversed. “It was not the family which existed in order to support the individual, but rather, the individual who existed in order to continue the family” (Baker, 1979:26). An individual without an extended family network would be penniless and powerless. In pre-modern China, economic, political and social pressures all colluded to reinforce the inter-generational bonding of the Confucian family.

In the contemporary era, this inter-generational contract can still be found; individual members continue to make sacrifices for the common good of the family unit. Elderly parents stay behind to take care of their property and their grandchildren while their adult children work away from home. When elderly parents get sick they call for their adult children to return (Interviewees #3, 11, & 24)⁸.

In general, family relationships between the generations are better than in the past when parents and children struggled with tilling the land together. Working and living together, day-in and day-out, caused tensions. Now, elderly parents see it as a blessing that adult children no longer have to endure manual work on the farm (#4). With the changed economic situation, their children can now leave the farms to earn their living outside while the elderly remain at home looking after the land.

With children working outside to earn the income needed for the family, elderly parents are better off financially. Yet this economic stability comes with trade-offs. In the past, elders grew old and could cherish the moments spent with children and grandchildren, but now, it is simply not possible. Parents and children used to struggle together for survival but they were around each other and could rely on one another. Now they have clothes to wear and food to eat, but they no longer feel reassured by this.

⁸ From this point onwards, # followed by a number indicates the family /profile number in the section at the end of Chapter 3.

“Though we now have the necessities of life, I do not feel comfortable about anything now that my children are not around” (Zhang Wenxiang, #21). “There is an element of trade-off in our lives. In contrast to the old days, we no longer have to worry about our children. Our children go away to earn money and provide a better life for us, but we old people constantly feel lonely and struggle with working on the farm by ourselves” (Wang Yumei, #1). In Meijia, economic prosperity has come at the cost of affective distress and loneliness and the physical distress of labour continuing into old age.

The eldest generation grew up in the late Republican or early Maoist era, but either way would have known only the life of agricultural labour. Few members of this generation would have received much of an education, or have literacy skills beyond the basics. This generation experienced collectivisation, the Great Leap Forward and the subsequent famine, and the abrupt de-collectivisation and marketisation which followed. Some members of this generation (mostly men) may have migrated out to pursue labour opportunities elsewhere, but would have already married and established families of their own, and so maintained tight relationships with those left behind. As they aged, even those who migrated chose to return to their ancestral homes to reunite with their families and work the land.

The middle, working generation, on the other hand, is far less predictable. The market economy is the only China they have known. While few have attained college degrees or professional skills, this generation has had far more educational opportunities than their parents. They have grown up with the socialist values of equality and hard work, but they have also inherited elements of traditional filial piety, and have imbibed some of the modern values of individualism. They have had opportunities to migrate out from the village to seek employment that pays better than simply working the land. Yet their movements have been limited by the *hukou* registration system. They are also the

first One-Child generation, and are likely the only son, or one of only two children in their family. This middle generation finds themselves geographically, financially, and morally torn. On the one hand, they need to earn enough money to care for not only themselves, but their parents and their children as well, and migration offers the best chance to do so. On the other hand, the affective demands of filial piety and parenthood require them to be physically present for their aging parents and their young children. The economic realities of migration have put a tremendous strain on this generation.

Finally, the school age generation is in an unprecedented position. As members of the second, or sometimes third generation of the One-Child policy, these children are often the sole beneficiaries of the attention and support of six or more people – two parents, four grandparents, and perhaps even great-grandparents. Both their parents and grandparents place a high value on education, which they see as creating the best opportunity for the advancement for children. Yet because of the high cost of such education, their parents often feel compelled to migrate in order to support their academic needs. Thus, the school-age generation often grows up with one or both parents *in absentia*. They are raised instead by their grandparents, who, due to age, poor health, work demands on the farm, or lack of education, often feel ill equipped to raise them. Yet they also form a bridge between their parents and grandparents – the common bond which unites those who migrate with those who are left behind. Without these children present, the migrant generation might not feel as compelled to send remittances or maintain contact with their rural families (#18).

Before a more detailed examination of the interviews and their insights into the inter-generational family structure, it will be helpful to review the basic demographics of this study, as they are a representative sample of the village of Meijia as a whole.

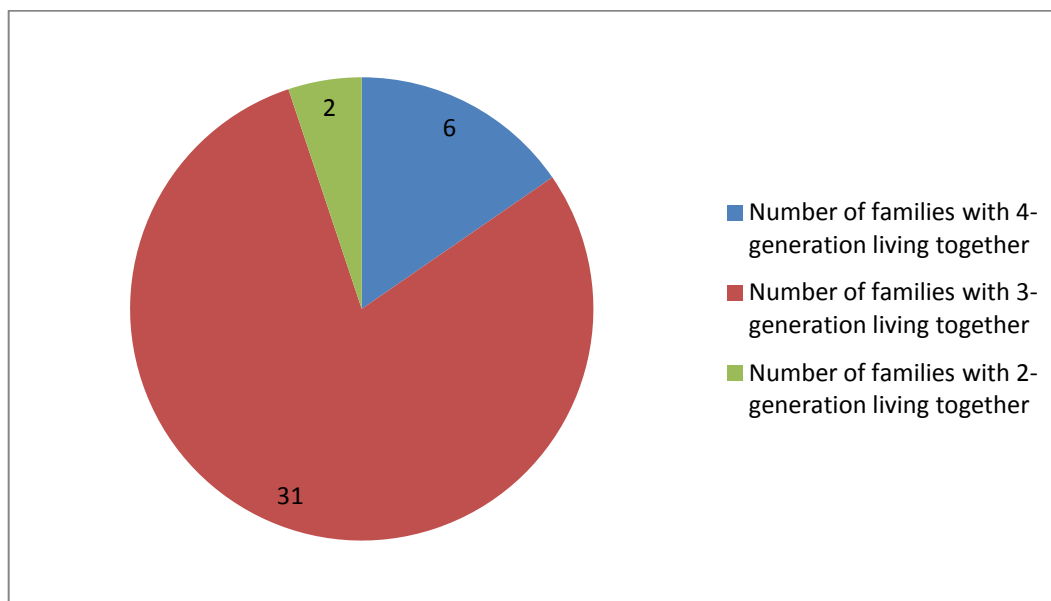
Table 4.1 Demographic Data for Families the Study

Number of families interview	39
Number of four generation family	6
Number of families where parental age is 55 or over	32
Number of families where parental age is under 55	7
Number of people aged 55 and over	57
Number of people aged 65 and over	28
Average age of parents/grandparents	62.3
Number of families with only daughter	6
Number of families with no migrant member	2
Number of families with parents as migrants	8
Number of families who have built their house	33
Number of families with a house in the city	11
Number of families in which children have professional jobs	5
Number of families with children in school	15
Number of families with children attending school in Meijia	6
Number of families with grandchildren at home	21
Total population	202
Number of migrant workers	101
Number of families that have a faith belief	3

The families in this study consist of three to four generations who cooperate to create a shared livelihood. From oldest to youngest, the family is comprised of grandparents (and sometimes great-grandparents), usually aged 55 years or older; an adult, working generation aged between 20 and 55; and a school age generation under 20 years of age.

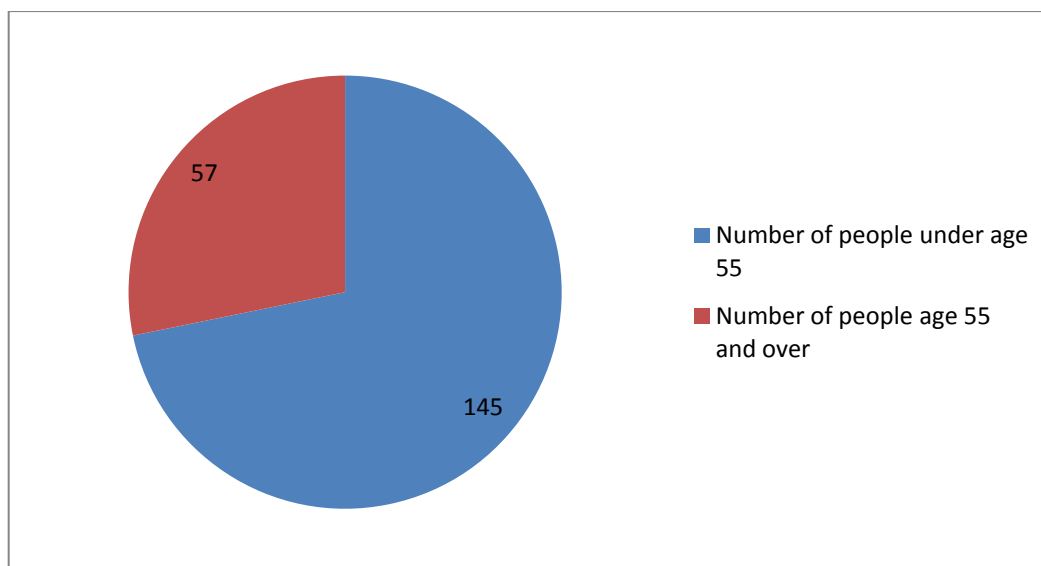
Figures 78 to 81 illustrate family type, ages, and number of migrant family.

Figure 78. Types of families interviewed



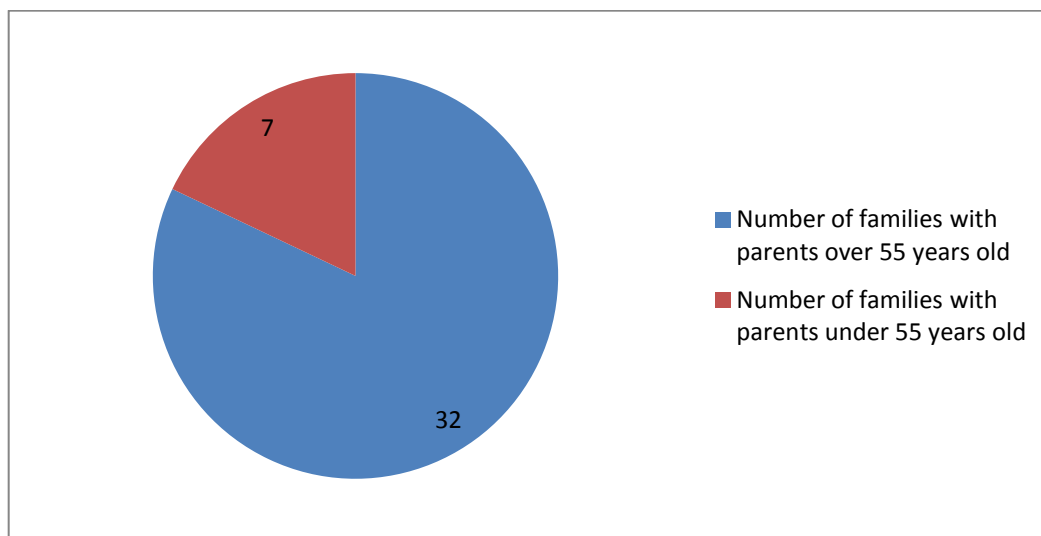
The three generation family type accounts for 79.5 percent of the families in the study (31 out of 39 families).

Figure 79. Population distributions of under 55 versus over 55 years of age



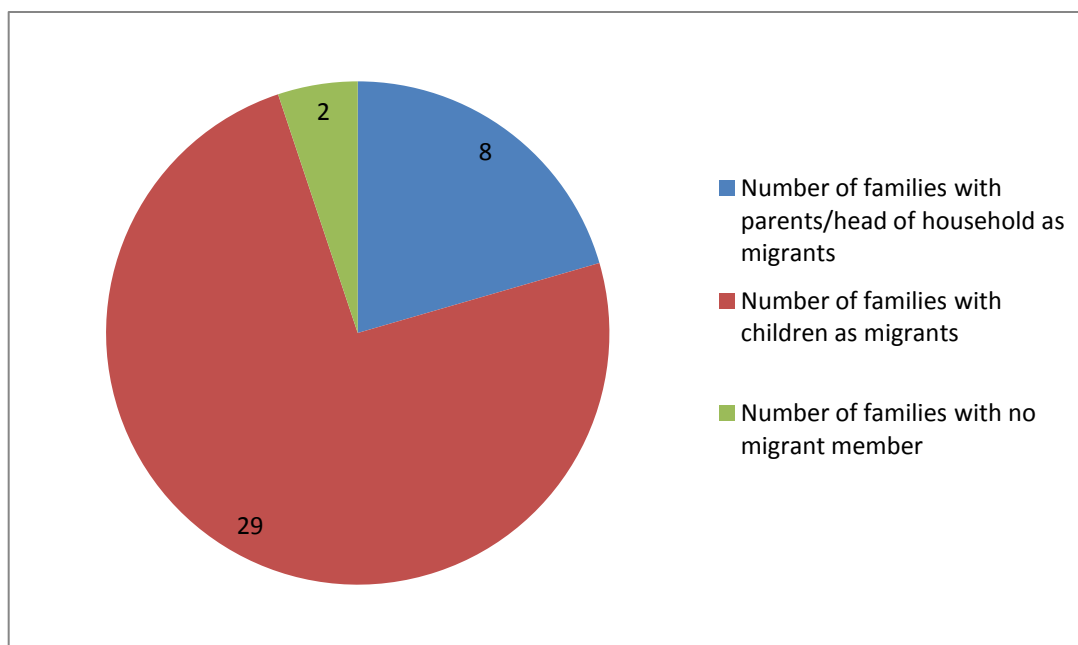
The population in the studies are relatively old. Just over one third of the population (39%) is under 55 years old.

Figure 80. Families with parents under 50 versus over 50



Eighty-two percent (32 out of 39) of families in the studies have parents or grandparents aged 55 years or older.

Figure 81. Family members who are migrants



Of the 37 families with migrant members, eight families (21.6%) have either parents or head of household as migrant members.

4.3 Elderly Grandparents: The Family Main-stays and Care-takers of the Land

Among the members of a rural migrant family, the elderly grandparents are the most stable. For the most part they stay at home and manage the land. They serve as an anchor for both their children who are migrants and their left-behind grandchildren.

They are generally content with life due to the household's improved economic condition (#4). But on the other hand, many complain of burdens (#24) and loneliness (#4). Nevertheless, they generally come to accept their fate of being old and left-behind to manage the house (#10).

The main fear of elderly people is not so much about having too little money to live on, but rather they are afraid of being a burden to their own children when they become sick and infirm. It is a fear that their children will have to quit their jobs and return home to take care of them. "I think life is ok as long as I'm not sick. If I'm sick I will have to depend on my children. We rural people are not allowed to become sick. It costs several thousand *yuan* each time to stay in hospital" (Wang Zhiming, #19).

They are satisfied with life once their children grow up and buy their own houses. "We were worrying about them when they were young. We worry that our son and daughter would not be able to get married. Now both of them have established their own families, and we now have nothing to worry about. What we can do now is to save some money to help our son pay off the loan on his house" (Sun Jinlong and Song Shuhui, #14).

Middle-aged parents who are physically well and still manage to farm do not worry much about their children working away from home since they themselves are still capable of working and supporting themselves with farm income. What they do worry about is the long-term well-being of their children. Some parents will accept the fact that

they are in no position to help their children, especially when it comes to helping them buy a house (#6).

As a whole, members of the elder generation express contentment, satisfaction or happiness with their economic situation, which is generally an improvement over the widespread poverty and starvation of their youth (#4 and #21). Yet at the same time, many respondents also complain of still having to work hard into their old age (#15), being taken for granted as caretakers for both land and grandchildren (#24), and loneliness due to their migrant children being so far away and out of contact (#21). As the family main-stays, they experience both the benefits and the challenges of being left behind by their migrant labourer children.

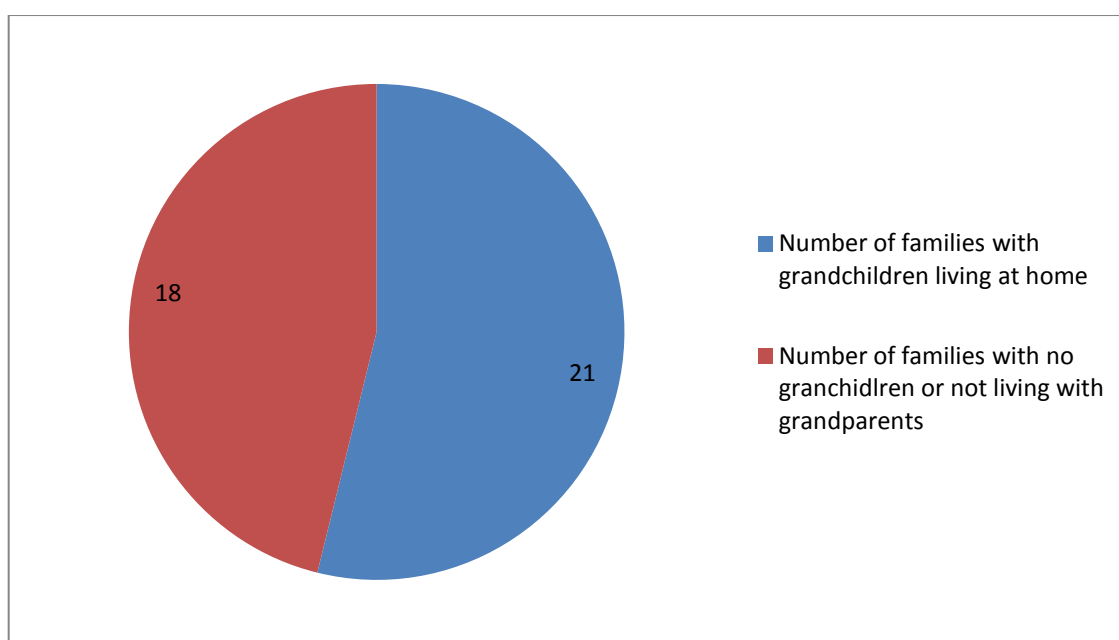
4.4 Grandchildren as the Bridge between the Elders and the Migrants

Unmarried migrant workers regularly send money home to their parents in the village since they feel a strong obligation to do so (#22). Once migrants marry, however, they may begin to feel torn between saving money for supporting their own nuclear family and continuing to support their parents back in the village. Young families take priority on their children and use all their time, money, and resources on their own children as result they have less time and money for their elderly parents (Rui, 2006). Here, the presence of grandchildren becomes a decisive factor. Married migrants whose children have stayed behind with their grandparents more diligently keep up weekly contact with home and send remittances on a regular basis. Xin Yuntai (#20) indicates that each month his daughter sends home 700 *yuan*; half for him and half for his grandson to take care of school expenses. In their survey of 978 people ages 60 and over in 15 provinces, Lu and Qian (2014) found that if elderlies are responsible for the guidance of the grandchildren, they receive more support from their children than those

who are not responsible for the guidance of the grandchildren (5,242 RMB versus 4,4402 RMB). Chow (2004) indicates that the more contacts elderly parents have with their working children, the better relationship they have, and the more support they will get from their children. On the one hand this expresses the bond between parents and children, but on the other hand there exists an understanding of mutual inter-generational exchange between the elderly parents and the working children.

Elderly grandparents help take care of grandchildren at home so the parents can work in the city; in return, migrants working in the city give elderly grandparents money not only out of a sense of filial duty, but also to look ahead by providing the necessary care for the young children. These young children are sources of insurance and security for the parents when they themselves become old. One of the interviewees in Anhui states that, “Unless the children have a good relationship with parents, they will not leave their children behind to be taken care of by their parents” (Interview in Anhui, 28 November 2010).

Figure 82. Families with grandchildren living at home with grandparents



Of the families interviewed more than half of the families have grandchildren living at home.

Money sent home does indeed help elderly parents with daily expenses, but the most significant portion of it pays for tuition and school fees, food and accommodation for the children, with additional support for the grandparents themselves when farm work is interrupted by caring for their grandchildren. For instance, when a child is enrolled in a school far away from home, parents might need to rent a room or a house near the school for the children to stay during the school term. When this happens, the grandmother might come along to take care of the children.

Migrants who have already bought a house in the city and do not have children staying in the village with the grandparents might not regularly send money to their parents because they have to look after their own family. As Wang Zhiming (#19) explained, “How can we depend on our eldest son when he cannot even take care of himself?” If middle aged grandparents are still able to manage themselves then their children might not send money. “We are capable now, but will depend on our children when we are old” (Song Shuhui, #14).

4.5 Migrant Parents: Straddling Two Worlds and Two Generations

Sichuan farmers migrate to look for work because of shortage of land causing a mass labour surplus in rural area. Migration effectively increases the income of the farmer. They have made significant contributions to urban economic development; but on the hand they face difficulties in the city due to lack of employment contracts with their employers, while at the same time they are denied social and security benefits due to the lack of a proper urban *hukou* (Long, 2011).

Besides facing social challenges, migrant parents are also being pulled in two opposite directions by their elderly grandparents and by their own children. They want to show respect and support for their elderly parents, but at the same time, desire to better their children's futures. This investment is not just purely for the betterment of the child him/herself, but is for their own future. Giving children a better life and a better education is their insurance for old age. Like their elderly parents, when these migrants get old they too will have to depend on their children for support, since rural prefectures have yet to establish a social pension scheme for migrant workers.

It is not easy for working parents to leave behind their young children and live in the city where they do not get to see their children for months. Liu Yijun (#9) and Li Jian, her husband, both have spent more than 20 years working outside. It breaks her heart to be away from the children:

I really want to stay with them if we could afford to. I would rather stay at home and take care of our children even if I make less money. But with school expenses we are not able to stay at home. I would be very happy if all our family members could be together. It is hard working outside since we often we have no control on our life. One time we lost over 20,000 *yuan* because of snow. Our fruits were not able to reach the destination on time and spoiled. It is not easy doing business outside so we often tell our children not to worry about anything but to study hard. Education is the most useful method to be successful in life. Having a diploma is more useful in life than manual work.

As Liu Yijun testifies, it is her very dedication to her children that drives her separation from the family. This painful juxtaposition is at the heart of many migrant workers' decision to either migrate out or return home.

A second tension that migrants face is having to straddle two different spheres: home and work. Their minds are always on their parents. They worry about the burden that their elderly parents must endure labouring on the farm. "Yesterday, my son called and asked whether it is time to harvest. I told him I can do the harvesting by myself, but he told me not to do it and will send 300 *yuan* to hire others to help with harvesting"

(Zhou Wenxiong, #23). As we saw earlier, Wang Zhiming (#19) is afraid of getting sick and becoming a burden for the children. Migrants likewise share the same concern. With elderly or sick parents at home, migrants are constrained and limited to how far away from home they can be. They may need to work closer to home so they could quickly return if and when the situation at home requires their presence. Proximity often determines what kind of jobs they can take, and places a limit on their economic mobility. “We are only doing business in Chongqing and are not free to go far since we have elderly parents at home” (Yao Xingming , #24).

Yao Xingming and her husband operate a sesame cake and steam bun business in Chongqing; however, she has been forced to return to the village because her mother-in-law is paralyzed. They bought her to Chongqing to live with the family, “But it was too much to look after with her being sick and us taking care of our grandchildren while trying to keep our business running.” She and her husband have been back in Meijia for about three months now; however, they arrived too late for her to plant any crops. “We now just sit idling at home. Our mother said that she was going to die, so we came home; but it turns out that she is still very much alive after three months. So she has deceived us [into to coming] back” (Yao Xingming, #24).

Yao’s mother-in-law’s ill health forced her to modify her way of life. This case illustrates the type of difficulty that migrants face when they have elderly parents at home who are not in good health. To return home, they have to put their job or business on hold. They do not have definite plan when to go out again. Being at home cost the Yaos money because they initially did not plan to shut down their business completely for they still rent a place to keep their refrigerator in Chongqing, and must continue to pay for this expense while sitting at home waiting for their mother to pass away.

On the other hand, we can see that they can easily adapt back into village life. They were farmers before going out to work so they can always depend on land as the last resource. Farming in Sichuan is quite simple, mainly wheat, rice, corn and subsistence farming, which means that not much technical expertise is required to work the land. People who were older when they first migrated are more at ease with moving back to the village and resuming farming, whereas younger migrants who went out either right after school or before finishing school find it difficult to transition back because they have not done much farm work in their life except for helping with small chores during their school years.

As is evident, migrant parents can feel torn between the needs of the elder generation and the needs of their children, between the economic possibilities of faraway cities and the advantages of geographic proximity, and between the comparative workloads of urban versus rural life. Each migrant must weigh these competing factors as he/she makes the decision to migrate out or return home, and whether that move is temporary or permanent.

4.6 Types of Migrants and Motivational Theories

Migrants can be classified into the following types: 1) *one-way migration* where the migrant decides to settle permanently in the new (urban) areas; 2) *seasonal migration* which is in response to cyclical work opportunities in different locations; and 3) *circular migration* in which migrants work for a period of time in the urban sector, and then return home to the family farm (Ellis, 1998). Most migration is done by a single person who continues to maintain close links with the area of origin where “migration is a series of exchanges between places” (Garner, 1993 in De Haan, 1999). This view aligns with the household strategy theory in that migration is a family decision allowing the migrant

to maintain contact with the family. De Haan (1999) suggests that circular migration is determined by factors such as distance and transportation, living conditions in the areas of destination, and keeping a foot on the farm—as part of a diversification strategy. Other factors such as patterns of landholding, land rights, and the pattern of demand for labour in a rural society are also important. This is very true for China where *hukou* registration forbids most migrants to settle permanently in the city.

Stark (1993) suggested that migrants take on the role of financial intermediaries in enabling rural households to overcome risk and constraints on their ability to transition from domestic to commercial production. The underlying assumption here is that migration decisions are not made by individual migrants, but rather by a larger unit of people such as the family or household. Household strategy theory shifts the focus from individual-based to mutual interdependent family-based decision-making. It is in this context that remittance transfers by the migrant to family members are viewed as results of collective migration decisions (Chen, Chiang, & Leung, 2003). Stark suggests that the decision to migrate is a strategy of risk diversification. Migration can still take place even if migrants make less in other locations (Chen et al., 2003). This is because migration is often not a first choice for poor peasants but an option of last resort for survival. As a risk-diversification strategy, a family as a unit would pool resources to allow migrants to leave and seek work. All family members share in the risks and rewards of such migration. Members left-behind will tend the farm or look after the household and expect their returns in the form of remittances.

Ellis (1998) suggests that migration is a household strategy of livelihood and diversification. He defines livelihood as a process which encompasses diverse strategies and social support capabilities for survival wherein rural households strive for survival and improvements in their standard of living. Livelihood comprises more than just

income, and includes social institutions of family and kinship. In a similar vein, De Haan (1999) argues that rural-urban migration has to be seen as a central element in the livelihoods of many household families and that migration movements are not economic reactions to push and pull, but are determined by social and cultural institutions.

As the interviews of this study reveal, this concept of livelihood for rural Chinese families cannot simply be understood in financial terms. It must also include the affective needs of all three generations, and must honour the filial expectations of the elder generation, while continuing to invest in the younger generations.

There is a gendered aspect to migration in China. In the Philippines, for instance, the employment of wives and mothers is often equated with a failure by men to provide for the family (Parreñas, 2005). This is not the case for China, where out-migration by the young is popular for both males and females. This is because there is surplus labour on the farm. The alternative of not going out to work would be sitting idle at home since there is limited opportunity for employment in remote rural areas. Society will look down on those who sat idling at home. The social, economic, and political situation in China is very different from other parts of the world. In rural China, one finds equal numbers of men and women who migrate. Typically, both husband and wife migrate, but there is no guarantee they will find work in the same city. When both spouses migrate, it often means separation from each other as well as separation from those left behind.

Li Jian and his wife, Liu Yijun (#9), have spent more than 20 years working in Gansu, Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan, Hunan, Yunnan, and Zhejiang Provinces. They first met each in Guangzhou then returned home to get married. They were only home for a week and then went back to work. They were separated for a period of seven years in two different parts of China, often a 2-3 day train journey apart. The husband worked

in the south while his wife was in the northwest part of the country. They would try to meet every three to four months. Early on when they had no mobile phones, they kept in touch by writing letters.

While both sons and daughters migrate to find work, their experience of filial relations with the parents is quite different. Chapter 6 will explore how migration is affecting gender roles and is thereby transforming notions of filial piety.

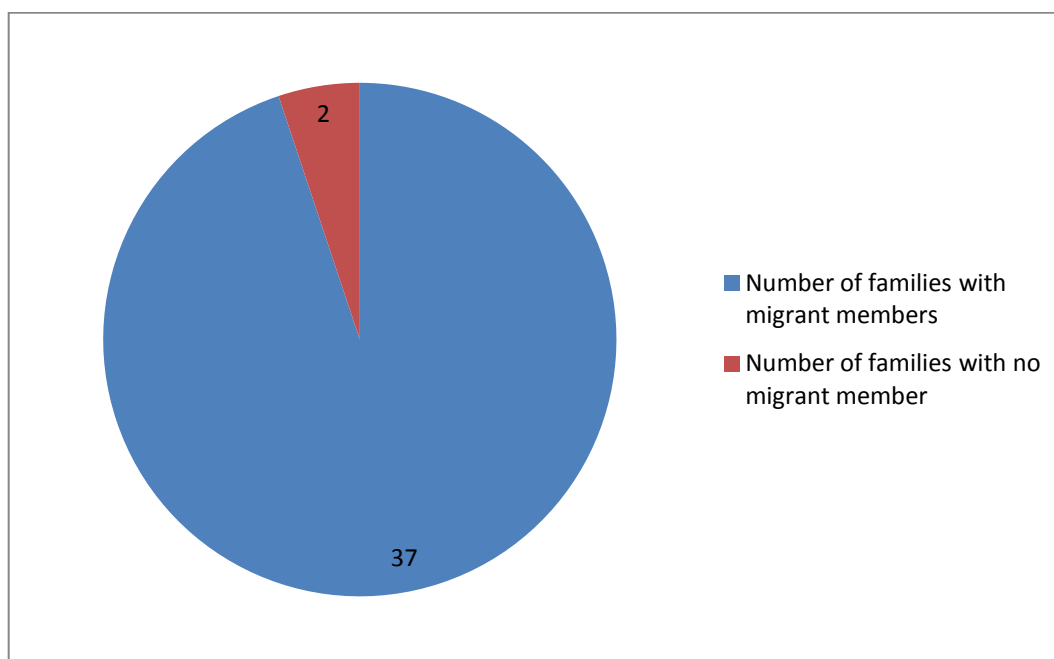
4.7 Migration as a Strategy to Enhance Income or as the Necessary Means for Survival

When parents are physically well and are able to take care of the farmland and other house chores, their sons and daughters may be motivated to pursue migrant work in order to improve the family's economic well-being. For instance, in many areas of rural China, a single wage earner does not provide sufficient income for a family to build a house, send children to school outside the village, or meet the medical needs of the elderly. With a per capita income of 3108 *yuan*, it would take decades for a family to build a house if only there is only a single migrant in the family. Thus, incentives are high to maximize the number of migrant workers while still preserving the family's claim to land rights in the village. Despite the high costs, only six out of 39 families in Meijia have not built a new house. Others, like Liu Yijun (#9) above, are motivated by earning enough money to pay for a higher quality education for their children. On the other hand, illness, rather than investment can drive the migration process. A parent's sickness, especially in poor households, often compels rural men and women to look for urban work in order to pay for medical expenses.

It is not uncommon to have teenage youngsters as young as fifteen and sixteen going out and working. Those who finished junior high and could not or would not continue into senior high school often find it easier to migrate and find unskilled factory

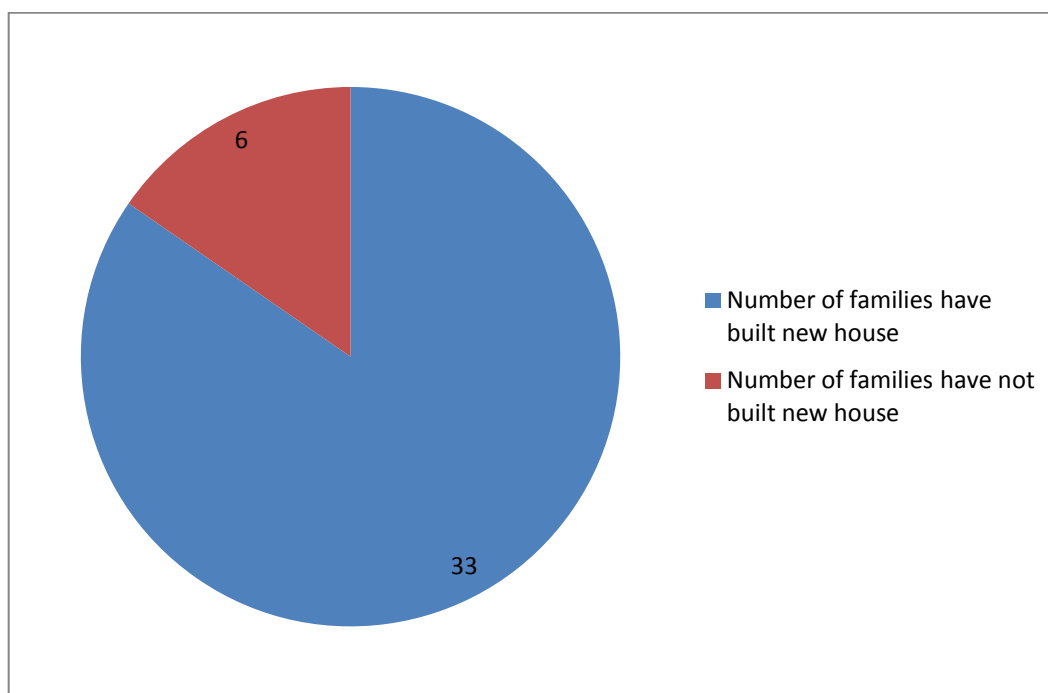
work than to dedicate themselves to their education. “I did not study very well at the time so I decided to go out to work to earn some money” (Wen Zhang, Lu Xiuli’s husband, #11). This sentiment can be compounded when parents are unavailable and grandparents are not able to support the youngest generation in their studies.

In the village everyone understands that when you are young and able-bodied, you are expected to go out and work. “Our children have to go out and work no matter whether they have skills or not they have to go out” (Li Shichang, #10). Parents not only expect their children to go out and earn a living, but society also perceives it that way as well. Neighbours will look down on you and think that you are useless if you do not go out to make money. “If you are able you should go out and earn money while you can. Only crazy people and those who do not have brains would stay at home” (Zhang Jie, #20).

Figure 83. Migrant versus non-migrant families

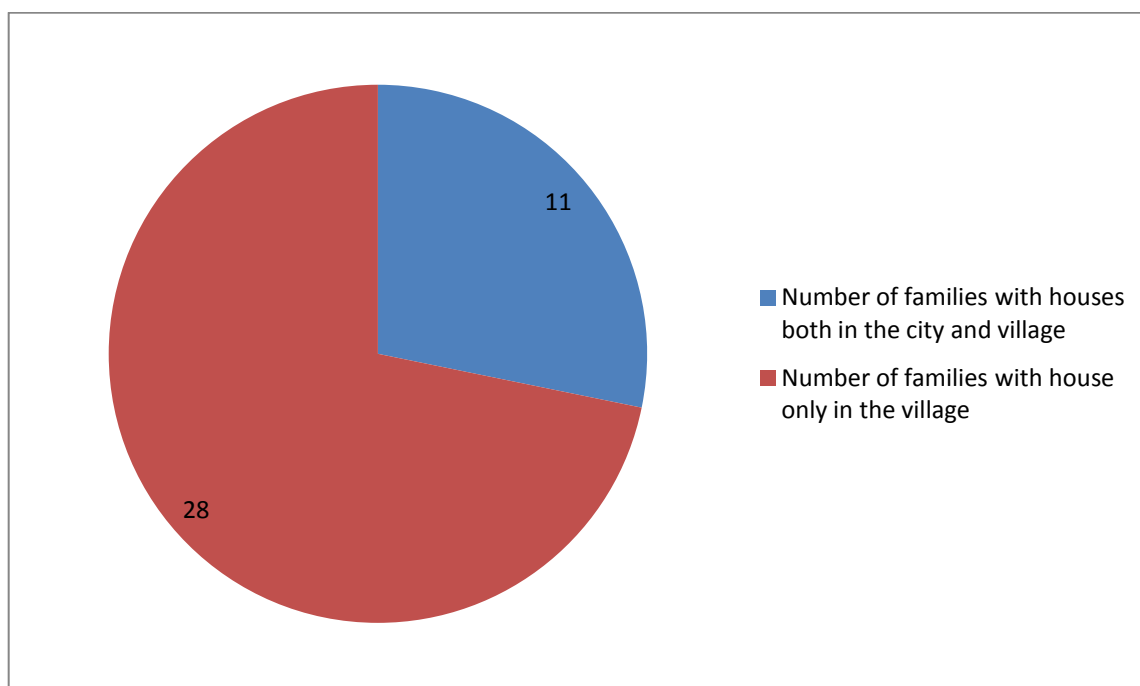
Of the 39 families interviewed for the study, only two families do not have migrant members.

Migration has become a common strategy for rural and less developed regions in China. Living conditions of migrant family is better than non-migrant family (Tang, 2006). For many migrants, seeking work away from home is an income diversifying option and as way to supplement farm income. “It is so difficult to become a millionaire if you are just dealing with land and crops every day” (Wen Zhang, Lu Xiuli’s husband, #11). “You do not make money plowing the field and it is laborious. If you work hard, but get no profit then it is really hard to stay around and farm.” So it makes sense to go out, “for you earn more money working outside” (Li Jian, #9). “I went out to work because my family needs money for my brother’s college expenses” (Lu Xiuli, #11).

Figure 84. Number of families have built house

But for some families, migration is more than an income diversifying strategy. It is a necessity for survival. Zhang Yiyun's daughter (#24) went to work because her father was sick. This migration disrupted her life and marriage. It reconfigured her life and her family's life in unintentional ways. Nowadays, for the rural family "depending on subsistence crops is not enough. We are getting old and can no longer work. The price of fertilizer is rising. We do not have money for investing. That is our concern now. When I think about this I sometime feel hopeless. That is our life" (Wang susu, #13). For both the Mei and Wang families, not having a member who could step in and make a sacrifice for the family makes the difference between survival or destitution for the family.

Figure 85. Number of families where children have bought a house in the city



Such filial practices are common amongst the migrant workers. Normally, they return home only once or twice a year, but when there is an illness in the family or death, they will return home immediately (Lu Xiuli, #9, and Zhou Xiuying, #24). Those who can take leave from their employers will do so but the majority of the low-skilled ones will just quit their jobs and return home for an uncertain length of time. When they are ready to return to the city for work again, they will seek a new job in that city. At times, they will evaluate their options and make the next move (Wen Zhang, #9 & transcript in Appendix 3). Some may return to the same job and to the same city whereas others may go for different jobs or to a new city. In general, those who are young and mobile may decide to go to a new city and try their luck there. However, this does not always pay off because often their experience from the previous job does not carry forward to future jobs (see interview transcript in Appendix 3). In this way, filial duty often works against the purely economic rationale of acquiring and keeping decent jobs in urban areas.

Many migrants judge their obligations to their families as far more important than their commitment to their employers.

When migrants set out to go work they might not see their actions as a way to live out their filial obligation for their parents, but their actions very much fulfil it. They will work outside to earn enough money to build a house (#20), send children or brother to school (#3, #11, and #16).

4.8 The Decision to Migrate

As indicated in Chapter 1, people migrate because of survival since there few employment opportunities at home. In China, migrants can earn much more than people who stay on the farm. It is said that only the elderly, crazy, and stupid people stay behind. In fact, if you are able and don't go out people will look down on you and think that there is something wrong with you. Elderly people staying in the village can farm enough food to feed the family even when the children return for the Spring Festival or holidays. This assumes that the elderly are still healthy enough to farm. They can farm enough to feed themselves and the returned migrants, but not enough to maintain a modern lifestyle since they now have to pay for utilities (electricity, water, phone bills), education for their children, and medical expenses for the elderly.

It is not a question of whether sons and daughters may be motivated to pursue migrant work, but rather it is a question of life necessity. It is much harder to live off the land alone. They need money because of high living expenses, wanting to fix up their house, help children with education, marriage, and medical expense of family members, and not just the elderly.

Some migrants may forgo the economic benefits of migration in order to keep the household intact: health issues of elderly parent, the desire to be with one's spouse and

children, and attachment to home are all powerful motivators. More often than not, however, it is family that motivates migration. For instance, Liu Yijun (#9) and her husband went out to work, recognizing the importance of education for their children and wanting to build a house for parents. They want to honour their elderly parents by providing a proper house for them rather than living in the crumbling, earthquake-damaged house they have now.

4.9 Characteristics of Migrants

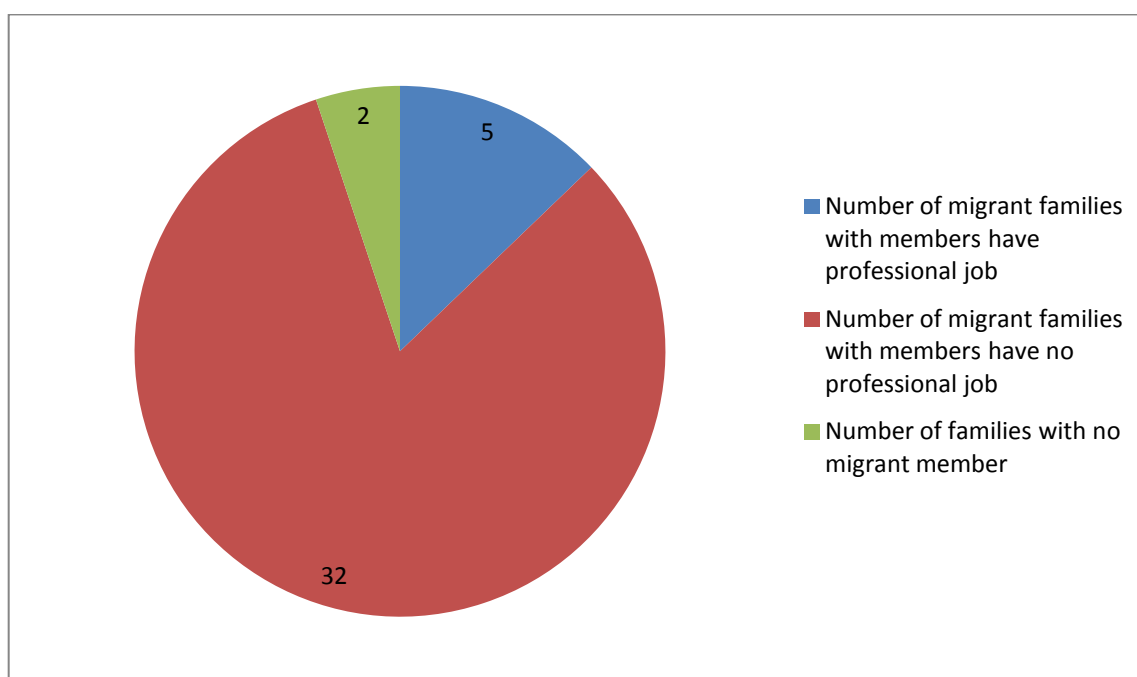
Constantly changing job or being disrupted by the family's situation prevent migrants committing themselves to a job which would enhance their future. Some will just quit their job when they need to return home to tend to family issues and will head out again when things are settled at home. When heading back to work, they might not necessarily return to the same job as before so previous experience might not count at all.

“After nine year of floating from place to place I began to realize that I had wasted a precious period of my life. Usually it takes people seven to eight years to be successful in whatever one engages in, but we're uneducated and we were not focused on being successful, we only focused on making money at the beginning. Making money is superficial since we have not developed any talents or skills during these years working outside” (Lu Xiuli, #11). This tends to be the case for many migrants who only focus on short term goals.

Migrants' wages are below the urban average because of the differences in educational levels. Though migrants from rural areas are more highly educated than the rural average, they are less well educated than their urban counterparts (Bramall, 2009:525). Migrants are aware that "studying can change our destiny" (which is why so many are willing to sacrifice their future for the younger generation's education). “It is

only through this [self-sacrifice] that we can have a better life." "Young urban people's thinking is different from ours in the rural areas. Urban people do not need to study hard to change their destiny since they have their parents to rely on. They do not need to work hard since their parents will give them money and support them. But this is not available in the village" (Ibid.).

Figure 86. Job characteristic of migrants



Only five out 37 (13.5%) families have migrants who held professional job. The majority of them are employed in low pay jobs such as manufacturing, services, or construction.

Rural villages still serve as a base for many migrant since the *hukou* system prevents them from being fully accepted and incorporated into an urban setting. They continue to work in the city until they get old and then return to the village. Moreover, many migrants are employed in low tech skills such as services, manufacturing, and construction; they are easily replaceable and can easily leave their job. Whenever there is a family need, such as their parents' illness or a family celebration, they will ask for

leave to return home. If permission is not granted they will just quit and return. They will stay at home as long as needed and then head out again when the situation at home is taken care of. There is no extra overhead cost of being at home except for an additional “set of chopsticks” as the Chinese would say.

Migrants are locked into low skills jobs due to their lack of education and age. The father of my host family was a late migrant. He did not go out until he was in his 50s. He went because the family needed money to support their daughter’s education. Even with his migrant income, the family still has to borrow 10,000 *yuan* each year to finance her studies. As we noticed earlier, due to his advanced age, at times he had difficulty adjusting to the job and quit midway in his probation period and often did not receive the wages owed to him.

Many migrant workers, especially factory workers and small shop owners, perpetually see themselves as outsiders (Fan, 2008), no matter how long they have been working outside. One of the reasons for this is that they are always on the move. “After nine years of floating from place to place I began to realize that I had wasted a precious period of my life” (Lu Xiuli, #11). They can jump ship easily and often are not aware and unattached to what actually their work means. Many view their work just as a job where they can earn money rather than a career. In *Factory Girls*, Chang (2004) talks about how factory workers in Dongguan, Guangdong Province, produce luxury Coach brand handbags, but are unaware of the final retail value of their products.

Migrants undertake jobs that no ordinary urban resident would do. Since they do not have proper training and skills, men often work in construction related jobs, while women work in service and manufacturing. Both men and women often endure terrible working conditions without the protection that urban residency would afford them. Instead, they are vulnerable to exploitation and corruption, with wages often withheld for

weeks or even months at a time. Even with these oppressive conditions, the income possibilities in urban areas still far exceed what is available in the countryside. Rural migrants therefore put up with such workplaces so that they can achieve their financial and familial goals.

When Lu Xiuli (#11) first went out, it was a chance to get and earn money for her family, but now older and wiser, she began to reflect on the years that have passed and wonders about the meaning of her work. During her first years she wandered from place to place doing whatever job was available with a suitable wage. She found work in a shoe factory, restaurant, internet café, and hotel. Li Jian and Liu Yijun (#9) have crisscrossed the country the past 20 years. Now they too began to wonder about their life:

I had a dream a year ago that our generation mostly goes to the city, leaving behind uncultivated land. Land is gold, the unlimited treasure of our country. If nobody wants to makes use of it I want to collect it, even on loan if that is permitted. Our hands are the resources we have. Human force is gold. If all of us united in one mind our hometown would be much better. I can plant or raise fish. We can hire agricultural specialists from Chengdu to teach us what is suitable for us to plant here.

They now regret that they have not developed any specialty, so now want to return and develop their own village.

Migrants are willing to part with jobs easily since many of them are factory or construction workers and do not require technical skills. A job is not difficult to find when they decide to return to work. They could be referred to a job again either through relatives or friends. Unlike the early days where migrants will “float” around the country to find a job (hence we have the term floating population), nowadays jobs are obtained through specific recruitment and referral (Fan, 2008). Because they are willing to jump from job to job, migrants do not often get the chance to specialize or further develop their knowledge in one workplace or skill. Without in-depth knowledge it is difficult to

bargain for a better position or higher wages since they are considered dispensable and replaceable.

4.10 Migrants' experiences in the city

Even though migrants are the driving force behind China's economic development, they are not fully accepted by people in the cities and employers they serve. They do not see a bright future ahead of them. "Poor people have no future." They feel the injustice of the inequality between city dwellers and themselves. Even after 20 years of working outside, Li Jian (#9) still feels that he does not fit in: "I'm just a peasant-worker," he complains. And Lu Xiuli (#9) here expressed her hardship:

I feel I didn't have any freedom in the factory. It was like a frog living in a well with very limited outlook. I could not learn anything worthwhile, nor did I learn how to deal with matters; people were only interested in getting more pay. This is all I have learned, that the human heart is treacherous... The boss was very bad. We were required to work overtime until 2 or 3 o' clock in the morning; we even had to go to the restroom within the time allowed; only about 30 minutes were allowed for a meal break. Life was very hard then, I worked for one year on low pay and did not have a good rest for a whole month.

Due to lax labour law, migrant workers often receive the short end of the stick. They can work for months without receiving pay and have no recourse or way to file a grievance. It is not uncommon to find migrant workers protesting over unpaid wages. Recently in Lanzhou, Gansu, six migrant workers threatened to jump off a building to claim unpaid wages (Chinanews.com, 4 January 2014).

Wang Wei (#16) spent a year working in Yunnan Province, but was not paid so out of frustration he returned home. This is not an isolated incident. My assistant's father spent nearly two months on a construction site in Chengdu, but got into a dispute with the foreman so he left early. Because he left before his two months "probation"

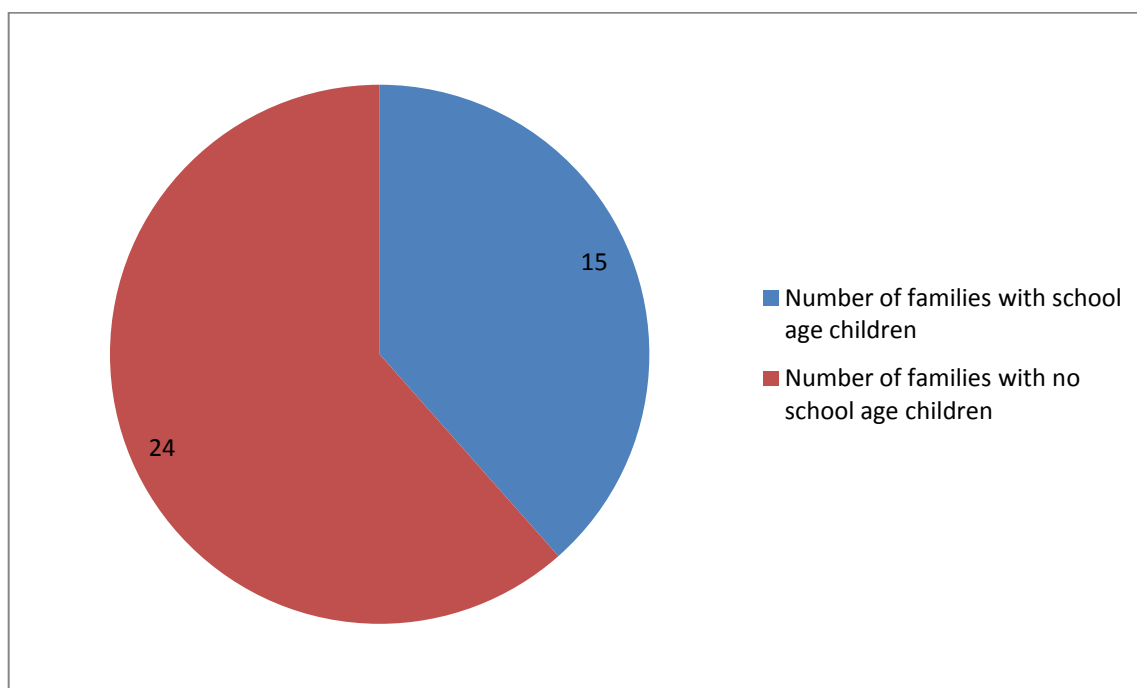
period was up, he did not receive any wages. Cai Guozhong (#1) shares this assessment with my assistant during one of our interviews:

Your dad came by yesterday and I told him that I'll return to work in the morning. He can come if he wants, but there is too much dust in the factory and I'm afraid that he would not get any money if he just worked for a few days and then gives up. If you are newcomers your wages will be delayed for a month. You do not get your August wages until the end of September. There were people who worked for half a month and left, but did not receive any money.

Not only that he did not receive any wages, he actually lost money because he had to provide transportation to and from Chengdu to his hometown. Though there is a potential for financial reward, migration is an inherently risky proposition, with many potential pitfalls awaiting rural workers. In a study of 751 migrant workers in Hubei Province, Tang (2006) found that 90 percent of migrant workers think city people look down on migrant workers, but 100 percent want to go back because wages are higher and there are more job opportunities in the city.

4.11 Education – Parents making sacrifices for young children

China guarantees nine years of compulsory education for children up to the age of 16 nationwide; however, it is only free if you attend in your own area. Most parents who work in the city are unable to bring their children along since the cost of sending them to local schools in the city would be prohibitive. Because of *hukou* registration, migrants' children are excluded from urban schools, even if they were born in the city. There are cities that have schools set up especially for migrant children, but the level of education provided by these places is lower than that in regular school. Also, many of these places are unsanctioned by the local district and government (Lu & Qian, 2014; Li, Sun, & Li, 2014, and Hu & LI, 2009).

Figure 87. Families with school age children

Previously in Figure 82 we seen that over half (21 out of 39) of the families have grandchildren living at home with grandparent however, in the figure above, only 15 (39 percent) of families have school age children. This means that there are children at home who do not go to school. Du (2004) found that when parents are occupied with young grandchildren they spend less time on the farm.

China guarantees free education, but students are still required to pay other fees - for uniforms, books, and registration. In rural areas, middle and high schools are often located in a bigger town or city; hence students who want to continue school will incur extra costs to their family since they now have to pay room and board as well as transportation to and from the village during holiday times.

Those who have finished elementary school will proceed to middle school if they scored sufficiently high on their examinations to gain entry into high school. To do so, however, they would need to move to the city to attend school. Some might board with a relative in the city; others will board in the school dormitory. Some families will even

rent a house in the city, with one of the grandparents to look after the children, especially if the child is preparing for the *gaokao* – the rigorous exam to enter university.

Table 5.1 lists education expenses for senior high students in Meijia attending school in Nanbu.

Table 5.1: Educational expenses for senior high students in Meijia (figures are per quarter):

1 st year	
Tuition	450 RMB
Text books	210 RMB
Work books	20 RMB
Supplementary charge	260 RMB
Insurance	50 RMB
2 nd year	
Tuition	450 RMB
Text books	190 RMB
Work books	20 RMB
Supplementary charge	230 RMB
Insurance	50 RMB
3 rd year	
Tuition	450 RMB
Text books	170 RMB
Work books	20 RMB
Supplementary charge	200 RMB
Insurance	50 RMB

Source: 2010 Nanbu School district

In Meijia, those who dropped out of school typically did so during middle school. There were only a couple of students who quit school during their high school years. It is much more difficult to get into high school than middle school, since they must pass an exam, and those who are serious about their education will put effort into it. Once they arrive at the school, they have a rigorous schedule that they have to follow. They have review in the morning and evening. This leaves little time for slacking off. The

structure makes it difficult for students to fall out of the system, unless they really choose not to study.

Thus school age children, especially those in junior and high schools, experience a new level of separation and loneliness. They have to straddle three very different spheres of life: the countryside home of their grandparents, their school in the city, and their parents working in another place altogether. Students from rural areas who want to continue school beyond junior high must be quite determined. Since their parents are not around and grandparents often are not able to help with school, they will need to rely on themselves when they encounter problems.

Many parents and grandparents in the rural areas are not able to help the students with their school work (#12 & #23). The students could only rely on themselves or friends and teachers at school when they encounter problems at school. Those who are determined to do well in school are often successful in finishing their high school career. Those unmotivated in school, however, often are allowed to fail out. With migrant parents away from home, students might not pay close attention to school work. They can develop bad habits such as not listening to teachers, truancy, late arrival & early departure, and smoking & drinking. Students' physical and psychological needs might not be easily recognized or met (#8). This is especially true for children supervised by their grandparents, who being mostly uneducated themselves, have little experience to draw on when checking their grandchildren's progress.

Many parents in rural areas take a passive approach to their children's education. If their children can make it then that is good; however, parents easily accept their fate if they do not do well in school since they are unable to help their children with school work. Often grandparents are helpless when it comes to forcing their grandchildren to

study. They are unable to carry out punishment: “we cannot hit them because they will tell their parents.”

Even though parents have limited education and sending children to school is expensive, a number of parents who realize that their children have potential will make sacrifice so that their children could have a better education - either sending them to a better school in the next village or even renting a house near the school so it is more convenient to go back and forth between home and school.

Figure 88. Children attending school in Meija versus other villages or town

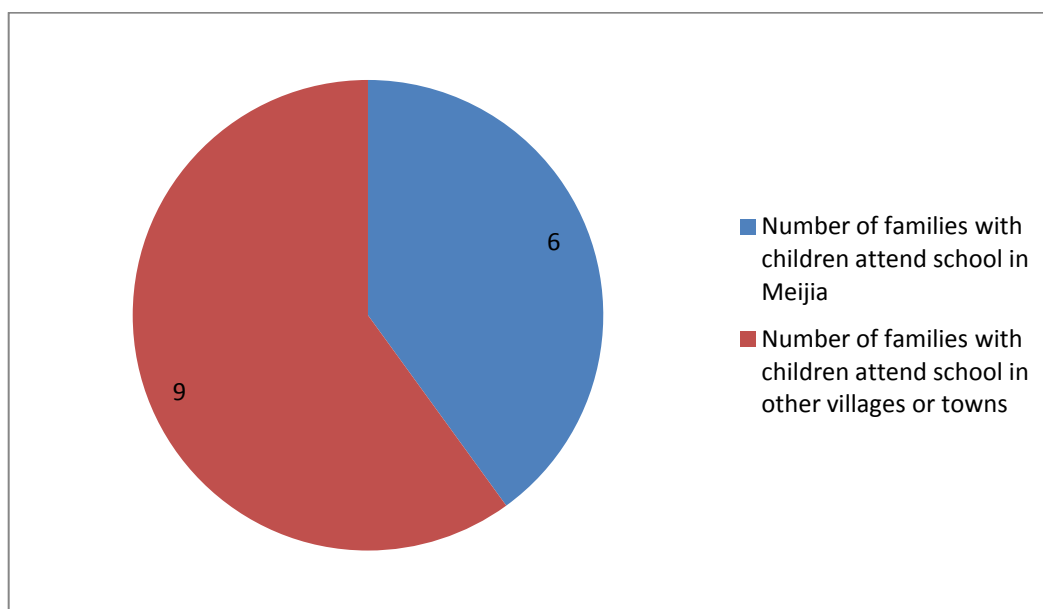


Figure 4.10 shows that out of 15 families with school age children, almost two thirds of the students attend schools other than the village school.

Many migrants make personal sacrifices so that their children could have a better future. As Liu Yijun (#9) articulates, “It is not easy doing business outside, but we do it because of our children's future. We often tell our children not to worry about anything but to study hard. Education is the most useful means to being successful in life. Having a diploma is more useful in life than manual work.” Liu Yijun and Li Jian are considered

one of the most educated couple that I interviewed in the village for they know how to read and write, but still are unable to give much assistance to their children when it come to their children's studies. They are one of the few families⁹ in the villages that prioritized educating their children before building a house. Most of their income has gone on their children's education. Both children are enrolled in city schools and are doing well. (They are now in the process of building their house, but would not have been able to do so if not for the 2008 earthquake which brought special state subsidies for repairs).

Many parents believe if they are able to accompany their children when they are young, the children will fare better in terms of social behaviour; but when it comes to school they cannot do much because they are illiterate. They are willing to sacrifice their own lives for their children's sake.

It is not good for children to grow up without parents to accompany them. I would really want to stay with them if we could afford to. We would rather stay at home and take care of our children even if we make less money. I would be very happy if all our family members could be together. Though we did not make money this year, and our father and mother are already 67 and 63, we still need to go out and work because we need to have money to pay school fees for our two children. We pay quite a bit for their education since we do not want them to be illiterate like us. We do not have enough time to take care of them. My mother looks after them, but when she is busy my aunt will help out. When the children were young we did not come back too often, but in recent years we felt that our children are growing fast and becoming more unfamiliar so we come home more frequently. We would have liked to see them more often in the past, but since we did not earn much money at the time we could not spend all our earnings on travelling. But now it does not matter how much it cost, we make effort to return home more often so we could see them (Liu Yijun, #9).

Other parents would be willing to pay "an entrance fee/bribe" to the school or would rent a flat or house nearby for the children to live in while going to school (#16). Wang Enmei (#15) rents a house near Meijia centre so that her grandchildren could get

⁹ My host family is the second and Guo Mingzhu (#5) are the other two families that prioritize education over building a new house.

to school more conveniently since they need to get to school early and stay late in the evening for activities. Other parents may choose to send their children to school in another village. "I sent my grandson to school to Dongba because the local teachers are not good. They know nothing but playing" (Wu Cheng-en, #25). His grandson goes to school in Dongba during the week and returns to Meijia and stays with him at the weekend.

My assistant's aunt works in Yunnan and has already bought a house in Nanbu; however, the location of the house is not convenient for her daughter to attend school since she has to travel to the school early in the morning and late evening for review and preparing for the college examination. The parents decided to rent a house just across from the school so that the daughter could attend school. The girl is currently staying in the house with her cousin who is also in the same year and their grandma is looking after them. This is not the only expense. When the daughter applied for high school, her test result was not high enough to qualify to enter the school so her parents had to pay the school an "entrance fee" of 12,000 *Yuan* in order for her to gain admission (Conversation with my assistant and her mother, 17 August 2010).

Often parents are the one who make education decision for their children. However, there are case when the student is motivated. He will push for change. Both of Guo Mingzhu's (#5) sons attend school outside Meijia. Both are doing well in school. The older son, 14 years old, is studying in Dongba; the younger one, 11 years old, is studying in Tiefu Tang, a next door village. The family has made sacrifices for their sons to attend school outside Meijia since education in Meijia is not good. Her younger son insists on going to school in Tiefu Tang; he said that, "the teacher in Meijia did nothing except play cards." Initially, the family was reluctant to send their sons to school outside the village because they wanted to save money to build a house. However their sons

kept begging them to allow them to attend school outside so they could get a better education. Her 11 year old son told her, "I want to study. You must transfer me to Tiefu Tang. I can work harder there. Things could be worse if I do not get high marks here. In the long run we will be paying more for the tuition in high school if I don't do well in middle school."

Since the vast majority of parents lack school education, they are incapable of helping their children with school work or even aware of how their children perform at school. Therefore, they do not put pressure on their children as their counterparts in the city do to excel in school. As teacher Li (#8) mentioned, actual performance depends on the students themselves. However, students with parents at home tend to do better in general than those without parents at home. This is because parents are stricter with their children when compared to grandparents with their grandchildren. Many students do not like to study. The lack of supervision by parents has a significant impact on students' achievement. The impact of single migrant worker's parent is more positive than two migrant parents in the family (Su, Fu, and Yang, 2010). The choice of gender selection of which parent is it to migrate and work (father or mother) would have significant difference to children's academic performances. Either father or mother go out and work will have negative impact on their children, but the impact on having mother out and working is greater than father (Li, Sun, & Li, 2014). Parents who migrate longer distance away has more negative impact on children education as they have less communication with their children (Hu, & Li, 2009).

When it comes to helping their grandchildren, grandparents often are helpless since the majority of them are illiterate. "I want to take care of my grandchildren but I cannot read. His studies are getting more difficult and we cannot help him. That is our life" (Mao Suzhen, #12). For example, when I asked a 12 year old boy if he was able to

finish all his homework he answered yes, but when asked if he has homework that he is not able to do, he said it was often the case.

While I was there, his great-grandma asked the boy to study, but he does not even bother to take a quick look at the book. This is the challenge of the grandparent since they cannot force their grandchildren to do anything that they do not like. As one parent said, “we cannot hit them. If we do they will tell their parents when the parents return.”

Grandparents are helpless when it comes to forcing their grandchildren to study.

As is indicated here:

“We do not know what will happen to our grandson. Since we are illiterate we cannot help him with his school work. Whether he attends high school will depend on his test score. If his parents were at home, he would have better test scores. He was doing well in school, but since his parents went out he just spends time watching television instead of studying. We do not know if he actually finished his homework because every time we ask him he often said that he has already finished it. His sister is different because she has better discipline. Our son and daughter-in-law watched over her when she was young (Zhang Jie, #5).

Sometimes you ask the parents if they have any aspirations or hope for their children when they grow up. The typical answer among illiterate parents would be, “It is up to them. We cannot help them with school work.” This answer demonstrates the lack of ambition of their parents and the lack of pushing their children to attain a better status in life than they themselves have experienced. Not only do they have no aspirations for their children, they have no guidance for their children. “If they could not do well in study no matter how hard they try it is not useful to force them. It is their destiny.” They do not force education on their children like city people.

Children who quit school as a result of several factors: lack of parental supervision, children refusing to continue with school, or family hardship and lack of money. In the case of lack of supervision, a mother said that during her absence, her son

quit school and began playing cards with adults. The son stayed idle for a year and then headed out to work the next year (#17).

Mao Suzhen (#18) expressed frustration about not being able to keep her granddaughter in school. “Our granddaughter went to work when she was 15. She was left unsupervised by her parents for three years. At the end of the year, her teacher said that she should go to another school, but at the new school she did poorly in school work and her teacher beat her. Because of that she refused to go to school. She did not even finish the second year of junior high.”

And there are cases when children did well in school, but the family was unable to afford fees and expenses so student eventually have to quit school. “Our daughter was accepted into medical school, but tuition was too high at the time and our family was not able to afford it so we did not let her attend. She is now in Xi’an just working in whatever temporary jobs she can find. Because we did not send her to the university she still complains about it” (Cai Guozhong & Wang Yumei, #1).

As is evident, education is a priority for the migrant generation, to the extent that they have uprooted themselves in order to provide educational opportunities for their children. They see this as investment for the future for the whole family, and are willing to forego personal needs in order to assure their child has every opportunity. Yet this emphasis on education – a strong by-product of modernization and the market economy – has created one of the strongest motivating factors for economic migration. The high cost of a quality education in rural areas is having unintended ramifications on all three generations of a migrant family.

4.12 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have been introduced to the ideal of the Confucian family, and then have explored how rural Chinese families are structured today, in ways that are both similar to and very different from ancient tradition. After a demographic survey of this study's respondents, we explored the unique, tension-filled roles of all three generations of these family units. After discussing the hopes and fears of the elder generation, and delineating challenges faced by the youngest, this chapter focused on the migrant generation and the myriad of forces at work in their decision-making process. When considering both household strategy theory and income diversification theory as explanatory models for rural migration, it was suggested that a livelihood model, which considers both financial and moral/cultural motivations, was a more apt lens for considering the many factors which influence a migrant when she/he chooses to go out, chooses to remain out (even in the face of terrible working conditions), or chooses to return to the village. As was made clear, none of these decisions are made lightly, and few are made selfishly. Rather what emerged is a strong element of familial devotion and filial piety characterizing the decision making process at all levels. Finally, the unique motivating factor of education was explored, with its impacts on all three generations. In many ways, education is a microcosm of the greater challenges that rural families face. Striving for an education places unusual burdens on all three generations, requiring all family members to sacrifice for the well-being and success of all. These acts of self-sacrifice, though brought about due to a constellation of very modern problems, are nevertheless consistent with the ancient traditions of Confucian filial piety. It is therefore to this powerful concept that we turn our attention in Chapter 5.

Chapter Five

Filial Piety, Inter-generational conflicts and Mobility in rural China: Obligations and paradoxes in light of modernization

5.1 Introduction

This and the following chapters examine the core familial and social issues which a rural migrant family faces and how they deal with these issues on a daily basis. In the previous chapter, we looked at the migrants who are at the heart of the family. In this chapter we examine filial piety and inter-generational supports as well as conflicts. The next chapter explores filial piety through the lens of gender.

Studies of the elderly document that as societies modernize, shifting from agricultural to industrial modes of production, the social and economic status of the elderly diminishes (Cowgill & Holmes, 1972). According to Cowgill (1974), modernization has positive effects of increasing health technology and longevity, but this would also have negative effects for the elderly since longevity leads to more competition in the labor market. Elders in turn are relegated to less prestigious and increasingly obsolete jobs. This often forces the elderly into retirement which leads to the loss of income and prestige due to being driven out of participation in the labor market. In traditional societies, the older members of the family retain control of the mode of production and younger members are dependent on the old. Modernization reverses the roles of the old and the young. When older people are driven out of the labor market, they become dependent on the young.

Societies in general place high value on a good and long life. In general, as elders retire, they are channeled into less physically demanding roles. The elders' experience of old age is affected by their social support system and network. Elders who

possess a strong social support network may have greater social status during retirement and be protected from the hardship of aging experienced by the elders in rapidly changing market economy societies. In China, for thousands of years, Confucian values of filial piety dictated deference to the old. One might continue to expect, even during this period of rapid change in China, that Confucian values would continue to encourage young people to provide a secure place for the old. However, with rapid out-migration of young people to the cities in searching for work, the elderly are left behind to fend for themselves. Instead of enjoying old age surrounded by children and grandchildren, many elders are now forced to continue toiling on the farm and adapt to being parents again as they look after their grandchildren. In rural China, many elderly people complain both of being overburdened and of loneliness in their life.

After this introductory section, the chapter includes the following sections: the first section details empirically the impact of modernization and migration on the well-being of the elderly in rural China. It specifically chronicles their material and emotional vulnerability. The second section interrogates the current contractual expectations embedded in the concept of filial piety. There are numerous examples of how the expectations of the elderly are fulfilled and their well-being ensured. Conversely, there are also cases indicating unfulfilled expectations and increasing hardship for the elderly. The third section analyses the role of filial piety in explaining both the expectations and their fulfillment. The fourth section explores examples of how the concept of filial piety has adapted to a changing environment. Finally, the chapter analyzes the expression of filial piety in terms of conflicting inter-generational perspectives and priorities emerging from migration pressures. This continues from the previous chapter, which delved more deeply into the concept of filial piety within the family. It contrasts and analyzes the

customary understanding of filial piety with current perceptions and practice from the vantage points of both elderly parents and their younger migrant children.

5.2 Impact of modernization and migration on well-being of the elderly in Rural China

5.2.1 Life satisfaction

As we have seen in the previous chapter, in general elders in the study indicated that their material well-being is much better nowadays than in the past. Furthermore, when asked about their current economic conditions as compared to the past, the elderly provided responses such as: “People are now saying that you can have enough to eat even if you stay idle all your life” (Mao Suzhen, #12). “Our life used to be very tough. When we were young we did not have enough to eat. It was very difficult to raise our children at the time. But nowadays people in the village generally have a good life. In our two brigades, eight people have bought insurance” (Li Shuhua, #19). What she means by this is that people are now living a more secure life, able to afford insurance, and planning for the future.

Households where the elders are still healthy and fit while their children work outside to earn a wage for the family are better off than those elders no longer able to work on the farm (#4, #20, and #25). These elderly often indicated that their lives have significantly improved. As Fan Junjie (#4), a 75 years old elder expresses it, “life is better now. We now have endless food and money. The country has given us plenty of money through various subsidies every year”. Though elders are happy that household financial circumstances are better than in the past, they have to accept the reality of being “abandoned” by their children. “Because our young people are working outside for the sake of our families, when we feel lonely, there is not much we can do... We old people

now stay at home alone and can only find people our age to hang out with” (Zhang Wenxiang, #21)

Figure 89. Senior people socialising in the village.



Figure 90. Socializing in the village.



When I asked Fan Junjie (#4) if he is satisfied with life, he responded, “How can I not be satisfied with life now? The more you plan, the more you harvest. If you are lazy you get less. This is the reality of life; however, the cadres nowadays are too corrupt. Even though there are many corrupt government officials, the farmers can still make a living. The peasants have always paid taxes, but instead now the government gives money to us.” People are now accepting the idea of “pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps” not so much in terms of not depending on their family, but not depending on government. Rural villagers in general feel helplessness towards their local government, so they can only depend on themselves. How well one does in life depends on how hard one works, and it is best not to expect handouts from the local government since collectivism is now the thing of the past. On the other hand, they are

critical of the local cadres who shortchange them of what is due to them, mainly subsidizes from the central government to local farmers, mainly in the form of subsidies and assistance received from central government (whether due to natural catastrophes or to subsidies for converting their land into grassland).

“We do not have to worry since we are healthy. Our lives before were very difficult, but things are better now. Now everyone has enough to eat. Even eggs are easy to sell” (Wu Cheng-en, #25). Overall, life has significantly improved for the elderly in the village since their standards of living have improved and they now have disposable income and surplus income to purchase the necessities of life.

5.2.2 Economic and social dimensions of old age

Materially life is better but what about overall well-being? Davis-Friedman (1991) reports that historically, women start to retreat into fulltime household function at around 50, the age when they expect grandchildren. Nowadays, elderly, even women, instead of enjoying old age with their children and grandchildren, are now taking on more agricultural and housework as well as playing parents to their grandchildren. Of the 1445 elders aged 60 above surveyed from An Hui, Hebei, and Henan provinces, Du (2004) found that 46.2% of the elderlies found the load has increased of agricultural work while 41.5% think the work load has remained the same. As for housework, the figure is evenly spread: 44.4% think this has increased while 45.8% think it hasn't changed.

Just like life, as give and take, in some ways life is better, but in other ways it is more difficult—especially when the elderly have to deal with loneliness and illness by themselves. With working children out-migrating for the sake of their livelihood, elderly parents struggle by themselves. Some of the common refrains from the elderly in the

village is that “it is not fun to play by oneself” or “it would be better if there is another person to help you set the table” (Zhang Yiyun, #22).

As we have seen in Figure 3.6, life expectancy has greatly improved and few have lived this long and encountered the new phenomenon of spending their old age by themselves. In this unprecedented familial situation, elders must continually adapt as they get older. They take life one day at a time. As we learned from the previous chapter, migration of adult children has had a significant impact on the well-being of their elderly parents. Elderly parents in rural areas have continued to work into old age well beyond the “natural retirement” age known in the west. Often, the only way to earn income is to toil on the farm. “If we don’t plant, we will not have enough food to eat when the children return during the spring festival” (Wang Susu, #14). Beyond the physical demand of toiling in the field into advanced age, they have to learn to be parents again, especially, when their daughter-in-law returns to the city for factory work right after giving birth. “I do not mind looking after one child, and the parents could raise the other one. It is not convenient for me to raise two kids and do my business” (Zhou Yiuying, #24).

Photo 91. Wen Zhang's great aunt, 88 years old still working on the farm



The elderly are more content that their financial circumstances are better than the past, but there is a trade off with burden and loneliness at home. The majority of people accept their new status, but many also talked about lack of emotional and financial support from their children. As farmers, who are considered self-sufficient, they do not have a legal age for retirement, except for receiving insurance benefits. Many elderly continue to depend on their own labor for income, which may or may not be supplemented with support from their children.

Figure 92. Gathering at the Buddhist Temple



Figure 93. Gathering at the Buddhist Temple



In theory, socialism would provide a safety net for the elderly, but in fact the burden is on the family (Davis-Friedman, 1). Allocation of subsidies is irregular, and depends on whom you know in the village. Many in Meijia complained about this unequal distribution of subsidies and benefits in the village. Behavior and practice do not necessarily conform with what might be expected in a socialist society. There is rampant corruption by local cadres since there is no accountability. For example, many cadres do not necessarily live in the village, but are appointed from above so they drive from town and city to manage the village.

According to Davis-Friedman (9) “The prevailing attitudes toward the old are characterized by tolerance and sympathy” and the old respond to their new status with grace and acceptance. However, this was not the case for a number of the interviewees. Many lamented their unfortunate fate. “I’m so miserable, people should be retired in their 60s, but I am still working” (Mao Suzhen, #12). Instead of speaking of their advanced years with joy and pride, they lament how at their age they still have to till the land while carrying their young grandchild on their back. They also lament about loneliness and the burden of looking after the house and the land.

Many elderly in Meijia still live near a subsistence level. Having a safe and decent house to live in is a priority for many farmers. My host family intended to build their house years ago, but with my assistant attending university and graduate school, they were unable to afford the labor and materials. The brick they made years ago for the new house never materialized and continued to lie unused beside their house. The father is approaching 60 and the mother is well past 50. At their advanced age, they will not be able to live in the house that they dreamt of building years ago. Their daughter has spent six years in university and graduate school, and they still have loans to pay off.

The amount that they borrowed each year (about 10,000RMB) is beyond their means to repay.

5.2.3 Elderly well-being

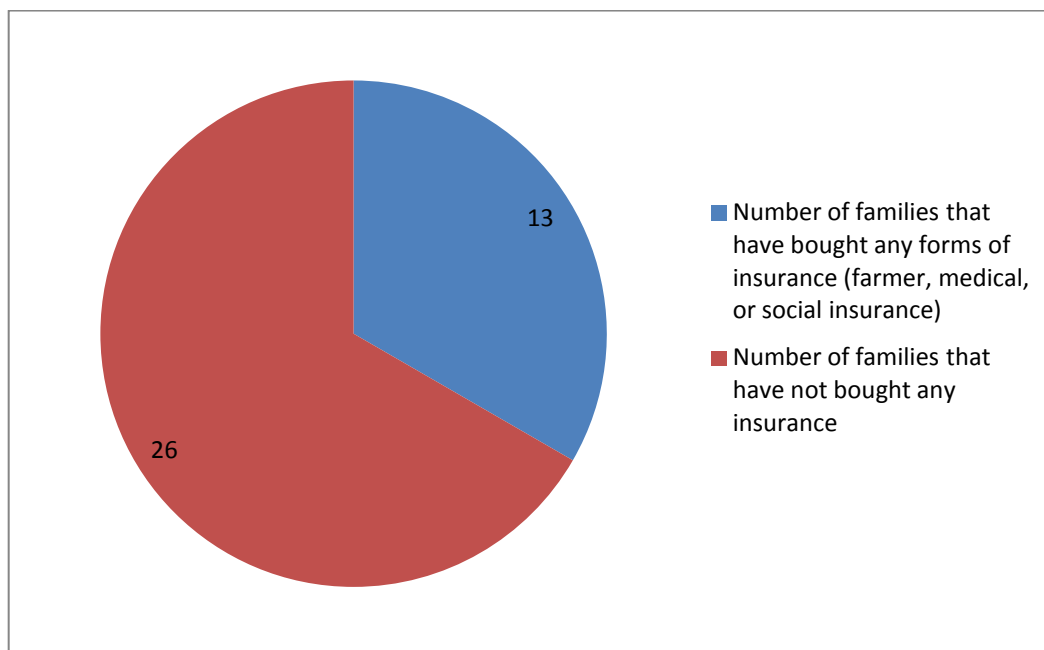
With children working away from home, elders have to take on new roles and being overburdened with new responsibilities can lead to deterioration in health. Being sick is a concern not just for the elderly but also for their working children. Most elders in rural China do not have health insurance and the cost of getting treatment can run from 10,000 to 20,000 RMB or higher (#10 & #15). This is not a small amount of money. It is the equivalent of many years of farming income or three to six months of their children's wages.

Often families have to sell their crops or borrow money for treatment. Many families are in debt because they have to borrow money for the medical treatment of elderly parents. "Because we are poor, we often have to borrow money for our treatment. Old people like us cannot work too hard in the field. If we work too hard and are tired, our health will be ruined. We cannot afford that. We do not have money to see a doctor" (Wang Susu, #14).

Because of low quality medical care in rural areas and high expenses in comparison with income, many sick or elderly people in China do not seek long term care since high health care cost could drain the elderly's finance (Sun, 2015). They would seek out treatment at the beginning, but with the passage of time and the high expenditure associated with ongoing care, they eventually stop seeking treatment or instead seek other alternatives. Alongside the high cost of health care, misdiagnosis and/or side effects of medication often prevent extended treatment, particularly since they often fail to seek alternative opinions/treatments (Lora-Wainwright, 2011). The high

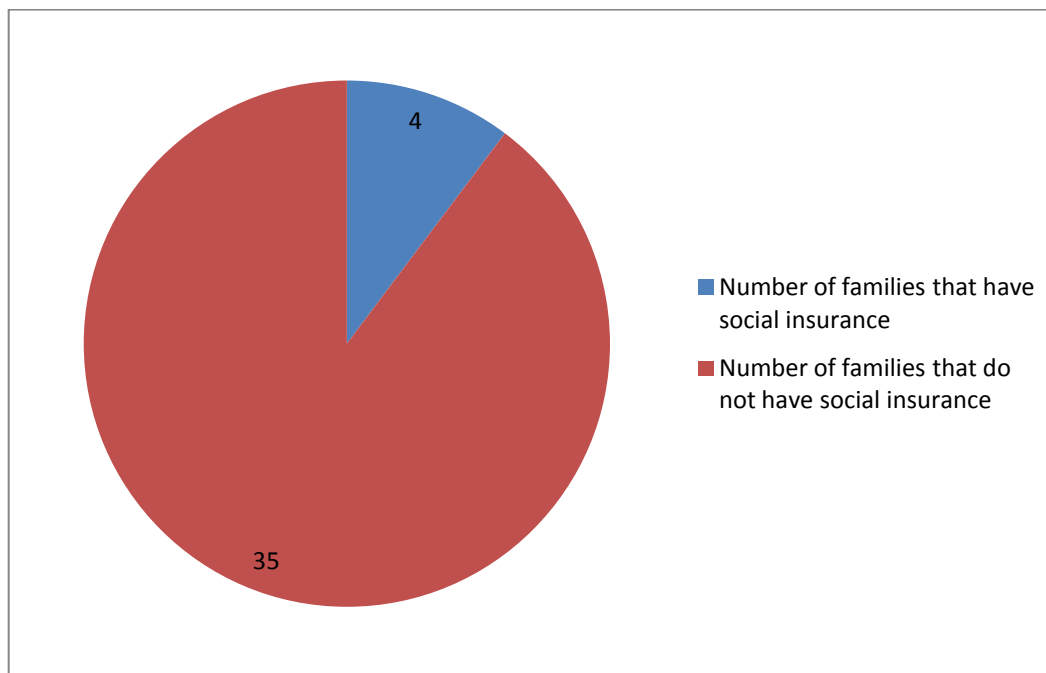
cost of health care is a large burden for many. 10,000-20,000 RMB for medical treatment is a significant amount of money where farming income is only a few thousands RMB a year. This is four to five times the annual income. Many cannot fathom this thought.

Figure 94. Number of families that have bought any form of insurance



Insurance is a very recent development for China especially for rural areas. The majority of people are still not aware of the availability of insurance and the function of it. Many do not want to buy insurance because they are afraid of being cheated or of not living long enough to benefit from it (Sun, 2015).

Figure 95. Number of people who have bought social security insurance



Social security is a great source of investment for those who can afford it. The cost to buy in is 20,000 RMB. After 2 years, men can collect at 60 years old and woman at 55. The payout is 500 RMB per month. That would cover household expenses. However, because of the steep buy-in cost not many people can afford to buy in.

5.2.4 Burden and loneliness

Many complained of the burden of looking after grandchildren and the tiredness that comes with it. “Our granddaughter is currently staying with her mother. We are too tired after raising all the grandsons. Our second son has two children. One is five and the other one is three. They attend kindergarten here (sighed). I feel very tired with them. Even at meals they are very noisy. At this age we just want a quiet and tranquil life” (Xian Yuhai, #18).

Elders stay behind “holding the fort” to take care of the land and their grandchildren so their children can go out to work. In general, the old people accept their fate to be in the village while their children are in the city. “Young people now need to focus on their career in the city. We older generation stay behind to guard the house and to raise grandchildren. We are raising them with the hope that they will support us in our old age” (Liu Jiajia, #10).

In the previous chapter we learnt how grandparents desire to help their grandchildren with school work, but lack of knowledge does not allow them to do so. Often they do not know how their grandchildren are doing in school or whether they have completed their school work.

Grandparents at times faced the difficulty of disciplining their children. As one grandparent said, “Grandparents often feel helpless when it comes to forcing their grandchildren to study. Previously we learn of this when a grandparent shares this sentiment, “we cannot hit them. If we do they will tell their parents when the parents return” (Wang Enmei, #15).

Parents and grandparents often pamper their children because they in turn will be depending on this younger one when they get old. As Fong (2004) indicates, “beat me now and I will beat you when you are old.” Wu Cheng-en (#25) thinks “children nowadays are good kids but lazy.” They might not engage in anti-social activities since Meijia is a small and isolated place¹⁰. What this grandfather implies is that young people nowadays are not as hard-working as the previous generation. He is not alone in voicing this. Another elderly echoes this in saying that “nowadays young people have a much

¹⁰ It is difficult for children to get into trouble. In the village where I was staying, it took 20-25 minutes to walk to the central shopping area, so it is difficult for children to venture out and play. In addition the village only has a market every third day, so there are not many activities around when the market is not in session. The only time I witnessed a grandmother get angry with the children was when her grandson went next door to play with another child and the parents could not locate him.

easier life for they do not have to worry about having enough food to eat and clothes to wear” (Zhang Wenxiang, #21).

With children in the city and grandchildren in school, many elderly experience loneliness. When asked if life is lonely, an elder replies, “that’s how life is nowadays, what can we do?” (Zhang Wenxiang, #21). Being left behind in the village to look after themselves and their grandchildren, the elderly have come to accept their fate. As expressed by an elderly member of the village, “What can I do about being lonely? I have to accept it and hang-out myself” (Cai Guozhong, #11). Elders struggle with loneliness, and have learn to accept their fate: “Now the old people stay at home alone and can only find people of similar to age to hang out with.” (Zhang Wenxiang, #21).

There is still a strong sense of expectation that people depend on the children when they are getting older and no longer able to function on their own.

5.3 Contractual expectations embedded in the concept of filial piety

Chow (2004) argued that policies to support the elderly are never value-free. As long as the family system plays an important role in supporting the elderly in East and South-East Asian societies, an examination of the value should not be discarded. In fact, any discussion of aged care policies in East and South-East Asian societies will be incomplete without a discussion about the nature and practice of filial piety in these societies.

Societal values, such as filial piety, which have been held dear for thousands of years in Asia, will not easily wither away. The value of filial piety will continue to be upheld since it is the fabric of society which regulates relationships between parents and children. Its values will continue to be relevant as long as the family system in these societies remains strong. A report prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for

Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on national policies and programmes on aging states that “an important point to preface the discussion on issues undermining policy formation is that, in most countries and areas in the [Asian] region, aging is still regarded primarily as a family concern in which official policy has yet to intrude” (Chow, 2004:S22).

Ikels (1993) posits that there is an unavoidable contract between the young and the old in China in which the constitution and government have made it clear that the care of elders in China is primarily the responsibility of the family. Traditionally, the senior generations provided resources for the young and property was passed over to children as security to be taken care of by their children when the parents were old. Though young people desire to live separately from their older parents and sometimes avoid supporting their parents in old age, traditional Confucian practices prevent them from doing so. Through the practice of ‘face saving mechanisms’ and preserving harmony in the family, elderly parents without resources or affection from their children were not entirely powerless (Ikels 1993).

Filial piety is primarily about family rather than about personal matters (Ng, et al. 2002). It is embedded within the mosaic of family relations. On the one hand, it is the immediate repayment of parental care and sacrifice; on the other hand, it transcends the present and reaches to future generations, as the filial sons and daughters of today will set an example for their children to support them when they themselves become old. Thus a not-so-filial son or daughter will jeopardize both the present and the future well-being of the family and this will reflect badly on the whole family and not just on the person concerned (Hsu, 1971).

Bearing in mind the reverence and respect for elders due according to filial piety, the Chinese government has insisted that caring for the elderly belongs in the private domain and is the responsibility of the family. In recent years, the government

introduced a number of laws to enforce this responsibility. The 1979 Criminal Law Code asserted that the refusal to support an aged parent can be punishable with up to a 5-year jail term. The Inheritance Law of 1985 specified that children who neglect their obligations to elderly parents might be denied a share of the parents' estate. In addition, the 1996 Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of the Elderly made clear that adults must meet the financial, medical, housing, and social needs of the elderly when they have the means to do so. Only in the rare instance of elderly persons without children would the state support them in their old age (Ikels, 2006).

5.4 Forms of filial piety

This section looks at forms of filial piety that are currently expressed by migrant children towards their parents left behind in the village. In simple terms, the expression of filial piety can be classified into material versus affective support to elderly parents.

Material filial:

- Financial support/remittance
- Giving parents gifts during spring festival/birthday
- Medical treatment
- Housing

Emotional/Affective filial:

- Visiting parents
- Calling parents
- Inquiry about parent health and well-being
- Being self-sustained and not depending on the parent
- Doing well (job, education, marriage) in life and not dishonoring the family name

Filial piety is still strong in many families, but it is eroding in some.

Examples of five families where children provide or do not provide filial support to their parents:

1. Children continue to support their parents (material or affective support)
2. Children not providing support (parents embarrassed due to lack of support)
3. Children neglecting their filial duty (not sending remittance or not keeping in touch)

4. Children taking advantage of elderly parents (expecting parents to look after grandchildren but not reciprocating with financial support; parents feeling overburdened and resentful)
5. Parents frustrated that children are not providing support at the same time they have to look after their own elderly parents.

Family #1 (happy family and filial piety is at its best)

The Fan Junjie (#4) family does not feel that migration has affected the family since the children bring money home regularly. With a landline telephone, children can contact them anytime. The family served us traditional Sichuan pork which is normally prepared during Spring Festival and consumed gradually through the year. My assistant explained that only rich people can afford this. In fact, the combined incomes of the family add up to more than 10,000 Yuan a month. The grandchildren stayed with grandparents in the village and visited their parents during the summer. Working children are more invested in the elderly parents at home because the grandparents are looking after children at home. This case illustrates how migration/modernity has brought benefits to rural life and the family is in harmony with one another. The elderly are doing well both physically and mentally since they enjoy their old age and do not have to worry about loneliness or being burdened. Their children support them financially and they are happy to look after the grandchildren.

Family #2 (embarrassed because children do not provide support)

Dong Wenfang (#3), a 78 year old woman, does not seem to have a good relationship with her sons. In fact, she has lived with one son for six months, but does not know exactly what he does for a living. Another of her sons has gone out for several years, but has managed to call back only once. Other sons seldom call her. She is embarrassed about the lack of support. Obviously, no one wants to admit that their children are un-filial, so she plays down the importance of receiving remittances from her children. When pressed on how much money her children have sent back to support

her, the response was, “how much money do I need since I’m here by myself. I only need a few Yuan each time for buying oil and salt since I grow my own crops. I eat very little meat. The salted meats I have were prepared during the previous spring festival.” Though her children seldom call her (part of modernization and adaptation to individualism), whenever she is sick, a simple phone call brings either her sons or daughters-in-law rushing home to take care of her.

When children move out, obtain jobs, and establish their own family, they might not pay much attention to the day-to-day welfare of elderly parents, but when parents fall sick they immediately rush home to see them for they are afraid that they might not see their parents again. This was portrayed in a popular film, *Shower* (1999), when an elderly son rushed home to see his father in Beijing after having received a postcard from his younger, mentally challenged, brother in Beijing. He rushed home because he thought that his father was dying; when at home he discovered that his father is very much alive and well. Initially he wanted to leave, but after staying a few days, he observed how his father socialized with the patrons of the bathhouse who are all old Beijingers. He is now caught between the nostalgic of a decaying childhood home and the booming life in Shenzhen.

Family #3: (similar to the previous family: here father gave up hope on his son since the son doesn’t provide material or emotional support to his parents)

Wang Zhengyi (#18), 57 years old and wife, 55 years old and sick. He was one of the first group of farmers in the village who went to the city in the early 1980s to obtain money to build his house. It took him over a decade to earn enough money to build his house in 1994 which only cost several thousand RMBs. At first he worked in a restaurant for other people and then struck out on his own to run his own snack shop for

two years. While he was away, he sent his son to live with his wife's brother and to attend school; however, his son only focused on playing cards and eventually quit school.

When this happened, he returned home to farm and made bricks for his home. But money was still not sufficient so he went to Chongqing several times more on different occasions before he was able to save enough money to build the house.

Currently his son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren live in Guangzhou. The son does not do anything in Guangzhou except play cards. Two years ago, he went to Guangzhou to visit the son and his family, but was disappointed because "I saw with my own eyes that my son doesn't do anything except playing cards. He wants to buy a house, but how could he when he doesn't earn a living." In some ways he has given up on his son since the son doesn't visit or give financial support. "I don't worry about him. Why should I worry? I just worry about myself". The son has two children but doesn't want to bring the children back to the village because the grandparents are not able to look after the grandchildren (the grandfather is well, but he is busy farming and looking after the sick grandmother). The son does not provide support because he has to worry about his own family in Guangzhou.

This family cannot afford to buy insurance since their income is only several thousand each year from selling crops. "I have to do everything in the house now. My wife has been sick for over a decade. She cannot take care of herself. She often excretes in her pants. I take care of her when I am home, but when I am away nobody does."

Family #4 (grandparents are frustrated because their son and daughter-in-law take advantage of them by not giving money to look after the grandchildren)

Zhou Xiuying (24) is 54 years old. Her husband is 56 years old. They have two young grandchildren staying with them. The family alternate their time between Meijia (summertime) and Chongqing (during the school year). All family members work outside so they no longer farm, except in the summer when they mainly grow vegetables

for consumption. The older daughter works in Xi'an selling furniture. They themselves, along with the younger son and his wife, work in Chongqing. When they are in Chongqing during the school year, they have a sesame cake food stand. The son works in a meat factory and the daughter-in-law works in a department store. Besides managing their sesame cake stand, they also look after their two grandchildren. They need to be up at 5 AM in the morning to prepare the sesame cakes and send their grandchildren to school and then pick them up at 5 PM in the afternoon. They are frustrated with their children because both son and daughter-in-law work in Chongqing and have their own income, but the son and daughter-in-law don't look after their own children and do not provide financial support.

Family #5: (Similar to family #4, this family is also struggling with financial needs. Family mobility is constrained because the elderly mother is quite sick hence they are not able to go out to work)

Zhou Xiuying (#24): this is a four-generation family. The family has a steam bun business in Chongqing, but is currently not working there because the elderly mother is paralyzed. The wife is frustrated because they are back in Meijia while they continue to have to pay for rent to store their refrigerator units in Chongqing.

We can't go back to Chongqing to work because my mom [mother-in-law; wife is talking] is like this [she is paralyzed]. She has been paralyzed for about half a year. We brought her to Chongqing but I was not able to take care of her while looking after my two grandchildren at the same time. She is incapable now and even asks for assistance to go to the toilet. It is very painful, but what can I do... We were not able to plant any crops since we came back to Meijia too late for crop planting, but at this stage, we will be planting next year."

"We're not going out now so sitting idle at home. She (grandmother) said she was going to die so we brought her home, but it turned out that she is very much still around. She deceived us to come back here. We have been sitting idle at home for three months now."

The family did not buy social insurance 社保 since “we do not have the money”. They want to buy farmers’ insurance, 农保, but their ID card is not ready. You can only buy insurance if you have an ID card, a proof of rural residence.

The wife (the working mother) also grumbled about her children since they are also looking after their two grandchildren.

"We do not have money because each week we have to spend money buying diapers for the two kids (70 RMB per week)¹¹ and that is not counting money for the milk yet. The baby doesn't eat anything besides drinking milk." "What is the purpose of having baby nowadays? Young people want to have babies but are not willing to raise them. This baby is too afraid of heat so whenever I feed him I have to stop my work. I don't mind raising one child and the parents can raise the other. It is not convenient for me to raise two kids and do my business. Their mother does not even bother to come and look after them."

The son and daughter-in-law have their own food stall in Chongqing, but do not give money to parents to raise their grandchildren.

5.5 Five Families and their Understanding and Practice of Filial Piety

Family #1: the family is happy and in harmony. They are doing well materially and the elderly grandparent is healthy. The grandparents are in their late seventies, but still very healthy. They don't have much worry in their life. Their children give them financial support and call them regularly to check on their well-being. The grandchildren go to the city and stay with their parents in the summer. There is no tension in the family because they are financially well off. This family illustrates mutual support among the generations.

Family #2: the grandmother is lonely and burdened with looking after her grandchild. Even in the evening she had to walk to the village center to top up her phone

¹¹ This is rare because not many people would spend money buying disposal diapers for the grandchildren let alone in rural China. Perhaps this is when they are in the city.

card. She is looking after her grandson. She is embarrassed because her sons do not support her, but she plays down this embarrassment.

Family #3: *pulling up by your own bootstraps mentality*. The father went out very early in the 1980s to work and left his son behind in the village with the uncle. This impacted on the son's education and he eventually dropped out of school and got into the bad habit of playing cards. In his eyes, the son bought dishonour to the family which continues since he does not have a proper job in Guangzhou. There is inter-generational support/relationship breakdown because the son doesn't provide financial support to the parents and the grandparents are unable to look after their grandchildren because the grandmother is sick and the grandfather needs to farm. Some parents come to the realization that they can only look after their own life and not their children's lives and so leave their children on their own and do whatever they like. Would things be different if the son and daughter-in-law were able to provide enough financial support so that the father did not have to work and could spend time looking after the grandchildren? He went to work when he was in his thirties and forties to support his family, but has not received the reciprocal care now that he is in his elder years.

Migration had a negative impact on his son's education, which in turn has impacted his later life. While he was away, the son stayed with the uncle's family in the village, but due to lack of supervision and guidance, the son gave up schooling after a few years and then spent most of his time playing cards.

Besides not having enough money to build the house, the other main reason that he stays at home is because his wife is sick. She has been sick for over a decade. She cannot take care of herself and often excretes in her pants. "I cannot go out because of my wife's situation. Last summer she fell several times and could not stand on her feet again after falling down. She is not dead yet, but as long as she lives I should take care

of her.” He has a modest income mainly from planting crops and raising two pigs. Because he can only earn several thousand Yuan a year on this income, he cannot afford insurance and often has to borrow money from the local credit union to buy medicines for his wife. Besides worries about not having enough money to care for his wife, he also worries about his own health. “I look well outside, but I’m sick all over my body. Only the doctor can tell”.

He seems to have affection for his grandchildren. “We have two granddaughters but do not get to see them often because we cannot take care of them here. They are living with their parents in Guangzhou.” But he seems not to care for his son. In fact, he seems very disappointed with his son.

When he asked his son for help he did not receive any. “My son does not come back here and does not have any money. He plays cards all the time and his wife has to work in the factory to support her family. I asked them for money to repay the money I borrowed for the pig and to buy some medicine for my wife, but they have not called me for six months.”

Family #4: The son and daughter-in-law continue to burden their parents to look after the grandchildren but do not provide any financial support. The children take advantage of the grandmother. As Davis-Friedman has suggested, old women around the age of 50 start to retreat from the commune and focus on taking care of their grandchildren. In the days of the planned economy, as part of the commune you received the same allotment of provision whether you worked hard or not. Back then grandparents would have had more leisure time, but nowadays, women in their 60s and 70s are still burdened with looking after the farm and the grandchildren. In this case, the grandmother is occupied with running a business. Running a business is quite different from farming. Farming is hard physical work but it does not have a sense of urgency

whereas running a business does, especially in the restaurant and service sector. Hence, the grandmother is not satisfied with the behavior of the children.

Family #5: The parents are happy to look after their grandchildren as long as their children contribute financial support and look after one of the grandchildren. They are also constrained by their elderly mother's ill health. These middle aged parents are caught between supporting future generations (their grandchildren are their own insurance and security for the future) and at the same time needing to fulfill their own obligation of providing support for their elderly parents especially in their old age.

5.6 Expectation versus Fulfillment of Filial Piety

The practice of filial piety in China is changing because of the mobility of migrant labourers, the increased participation of women in the work force, and the tendency of young people to adapt to individualism. Along with these movements are changes in family size due to the One-Child policy. Sons were generally entrusted with the care of elderly parents, but many families only have a daughter.

Rapid industrialization has enabled more and more young people to achieve financial autonomy from parental control at a much earlier age than before. Above all, the traditional Chinese family structures are increasingly fragmented into nuclear or even single-generation households, in which the elders have little face-to-face contact with their children as well as their grandchildren.

Given the central importance of family life in Chinese societies, it will be unlikely that the social and economic changes mentioned above would bring a wholesale erosion of filial obligations and expectations. In fact, studies done by Chow (2004) and Yang (1998) have shown that filial piety is still relevant though different. Yang points out that filial piety will not disappear completely. More likely a mode of individual

responses to social changes of piecemeal coping will evolve which selectively combines the retention of traditional core values with the creative transformation of other, less central values (Yang, 1998). Chow finds that the value of filial piety is not totally forgotten in present-day Hong Kong. Most Hong Kong people still treasure its values and practise it in ways that they find suitable and appropriate (Chow, 2004).

In the study of expectations and patterns of informal support for older persons in Hong Kong, Lee and Kwon found that the modern practice of filial piety continued to share important attributes of traditional filial piety in terms of the emphasis on respect and provision of proper care for older parents; however, due to social, economic, and political transformation along with modernization and globalization, the practice of traditional filial piety has been destabilized. Modernization has led to an increased individualism and economic independence among young people which resulted in changes in younger adults' filial obligation towards their parents, eroding the status and power of the old (Lee and Kwon, 2005).

Although Chinese family members still retain close contact with each other, traditional family units are breaking down as more married couples desire to live separately from their parents. Unlike in many Western societies, parents who live away from their married children still tend to maintain very close contact with their children. This contact can be in the form of visits or through the exchanges of gifts and money (Unger, 1993). Unger argues that the Chinese people continue to foster embedded/networked families. Though not as close as before, families do continue to keep in touch with each other.

Why are some children able to fulfill their duties why others are not? One possible explanation for this is that in traditional society, children are confronted and restrained by adults and elders in the community. In studying delinquency in children (McClure,

1980) suggests that under this circumstance, individual delinquency behaviors are not tolerated by family and society. Family life is highly influenced by grandparents and the community. Societal actors exert pressure on children and individuals to conform to “what are considered desirable values and standards of behavior, and anti-social activity is poorly tolerated” (McClure, 1980: 3). If parents are not able to control their children, community members will step in. The world is rapidly changing and modernization has also caught up with rural China. These young migrant children are no longer bound into the surroundings of a close knit community. They are now in cities of several millions where they are nameless and faceless. In some way, there is no one to hold them accountable.

5.7 Parents expecting unconditional support from their children:

Traditional parents who do not have external sources of income continue to expect unconditional support from their children. “Our children have grown up. We should use their money since we have raised them” (Zhang Yue’e, #10). This can be interpreted in two ways: (1) it is nature that they are filial to her because they are her children, or (2) she has every right to demand that they support her since she has given them the gift of life and has looked after the children.

Some parents prefer that children send them money instead of coming back and visiting. Grandma prefers financial assistance instead of the opportunity for her son to come home and see her during the spring festival. “I do not want my son to come back and see me since he would need to spend several thousand Yuan traveling back home. I would be happier if he gives me the money instead” (Li Shuhua, #19).

Just like any sacred bond or relationship that traditional society treasures, as people adapt to modernization, they will adapt individualism characteristics, which break

away from traditional practice. As Chang states in *Factory Girls*, many young people have now taken a lax approach to this. They think that going home is unproductive or unprofitable. They would lie so that they could spend time with their boyfriend or travel to other places to visit. There are cases like this in Meijia. Some truly cannot come home because they cannot afford the travel expenses or are unable to obtain tickets. However, there are numerous cases where parents complain that their children have not come home to visit them for several years.

A generation ago, this behavior would be such an extraordinary affront to conventional morality that no children would dare think of it. This point of not coming home to spend time with their parents during the New Year is an important aspect of family relationship and filial piety – of how people prioritize their behavior, attitudes, and reverence towards their parents.

5.8 Contrast between young married children and middle aged married children who live separately from their parents.

In the case of Meijia I found that young married couples are less inclined to remit money to support their parents if they have their own dwelling place in the city (obviously living costs in the city are higher so they might not have surplus money to send to their parents). Unmarried children who still live under the same roof with the parents continue to remit money to their parents. In fact, if parents are still productive and able to look after themselves and have good relationships with their children, instead of receiving money from their children, the parents continue to support their children in all possible ways (after all they want their children to do well in life). Parents from time to time will help with the mortgage when they can, or go to the city to look after the grandchildren, or have the grandchildren come and stay with them during the summer.

On the other hand, there are children who cut off this filial relationship and do not give or receive help from their parents.

By contrast, married middle aged children who live separately from their parents generally continue to remit money to their parents even though they have to prepare for their own economic security in old age and look after their own children.

There is a tension between retaining ties and support for their elderly parents and shifting their concern to help their own children with jobs, marriage, and housing. The middle-aged generation is aware that their parents are getting old and are less able to look after themselves so they need to have a strategy to deal with their parents when the situation arises.

For these grandparents, taking care of grandchildren is a burden because they have to learn to be parents again. In the past, grandparents would take care of their children so the children can work, but the children worked at home not thousands of miles away. The grandparents shared the responsibility with the parents of looking after the grandchildren since the parents were working on the farm at home. Given the current situation, where the parents are working in the city thousands of miles away, the grandparents have to take full responsibility for the grandchildren. This is a burden! Many grandparents are not in good enough health to look after their children fulltime.

5.9 Modernization and individualism

“Acceptance of dependency within a society that observes the norm of reciprocity creates the most decisive support system for the favorable attitudes toward the elderly. The emphasis on mutual obligations throughout the life cycle coupled with the necessity of repayment eliminates the need for the elderly to justify their need for care and respect on an individual basis. As a result, dependency in old age is viewed as unpleasant but inevitable, and few people envision an extended period of complete independence from those of other ages. The elderly do not view their dependency as a fatal attack on their self-esteem and the young and

middle-aged do not entertain illusions of perpetual self-sufficiency or disengagement from the old” (Davis-Friedmann, 13).

Many elderly in Meijia desire this mutual reciprocity for they consider they have given enough for their children, and now expect to be dependent on their children, but this is not the case. They continue to work into their old age. It seems that the life cycle or stage of life for the elderly in China has now lost the “golden years.” Many no longer have the luxury to sit back and relax during their old age. Their parents’ generation might not have had access the material comforts that they now enjoy, but on the other hand, they were surrounded by their children (the current elderly generation) and grandchildren in their old age.

What do the elderly of current and previous generations value more? Material comfort (but with loneliness and a feeling of burden) in old age or being surrounded by children and grandchildren who will look after them and provide emotional comfort? It seems that many have come to accept the inevitability of being alone in old age and have learned to live with it. It is only when they are no longer able to care for themselves that they will be dependent on their children.

The centrality of the parent-son relationship in China has been waning. The central axes of the Chinese family are no longer father and son and mother and daughter-in-law, but now it is similar to the West where husband and wife are central players and everything else moves around them (Fei, 1947). The horizontal conjugal tie between husband and wife has replaced the vertical parent-son relationship. The conjugal tie has now become at least as equally important as the parent-son relationship. In the past, filial piety required a man to stand always firmly on his parents’ side, whether the parents were right or wrong. Children were supposed to show respect and obedience towards their parents in all circumstances.

In contrast to the traditional Confucian family, in the 1980s there was a growing desire both by young married children as well as by parents to live separately. There was no conflict in desire between the old and the young. Both sides wanted the same things. This trend continues and has now become the norm. One would expect that rural parents who have limited resources would want to live with their married children. However, many find this to be too stressful. They would rather move out and live on their own. Seniors now see a role reversal. The daughter-in-law used to serve the parents-in-law, but now parents-in-law feel that they are serving the daughters-in-law by looking after their grandchildren so that the daughters-in-law can go out and work. Though parents are not happy about tensions with the married couple, many of them regard early family division as a sign of their failure to raise filial sons (Yan, 2003).

As for other aspects of filial practice in terms of relationship – children are not more distant to parents. Living separately from the parents has created distance in the relationship between parents and children. When some children return during the spring festival they do not help with household chores. They are more polite and they treat their parents as if they were relatives or friends.

Many people say that children nowadays are much more filial to their parents than they themselves were in the past—at least in financial terms. Working children often buy food for their parents when they return. A man in Anhui says that his son is very filial, for the son gives him money to buy alcohol! This was not possible in former times where children worked alongside parents and did not have any money outside the house. Other children begged their parents not to work so hard and some even gave them money to hire extra help during harvest time.

Many elders think that currently their children are filial, but are unsure about the next generation, because children and grandchildren are becoming more independent.

They have established houses away from the village. Although with better transportation children could come home more often, in practice they are not coming home due to work obligations.

Traditionally living side-by-side and serving parents on a daily basis is considered filial, but this is no longer the case. Being filial nowadays is being on the move to earn money and to send money home to rebuild the parental home and to provide a living. Parents who are self-reliant and do not have to depend on children for financial support prefer their children to provide psychological and emotional support or they prefer to be self-sufficient. "Since we are still able to work, we do not need any support from our children. We would like them to call us often asking about our health. That way we know they are safe outside." For others, being filial is about not depending on parents for on-going support, "we do not need any help from our children. We are happy to know that they are self-sufficient". "We're tired of looking after the children. We would be happy if they could just take care of one kid."

In general, most elderly parents in this study still think that their working children are filial, but as for the grandchildren's generation, who are not being accompanied by their parents, they do not know. Some go so far as saying that it is not their concern. "Because children's life nowadays is much better than their parents or our generation, they have not "tasted bitterness" or appreciate the difficult life before them." However the working generation who are currently working outside does show concern.

To be filial is to be self-sufficient or successful. Parents know that their children and grandchildren are doing well so they are not too concerned with their children sending them money every month. "My daughters also give money, but we can live by ourselves. It is not useful for us to save money. The only reason we would need to save money is in case we get ill because we are old." Many parents worry about their

children working outside. They think this is hardship. Many worry for their children who are working outside. Until now, the only way of life for these people was farming. Now that their children have to work outside, parents believe they suffer much hardship being away from home.

The elderly parents' concerns are not so much about having enough money to live on when they are old and not able to sustain themselves, rather, their main concern is about getting sick and becoming a burden to their children which would force their children to quit their job and return home to look after them. Perhaps they are not worried about finances because they have always relied on the farm and know that their children and grandchildren will look after them

5.10 Conclusion

The chapter has analyzed the expression of filial piety in terms of conflicting inter-generational perspectives and priorities emerging from migration pressures, as demonstrated in the interviews in Meijia. This continues from the previous chapter, which delved more deeply into the concept of filial piety within the family. Studies (Cowgill & Homles, 1972; Cowgill, 1974) have demonstrated that the social and economic status of the elderly can be diminished when society shifts from agricultural to industrial modes. This was not the case for China where elderly material well-being is actually better off. Children in general continue to uphold and fulfill their filial duty to their parents, but just like any sacred bond that traditional society treasures, as people adapt to modernization, they will adopt individualism characteristics which break away from traditional practice. The One-Child Policy for better or for worse has shifted the role of the daughter in the family. And it is to this we now turn our attention.

Chapter 6

Gender and Filial Piety: Filial Sons versus Filial Daughters

6.1 Introduction

This chapter selects core family relationships, using both ethnographic data and interviews to focus on the role of gender in current practices of filial piety by looking specifically at how sons versus daughters carry out their filial duties. It then examines more specifically the roles of mother- and daughter-in-law in light of their tensions and relationships. Migration has altered the core mother- and daughter-in-law relationship with implications for the mother-in-law due to the absence of the daughter-in-law.

Due to its One-Child Policy, what is the role of gender in the current practice of filial piety in rural China? To what extent has the communist commitment to female equality eliminated preference for the patrilocal household? Has migration altered the mother- and daughter-in-law relationship when daughters-in-law are absent from the home? This chapter explores how sons versus daughters carry out their filial duties toward their parents.

6.2 Gender Roles and Division of Labor in the Family

As we have learnt in Chapter One, throughout history, China has been known for its patrimonial society. Traditionally, the mentality of gender division in the family is that ‘*men till, women weave*’ (男主外女主内 *nanzhuwai nuzhunei*). In other words, men and women operate in separate spheres. Men take on the role of breadwinning and women of homemaking. In recent decades, this barrier has been breaking down since rural-urban migration has further increased the responsibility of women in agriculture, as many are left behind to farm while their husbands become migrants and pursue off-farm

work (Stockman, 1994). The boundary of the women's sphere therefore has expanded beyond the physical interior of the family compound to include agriculture (Jacka 1997).

Traditionally, women have a low status in society because the eventual loss of daughters through marriage discourages the natal family from investing in their education relative to their male siblings. It is said that, "daughters married out are like water spilled out. They don't usually send their remittances to the natal family. Even if they do, it's largely symbolic. Sons are different. They are expected to shoulder the responsibility" (Fan 2008: 9). Economically and politically the role of women in China has altered significantly, however, since the birth of the People's Republic of China. During the Maoist period, the state went to great lengths not only to counter the Confucian-based hierarchy of power between father and son, but also to counter gender ideology. As a result, "it considered both proletarians and women as the oppressed under capitalism and thus championed them and their contributions to production" (Fan, in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture*, 275). In proclaiming that, "women carry half of the heavens on their shoulders" (Ibid.) Mao brought forth an approach in the socialist state towards gender equality. Women were thus encouraged to participate in the labor force just like men.

Since then, the role of women in the labor force has shifted, not just for political reasons, but for economic ones as well. Women's contribution to economic production is not just limited to China. In general, rural families try to maximize their income in any way they can. Wahyuni (2008) suggests that, in the Philippines, families send their young daughters to the city to work as domestic servants, because it is the only opportunity for income generation available in the city. Meanwhile, they let their sons work in the village. Likewise, Trager (1984b) suggests, Filipino parents have higher expectations of their daughter's remittances than those of the sons. The migrant

daughters are usually more concerned about their families' welfare at home than their sons, who are more likely to use their income to meet their personal needs. A similar situation was also found in the cities of Sri Lanka, among unmarried women in factories, who are obliged to send money home to show their loyalty to their families. On the other hand, in North Tapanuli, Indonesia, families do not often expect remittances from their migrant daughters as much as they expect it from their sons (Rodenburg 1993).

In Taiwan, parents insist that daughters work, and give their earnings to the family, because they have to pay back their parents for raising them (Wolf 1972; Kung 1978). Parents will refuse to send a daughter to the city if she is the only available daughter at home, because the family needs her either to perform household domestic tasks or to give help in agricultural activities (Kung 1978). This is not the case in present day rural China since farmland is limited, and parents can manage the land themselves. Furthermore, there is limited employment opportunity in the rural areas.

Due to its One Child Policy, nowadays sons and daughters are viewed in many ways as equally important in the support of elderly parents. That is at least until the daughter is married. In fact, as we shall see later on this chapter, unmarried daughters are called upon to sacrifice more than sons in the family unit.

The migration of women is, however, not always related to household strategy. In some cases, the women's mobility is decided by the women, without any family considerations. Their motivation centered on their desire to purchase luxury items such as perfumed bars of soap, clothing or lipstick, in order to impress other girls in the village (Chang 2008). What is more, by migrating to the city, they have more of a chance to meet a future husband who is not an agricultural worker (Wolf, 1986).

This is not so for many rural areas nowadays, especially for daughters from Meijia. As illustrated later in the chapter, many daughters migrate out of necessity.

Their families need them. Policy-wise, lands are collectively owned by the village and local officials allot how much land each family receives depending on the number of members in the family. There is not enough land to be farmed by all. Also, families cannot simply work just on the farm since it does not generate enough income. Some want to lease additional land from the local government but are not successful since policies are not implemented uniformly in rural China.

6.3 A Preference for Daughters

As a patriarchal society, Chinese families traditionally favor sons, but this relationship is changing due to its One-Child policy. Traditionally, for the typical rural family, the boundary line is quite clear. When a woman marries, she is not just marrying her husband, but marrying into her husband's family. Chinese people use a special expression 女人出嫁 to express marrying off one's daughter, where the daughter is to cut ties with her own family and become part of her husband's family. With advances of communication and transportation, and due to the One-Child Policy, daughters are no longer fully cut off from their own family. In fact, after marriage, many daughters continue to look after their own parents as the previous discussion in chapter 5 has demonstrated. Daughters continue to take on caretaker roles for both their own parents and their parents-in-law. When an elderly parent is sick, it is often the daughter-in-law who returns to take care of them. In some ways, the age old tradition of *men till, women weave* 男主外女主内 is reinforced in this case where daughters-in-law are asked to return home to take care of sick parents, while sons continue to stay outside and earn money to support parents.

Because the roles of daughters are increasingly on par, or in some case exceeding the sons in terms of providing financial support to their parents, it is said that some parents actually prefer daughters over sons. They prefer a daughter to a son because daughters are more thoughtful and attentive when it comes to looking after them (Zhang 2004). Fan (2008) indicates that an unmarried daughter working outside her village to support her family tends to save more, and send more remittances home, than a son. Daughters, in general, are filial, especially those who have left their children behind to be looked after by the grandparents.

As articulated by a young woman in Meijia, “economic conditions have improved so everyone feels that it does not matter to have a son or a daughter as long as they get rich and the child is their own. In addition, girls can do everything that boys do. Some boys just stay at home and don’t do anything” (Lu Xiuli, #11). This is a big shift for Chinese people since families have always preferred sons over daughters. Many young women sacrifice their own future for the sake of their younger brother’s future.

As economic conditions improve, along with easier communication and transportation, elderly parents, who are still able to manage their own material needs, are shifting away from the traditional preferences for sons, because daughters can better provide the emotional support and comfort that they yearn for in old age.

a. Filial Sons

As a Confucian society, it is still tradition that sons provide for their parents in their old age. Almost every single family in Meija was satisfied with how sons fulfilled their filial duty to their parents. Only three parents explicitly expressed dissatisfaction with their sons. Wang Zhengyi (#18) no longer cares about his son’s business: “I do not worry about my son. Why should I worry? I just worry about myself and my wife.” Dong Wenfang (#3) does not know where her son is. He had left the house several years

before but seldom calls back. Zhou Xiuying (#24) thinks that her son and daughter-in-law are irresponsible for not taking care of their children, and thereby putting the burden on her to look after their children.

Being filial is to be able to look after oneself while providing for their parents when they are in need. Sons express this by sending remittances to parents, and by building a house for parents. Many go beyond this duty. For example, Li Shichang (#10) and Zhang Yue'e's (#13) children have helped the family with medical expenses to tens of thousands of *yuan*. Beyond the financial aspect of filial piety, sons also show concern for parents' health. During harvest season, one son sent home money to hire help so that his parents do not have to labor in the field.

6.5 Filial daughters:

Out-migration has allowed daughters to be more filial than ever before. In many ways, they are on an equal footing with their male siblings. Unlike the past, now they are able to go out and earn money for their family like their male counterparts. In some cases they are more filial than their brothers since they send home money to build the house and to pay for a brother's education, and help with wedding expenses. They continue to sacrifice their own life for the sake of their family. They put up with the brutality of the working conditions in the city—working long hours—during the most productive years of their youth as articulated here by Lu Xiuli (#11), a 26 year old migrant worker: “I feel I have no freedom in factory, like a frog living in a well with a very limited outlook. I cannot learn any knowledge or how to deal with matters, full of intrigue against each other such as buying food for the supervisor so they get more pay. That is what I learn. The human heart is treacherous.”

Historically, parents did not want their daughter to marry people outside of the town or province, for they fear that they might not get to see them again (Fan 2008). Nowadays, when a daughter is married, many still maintain connection, and indeed support their parents. With improvements in transportation, it is much easier for daughters to visit their parents. However, there are cases of married daughters wanting to sever ties with their family. In Anhui province, a married woman in her late twenties got upset when I asked if she continued to support her natal parents and said, “What do you mean my parents? My parents are here in this house because I’m already married!” Her parents are now her parents-in-law, not her birth parents.

China by and large is still a patriarchal society and family lineage follows the sons. However, there are cases in which families only have daughters and no sons. An uxori-local marriage might occur. In this case, the husband moves into the wife’s family home instead (Zhang 2004). In situations like this, a daughter has always sent money to support her parents and her children. This was not always the case for sons, who left children with their parents. As we have seen in the previous chapter, some sons take it for granted, leave their children to their parents, and do not provide financial support to them.

Married daughters continue to support their elderly parents. Dong Wenfang (#3) continues to receive support from her married daughter who lives in the next village. The daughter would meet up with her on market day to give her rice. Sons who are away from the village continue to support her in their own way by sending money when needed. Economically, her children are meeting her needs; however, she is disappointed that her sons do not interact with her on a regular basis. She feels lonely because all her children are gone, and her grandchildren are living in the city with their parents. She has not seen one of her sons for a number of years while the other son rarely calls. The only

one of her children that she sees on a regular basis is the daughter who lives in the next village. In some ways, this daughter has “fulfilled” more of the filial duties than her sons. The daughter not only provides for her material needs, such as rice, but also her emotional needs, through regular interaction.

6.6 Daughters Making Sacrifices for Family

Zhang Yiyun’s family (#22) is experiencing a lot of hardship. They are only in their early 40s. Her husband works as a house decorator but contracted hepatitis, and has returned home. The family has spent over 60,000 *yuan* on his treatment, equivalent to two to three years wages. But now that the husband is sick the family no longer has the freedom of action as before. They have two daughters and both are doing well in school. The younger one is 12 years old and is currently living with the grandmother in another village and going to school there. Their older daughter left school after junior high school, and went to work because her father got sick and could not afford to pay her school fees. It was her daughter who proposed that she go out to work. The parents did not want this initially, but ended up allowing her to go. Her parents are not worried about her living and working alone in Chengdu. They considered her a filial, good, and honest girl. She earns about 2000 *yuan* a month a month and sends most of it home, telling her parents not to go to work. This family did not complain about what a hard deal life has dealt them! In this case, migration is not an option of income diversification but rather a necessity for life survival. If their daughter stayed, their income from farming would simply not be enough to support her education let alone paying for the father’s medical expenses.

In Meijia, I found that young married couples are less inclined to remit money to support their parents if they have their own dwelling place in the city (obviously the cost

of living in the city is much higher so they might not have surplus money to send to their parents). Unmarried children who still live under the same roof as their parents continue to provide income for their parents more so in the case of daughters than sons. If parents are still productive, able to look after themselves, and have good relationships with their children, instead of receiving money from their children, the parents continue to support their children in all possible ways. After all, they want their children to do well in life. Parents, from time to time, will help with the mortgage when they can, or go to the city to look after the grandchildren or have the grandchildren come and stay with them during the summer. Married middle aged children who live separately from their parents generally continue to remit money to their parents even though they have to prepare for their own economic security in old age and look after their own children.

Daughters not only make sacrifice for their parents, but also for their brother's education. I found two cases in the study: Lu Xiuli (#11) sacrificed her life for the sake of her younger brother. At 17, she went to work in order to support her younger brother's education. Her reasoning was that because she is a girl, the best way for her to support her parents is to invest in her brother's education, since he will be the one to carry out the filial duty to her parents when she is married and no longer lives with her parents. Sun Jinlong and Shuhui's (#17) daughter also did exactly the same thing. She began to work at 16 years of age. She sent home money to help her parents build a house and paid for her younger brother's college. She is now a successful business owner in the nearby city. Besides running her own business, she also rents out part of her front shop to others for additional income. She is successful and continues to look after her parents—even though she is already married.

These stories illustrate that daughters are more willing than sons to make sacrifices for their family. None of the families in Meijia told us about heroic sacrifices

by their sons. In Chapter 4 we learned that Guo Mingzhu (#5) and her husband, instead of the expense of building their house, were willing to allow their son to go to school in Tiefsong because he insisted on going there. I did not encounter any family willing to sacrifice their son's education. Sons stopped going to school because they were not doing well; whereas Cai Guozhong and Wang Yumei (#1) did not allow their daughter to attend university because the family lacked money. Were their daughter able to go to medical school, would her future be very different? But now she is in Xi'an and working on whatever job she could find due to her very limited education.

6.7 Migration Opens up Marriage Options for Women

Marriage does not necessarily terminate the intention of women to migrate and migration of men does not necessarily lead to feminization of agricultural work. Women are less educated than men so they felt more pressure to move up; while parents often pressured daughters to come back and marry (Chang 2008). Migration makes rural women more likely to meet their future husbands on their own. They would marry later, and want fewer children (ibid). Many would marry fellow migrant workers rather than someone from their own village. Marriage does not put an end to migration, they would return home for the ceremony, but would leave again soon afterwards.

Traditionally, a woman would cut ties with her natal family, and take on the role of a daughter-in-law in her new family. But, nowadays, because of the One-Child Policy, married women continue to look after their own parents if conditions allow. Daughters continue to play the role of care taker for both their parents-in-law and their own parents.

Though migration allows women to marry husbands of their choice, nevertheless there is pressure for them to get married both from the family and from societal norms. Young women are often pressured to return home, and to get married, especially if their

wages are not that high. Most girls in a village marry in their early 20s. If they wait too long, they risked closing off that possibility for good (Fan, 2008). Whereas young men drift around, doing odd jobs, smoking, drinking and gambling away their meager earnings. Young women do not have this choice; they do not belong anywhere until they are married! (Chang, 57). “Here we do not get married because of falling in love at first sight. We get married if we feel that he or she is suitable after people have the introductory meeting. So it is called 'introduction', not 'love at first sight', and our feeling for each other will grow as time passes, for we do not choose a person because he is rich but rather because he is a kind man. I would not marry a man if I thought that we have different personalities” (Liu Yijun, #9).

With limited children through the One Child’s Policy, many parents do not see the difference between sons and daughters. In fact, many women continue to rely on their daughters for both financial and emotional support.

6.8 Daughter as care taker

Daughters continue to play the care-taker roles for both their own parents and their parents-in-law. When an elderly parent is sick, it is often the daughter-in-law who returns to take care of them.

Lu Xiuli (#11) returned home because her husband’s grandfather was sick—even though she does not want to return home. She has been used to living outside of the village for about nine years. When the grandfather got sick, the husband said that not returning home would be un-filial. As a result, she came home with her husband, and both have been sitting idle for the past three months. Her story illustrates several points. Either she is filial, or she is bound to her husband’s obligation. Filial obligations reach beyond the children’s generation. During my stay in Meijia, several people mentioned

that they have to take care of their grandchildren so that when they are old they can depend on them. Perhaps Lu Xiuli's husband was one of these grandchildren. When he was young his grandparents looked after him so now he is reciprocating his obligation. A family's interconnections, interrelations, and interdependence permeate all the generations who live under the same roof.

6.9 Mother and Daughter-in-Law

Traditionally, the daughter-in-law cares for the parents-in-law after marriage. Tensions can occur between mother and daughter-in-law, but with young daughters-in-law working outside with their husbands, there is little interaction between mother and daughter-in-law. Their relationship seems better: less conflictual when they don't interact with each other on a daily basis. Many daughters-in-law in Meijia are classified as good daughters-in-law.

Daughters and daughters-in-law rather than sons are the ones who would return to take care of the sick elderly parents. The only instance I encountered of the son returning home was when his father passed away after having returned home.

6.10 Conclusion

Migration has allowed daughters opportunity to fulfill their filial duties that were never asked of them before. Many of them go beyond the call of duty and make self sacrifices for their parents and their brothers. Though migration has enhanced the status of the daughter in the family, nevertheless the traditional roles of carer for their parents still fall on them. When parents-in-law are sick they are asked to return to take care of sick parents. In the past when they were married, they married into the husband's family and

helped their mother-in-law with household tasks, but now they are asked to look after not only their parents-in-law but also their own parents.

Chapter 7

Changing Roles in Changing Times

In the last century, arguably no civilization has undergone as much economic, political and social upheaval as China. In the past hundred years or so, China has transformed from a pre-modern agrarian economy, to an industrialized planned economy, to an export-driven market economy. At the same time, it has politically shifted from a post-imperial democracy, to a collectivized proletarian state, to the current party-driven Communist state. Meanwhile, the dominant social philosophy has shifted from Confucian-based filial piety to Marxist egalitarianism to Western-influenced Individualism. These rapid and simultaneous social transformations have had profound effects on every aspect of Chinese society, to the point where the landscapes of contemporary Shanghai or Beijing would be barely recognizable by people of Mao's generation.

In rural China, however, these three eras of China's recent past are still very much in evidence. Despite the rapid modernization that is taking place in the Special Economic Zones and the eastern port cities, many aspects of western China still resemble the agrarian economy of old. In villages like Meijia, families still rely on the land and its produce to sustain their livelihood and provide for their well-being and security. Modern amenities such as paved roads, regular phone service, affordable electricity and convenient public transportation are still uncommon. In Meijia, just as in countless other villages in rural China, ancient traditions and modern innovations stand side by side.

Of these ancient traditions, the most important and the longest lasting is clearly Filial Piety. In the Confucian tradition, the family was the building block of the nation. Clear roles within a patrimonial family led to peaceful coexistence, not only in domestic

life, but in village affairs, national politics and even cosmic harmony. This holistic view of filial piety is expressed in the Confucian proverb: 修身齐家治国平天下 *Xiushen qijia zhiguo pingtianxia*: “make yourself useful, look after your family, look after your country, and all is peaceful under heaven.” Within this cosmic order, fathers provide financial support and moral guidance for their wives and children. Within the home, mothers provide for the day-to-day necessities of life, and train and support their children in their formative years. In return, children pay filial respect to their parents, knowing that it is their duty to honour their parents, and particularly for sons to support their parents in their old age. Daughters are to be trained so that they can become proper wives to their future husbands, to be incorporated fully into their husbands’ families and to be honourable daughters-in-law to their husbands’ parents. Filial piety, then, was the binding force in this social system – it is not only a familial structure, but also a set of moral norms and a political hierarchy by which all of society is regulated. It was taught in the home, but reinforced in every facet of Confucian culture. Well-governed families led to a well-governed nation – so Chinese rulers highly valued the regulation of family life and familial roles. Filial piety was a source of social harmony that led to *pingtianxia*.

But with the economic, social and political upheavals that followed the Revolution, can great peace under heaven still be found for the rural Chinese family? This study has endeavoured to explore this question, not so much in terms of financial prosperity, but in terms of non-tangible cultural values of filial piety, changing familial and gender roles, and economic migration. In particular, this study has tried to examine how macro level changes in economic, social and demographic policies have affected family life in rural China. The primary policies examined were collectivisation, the *hukou* registration system, marketization, and the One-Child policy.

During the Maoist era, collectivisation not only radically altered the economic structure of rural life – moving from family landholding to village collectives, but also aggressively attacked the very premise of filial piety. Collectivisation challenged the patrimony system that left proletarians and women beholden to their Confucian feudal lords. Instead, collectivisation proposed that workers should depend on the state to have their needs met, from acquiring basic goods to being cared for in their old age. Maoism also introduced the idea of gender equality into a filial system that had for millennia valued sons over daughters. In addition to its well documented economic effects, collectivisation greatly eroded the cultural system which once reinforced the value of filial piety.

Yet collectivisation also instituted the *hukou* registration system as part of the state planned economy. In order to ensure that there was enough food to support the rapid industrialisation of the Great Leap Forward, state policy implemented *hukou* registration as both a means to deliver state resources equitably, and as a method to regulate the flow of labour such that the agricultural sector remains well supplied, even as heavy industry was opening up in the coastal regions. As Deng Xiaoping recognized, however, the Great Leap Forward was an economic disaster and humanitarian cataclysm that needed to be radically changed if China was going to succeed. But even as collectivisation ended, the *hukou* system persisted. Its bureaucratic requirements, limitation on movement, and method of distributing state services remain a definitive factor in modern family livelihood choices in rural China.

After the failure of the planned economy, China moved rapidly towards an export-based market economy. In the industrialized east, marketization led to a vast expansion of factories and manufacturing facilities, as well as the creation of Special Economic Zones to lure foreign investment. The exponential growth in industrial

production has created a huge demand for cheap labour in the eastern cities. Though still low by world standards, the wages offered in factories is often a significant step up from the income available in rural agriculture. Thus, marketization has created an incredible pull for rural workers, both male and female, to migrate to the cities. Yet, due to the limitations imposed by the *hukou* system, such rural-urban migration must often be a solitary journey, where both older and younger generations are left behind.

Marketization has also shifted employment away from state-owned enterprises with guaranteed wages and pension benefits, to private industry where worker protection and benefits are far more tenuous.

In the countryside, there has been a shift from collective benefits managed through the village commune back to particular families managing particular parcels of land. Care for the elderly and other state benefits have been re-privatized as part of de-collectivisation. Yet de-collectivisation has not meant a restoration of the Confucian social structures that reinforced filial piety. Rather, marketization has also brought with it Western individualism and its emphasis on personal liberty and the nuclear family. Migrant workers are now torn between their traditional filial duties and their own economic self-interest. Meanwhile, in the villages, elders who thought they could rely on the state to provide support services, now must rely on their families instead. After dismantling the structures of filial piety during the Maoist era, the state now enforces filial piety as a form of social security.

Finally, demographic pressures brought about the One-Child policy as a way of managing population growth. This policy has reshaped the Chinese family in fairly radical ways. Two generations after this policy's implementation, 4-2-1 children find themselves the focal point and beneficiaries of the labour and attention of six adults – two parents and four grandparents. Yet One-Child has caused China to become one of

the most rapidly aging countries on earth as well. With the reimplementation of filial piety as a primary form of social security, especially in rural areas, 4-2-1 children now find themselves responsible for the care and well-being of six aging parents and grandparents. One-Child has also exacerbated the labour shortage in the cities, since urban residents are only allowed one offspring, regardless of gender, while rural families may have two children if the first born is a daughter. Population growth is proportionately faster in rural areas, while the demand for labour is growing in the urban east.

Any one of these factors – collectivisation, *hukou* registration, marketization/decollectivisation, and One-Child – would have created tensions within rural families. With all four factors at work, families are now strained to the limit. In rural areas, the family has once again become the primary economic and social unit, and yet is under constant pressure due to the demands of livelihood, migration and filial piety.

This study, therefore, was undertaken in order to more fully understand how these pressures are reshaping family life in rural China. Through extensive ethnographic interviews – the methodology of which is detailed in Chapter 2 – I have tried to gain insight into how migration has affected rural family structures beyond the usual quantifiable economic measures. Using the village of Meijia, Sichuan province, as a paradigmatic sample (as explained in Chapter 3), this study presents a more comprehensive view of how migration and modernization are reshaping familial roles, changing filial expectations, reshuffling notions of care-taking, and transforming traditional views on the value of daughters and daughters-in-law.

These interviews have revealed that the choices families make around migration, child-rearing and elder-care cannot be fully explained by either an income diversification model or a survival model. Rather, what emerges is a more holistic, livelihood approach

wherein families evaluate a range of factors before deciding if and when a family member will migrate for work. These factors, explored in depth in Chapter 4, show that there are a wide range of motivations as well as limitations for migrants as they seek to better their personal or familial circumstances. Chapter 4 also details how familial roles for grandparents, migrant parents, and school age children are all being transformed and re-imagined due to the economic and social pressures brought about by migration and modernization.

What emerges from the interviews is that for rural Chinese families, economic factors alone are not determinative of migration choices. Rather, filial piety – that ancient system of social values – still plays an important and sometimes decisive motivation in the decisions that members of all three generations make. Chapter 5 explores the tensions that emerge between the generations as the tradition of filial piety butts up against the exigencies of marketization, individualism and migration. For the migrant generation, they feel torn between their filial responsibilities to the older generation, their parental responsibilities to the younger generation, and their own individual interests and desires. For the school age generation, there is pressure to succeed in education, but often that pressure comes from afar, since their parents are away working. Instead, the day-to-day responsibilities of parenting are thrust upon the elder generation, who often feel ill-equipped or under-funded to deal with this new challenge. Finally, for the elder generation, their traditional expectations about financial security through the filial piety of their sons are being challenged by the felt absences, loneliness and long work hours brought about when migrant children leave to increase the livelihood of the family. For all three generations, migration, livelihood and filial piety concerns are transforming what it means to be family.

Yet under the influence of the economic, social and political pressures discussed above, even the venerable concept of filial piety is changing. Chapter 6 explores how contemporary pressures are reshaping perceptions about the worth of daughters in the filial piety system. As elders realize they value not only financial security, but also affective nurturing, they are realizing that daughters are perhaps more apt to deliver both. Daughters of both school age and working age are proving to be more motivated, more disciplined and more filial than their male counterparts. Families now are more willing to invest in the education of their daughters, and actively maintain connections with them after marriage, rather than seeing them as members a different family. Even though filial piety remains a potent force in rural family life, it too is transforming as China enters fully into the modern, market economy of the 21st century.

7.1 The Contributions of this Study

While many scholars have explored the financial impacts of migration upon rural Chinese communities, very few have investigated how migration has affected the structure and behaviour of family members, both those outside working and those left behind in the villages. The ethnographic approach I have undertaken, as well as the unique opportunity to integrate myself into a Chinese village have allowed me to investigate the non-tangible effects of migration in ways that quantitative approaches are unsuited to examine. This approach has revealed changing attitudes and choices amongst an understudied demographic: the rural elderly. As migration becomes more and more a feature of the rural Chinese economy, understanding family dynamics will be important for policy planners and economic analysts.

Moreover, this study has integrated a historically grounded understanding of filial piety with the modern pressures of collectivisation, *hukou* policy, marketization/de-

collectivisation, and One-Child policy. In terms of Chinese Studies, these interviews have revealed that traditional values like filial piety still have a major effect on rural societies. Perhaps more importantly, however, this study shows that filial piety is itself a dynamic idea, rather than a static relic. Filial piety is now taking new forms, undreamt of by Confucius. Further ethnographic work may reveal that other age-old Chinese concepts are also transforming due to the influence of modernization and marketization.

In Migration Studies, this study offers insight into how traditional cultural values can be just as influential on migration patterns as economic incentives/disincentives. As the interviews revealed, migrants often choose to forego their own financial best interests in order to care for the elderly or the young. It encourages scholars to avoid oversimplifying the motivations and actions of rural people who are often considered simple or are lumped into an undifferentiated mass. In this study, filial piety has proven to be an influential factor in rural Chinese society. In other cultural settings, it may be religious values or ethnic affiliation or historical grievances that may influence migration choices. Regardless, this study has demonstrated that such non-tangible motivations must be considered when evaluating the behaviours and choices of non-refugee migrants.

7.2 Directions for Further Study

The fieldwork for this study concluded in 2011, so my analysis of the interviews only takes extant economic conditions and social policies into account. Since that time, however, the state has announced reforms in four of the social conditions cited in this study. China has recognized the inequalities between rural and urban pension systems and has implemented policy changes to equalize the state's contribution to elder care (Mu, 2014). Moreover, due to increasing complaints from the "floating population," the state has also reformed the *hukou* registration system, in order to improve the working

conditions and social rights of migrant workers (Branigan 2014). Furthermore, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is considering changes to the One-Child policy, now that demographic shifts are creating unanticipated complications for the 4-2-1 generation (Li, 2013). Lastly, filial piety laws are beginning to be enforced, and the younger generations can now be legally obligated to fulfil their filial duties (Pi, 2014). The social reinforcement mechanisms that were dismantled in the Maoist era are now starting to be rebuilt. China is transforming so rapidly that it is impossible to incorporate these new policy shifts effectively. These changes, however, do offer enticing possibilities for further study. One obvious avenue of research would be to return to Meijia after these new policies have been implemented, and see what if any changes in attitude and behaviour have been brought about following the change in regulations.

Nevertheless, the current study offers a new glimpse into the status of contemporary family life in rural China. Through these ethnographic interviews, we have been able to gain a much more nuanced understanding of how these families navigate the treacherous waters of modernization, marketization, and migration, even while clinging fast to the guiding values of filial piety and sacrifice for one's family. I can only hope that I have done justice to the generous, hard-working people of Meijia, and their struggle to improve their lives in the changing roles and changing times they face every day.

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Appendix 1 - Timeline of study

October 2007	Study commenced
June 2010	Transfer of Status completed
May 2012	Confirmation of Status completed
July 2010 – February 2011	Fieldwork in Sichuan, Anhui, and Shanxi provinces
April 2011 – August 2011	Analysed data in Hong Kong and revisited the mainland to clarify questions
October 2014	Thesis submitted

Appendix 2 – Fieldwork topic guide

The objective of the study is to investigate the six aspects of family dynamics in terms of behavior and interaction: (1) decision making and negotiating the process of migration; (2) the burden and challenges of those left-behind; (3) the relationship between husbands and wives due to long-term separation; (4) the emotional and social impact on left-behind children; (5) the anxieties, burden, and challenges for the elders (grandparents); and (6) attitudes and behaviours of the individual migrants.

This is only a topic guide and a point of reference for conversation.

Questions will be adapted and fine tuned during fieldwork.

Family Diversification

- How do they understand this as a family diversification strategy?
- What are the motivations and migration choice strategies? How do couples negotiate migration strategies?
- How do these migrant families differentiate themselves from non-migrant families?
- How has their social and economic situation changed?
 - More importantly, how have their relationships changed?
- How does the family understand/adapt itself in today's rapidly changing society? Does it still function as an economic unit or family?
- How does the family divide? What factors influence division?

Family roles & function (social relationship dimensions)

- What are the effects of migration on family life?
- What are the effects on those left behind?
- How do those left behind interact with each other?
- How do families cope with the departure and absence of family members?
- Who makes the decisions in business matters?
 - Does this mean that when the husband migrates the family structure is less traditional since the wife now has a say in business matters?
- Who decides about the amount and details of household expenditures? How do couples decide?
- Who makes the decisions in problems concerning the children: education, profession, and marriage? What about role reversal when the wife is away working?
- Who/ what holds the migrant to his contract?
 - What are the actors/agents that keep the migrants to their end of the bargain? That is, the family risk their resources, pull their resources together so the migrant can leave if necessary.
 - The family is the guarantee, a security landing pad or dock when things do not work out on the road.
- Are there structures being turned upside down?
- Is there role reversal?
- Are female heads of household satisfied that their husbands migrate instead of them?

- Role of women vs. men. In term of equality—do successful women feel held back by the concept of face saving?
- Marriage can be seen as an economic proposal which allows couples to pool their resources to open a business.
- Role of daughter-in-law with her mother-in-law?
- How do migrants continue to practise filial piety in supporting family and elderly parents? How does the family or a couple negotiate finance when living apart?

Family communication

- What are the communication networks of the Chinese migrant family?
- What are the effects of the internet on the communication networks of the Chinese migrant family?

Couple

- Husband & wife: what sustains their relationship?
- Do women now have equal footing with the man?
- Do remittances justify the husband to be apart?

Children (Social & human capitals)

- What are migrants' expectations of their left behind children?
- In which way are children better or worse off as result of migration?
- What is the Chinese migrant family's relationship between parents and children?
- Confucian tradition emphasize rites and ritual: how do children learn proper rites and ritual when living apart from their parents? How do children learn?
- Transnational family life – trans-rural-urban life—what is the children's perspective?

Elderly (remittance & elderly well-being)

- What might the expectations be of elderly parents in taking care of their young grandchildren while the adult children are away working?
- How does the family deal with migration, and dynamics within the family due to migration? How does migration affect the practice of filial piety?
- Children: family/filial piety obligation?
- Does public opinion influence the demand to help the old?
- What were the parents (elders) experiences of filial piety? How has the experience changed and how have they coped with it?
- How do elders get by without proper support from government? What is the recourse for rural parents now that land is worthless, in comparison to urban parents who have leverage over their children because they have better wages and better house values?

Returned Migrants - Straddling between two worlds

- How do family members cope with returned migrants?
- How do migrants negotiate rural and urban lifestyles?
- As they see the attractions of the city, how do they justify returning to the area they left to be with their parents/children?
- Does migration loosen the bond of family interaction?
- With feeling 'in-between', how do they cope? Do they always think about returning home or trying to spend time with new people?

- How do wives feel after returning now that they have had a new sense of freedom and independence? How do they negotiate returning to the city?
- Does their desire to go back to the city derive from the pull or push factors?
- How do they know that they have obtained their goals?
 - At what point would it be enough?
- What are the working conditions?
- Traditionally marriage sees the man as the head of the household. How do women who are currently heads of household leave their role when their husbands return after being away for work?
 - *In what ways do migrants see that they are subordinating their own interests to the interests of their family?*

Appendix 3 – Sample transcript

录音 10 文刚及夫人杨琴 2010.07.28 2: 30-5: 40pm
Transcript 10 Wen Zhang and Lu Xiuli (wife)

麦: 你刚回来是吗?

Mai: Have you just come back?

文刚: 有一段时间了

Wen Zhang: No, I have been back for a while.

麦: 你是在哪里打工呢?

Mai: Where did you work?

文刚: 广东, 我们这里去广东的比较多

Wen Zhang: In Guangdong; many people from here work in Guangdong.

麦: 有很多人去广东打工吗?

Mai: Oh really. There are many people from here working there?

文刚: 今年啊?

Wen Zhang: This year?

麦: 恩

Mai: Yes.

文刚: 今年回成都的比较多

Wen Zhang: Many people prefer to go back to Chengdu this year.

麦: 去那边是谁介绍的?]

Mai: Who suggested that you should go there?

文刚: 朋友亲戚介绍去的, 像我们这里农村, 如果在家里的话是没有办法生活的

Wen Zhang: Our relatives and friends suggested that we look for work there. As you know, in our country, we could not survive if we just stayed at home.

麦: 现在你家有多少人去打工?

Mai: How many people from your family are working elsewhere?

文刚: 6个人, 我爸爸妈妈在家, 年纪大了不能去打工了

Wen Zhang: Six of us. My parents are too old to work so they are now staying at home.

麦: 你去广东多久了?

Mai: How long have you been working in Guangdong?

文刚: 我去那里 3、4年了

Wen Zhang: I've been there about 3 or 4 years.

麦: 是高中毕业后就去了是吗?

Mai: Since you graduated from your high school?

文刚: 是, 因为当时成绩不是很好, 所以就决定去打工, 因为农村的孩子嘛, 想早一点出去闯一下

Wen Zhang: Yes. Because I didn't work at my studies at the time, I decided to work away from home. Since we are rural children we need to have an early start in life.

文: 是哪一年去的哦?

Mai: What year was that?

文刚: 2006 年

Wen Zhang: 2006.

麦: 在广东做什么工作?

Mai: What did you do in Guangdong?

文刚: 在酒店做前台接待工作

Wen Zhang: I did reception work in a hotel.

麦: 是住在酒店还是住在自己的地方?

Mai: Did you live in the hotel or in your own place?

文刚: 那里是包吃包住的, 一开始都是住集体宿舍的, 条件刚开始还是不错的, 因为我们做的是星际酒店, 福利还是蛮不错的

Wen Zhang: The wages there were pretty good, as we were working in a Star World Hotel, and they also offered free accommodation; we lived in a dormitory.

麦: 收入呢?

Mai: How much did you earn?

文刚: 收入也就两千多块钱

Wen Zhang: About 2,000 yuan.

麦: 需要学英语吗?

Mai: Did you need to learn English?

文刚: 还是要学, 还有一些粤语, 公司有一些培训

Wen Zhang: Yes, and we still had to learn Cantonese and attend some company training sessions.

麦: 如果会说英语的人, 收入会更高吗?

Mai: If someone can speak English, will his income be higher?

文刚: 这个会有一些优势, 这样的话就会从事一些重要的职位, 相对来说待遇也比较多

Wen Zhang: Yes this will have some advantages. He gets a more important position and a higher salary.

麦: 什么时候回来的?

Mai: When did you come back?

文刚: 可能有半年了

Wen Zhang: About half a year. Six months ago.

麦: 还打算回去吗?

Mai: Do you want to go back?

文刚: 不打算做这个了, 因为我觉得这个好像不适合我, 我打算在家做点小生意

Wen Zhang: I am not going to do this anymore. I don't think it really suits me. Now I am planning to start some kind of a small business in my hometown.

文: 准备在哪里做生意啊?

Mai: Where will you start your business?

文刚: 还没定, 只是在想, 因为还要资金, 我觉得如果要说的话, 还需要考察, 想搞点副业, 以前有个同学想搞养殖, 我觉得挺好

Wen Zhang: Not decided yet. I am still thinking about it. I would have to raise some capital and do some research before starting a business. I am also considering doing something else on the side. One of my classmates is breeding fishes. I think that is very good.

麦: 回梅家习惯吗?

Mai: Are you used to staying at home?

文刚: 习惯

Wen Zhang: Yes.

麦: 但是在广州有很多朋友, 你在这里没有朋友, 如果手机没有信号就。。。

Mai: But you've got so many friends in Guangzhou, and so few friends here; if your cell phone has no signal here, that means ...

文刚: 是, 在这里跟朋友联系少一点, 他们也会问我什么时候出去什么的, 但是家里也有朋友, 只是都在外面

Wen Zhang: Yes, we are a bit out of touch here. My friends will also ask me when I will go out to work. I do have some friends at my hometown, but they are working elsewhere now.

麦: 父母现在都回来了是吗?

Mai: Have your parents come back?

文刚: 是

Wen Zhang: Yes.

麦: 以前也是住在广东吗?

Mai: Did they live in Guangdong?

文刚: 不是, 他们年轻时也在外打工, 现在老了回家了

Wen Zhang: No. They were working somewhere else when they were young, now they are coming back as they are growing old.

文: 房子是什么时候修的啊?

Mai: When did you build this house?

文刚: 前年

Wen Zhang: The year before last.

麦: 多少钱?

Mai: How much?

文刚: 十三万

Wen Zhang: One hundred and thirty thousand.

麦: 你什么时候决定不再去那里了?

Mai: Why did you decide not to go there to work?

文刚: 因为那边工作自己觉得不是很适合自己, 并且没有什么前途, 那是个生活节奏很快的城市, 并且那里的生活环境还是不好, 尽管经济比较好

Wen Zhang: Because the job there is not so suitable for me, which I could not see any future....didn't suit me, and I could see no future in it. As it was a fast-paced city, and though the economy is better yet the living environment is not that good.

(关于对美国的一些聊天情况没有整理)

(Chats about the situation in the United States so have not been transcribed.)

文: 为什么要出去打工?

Mai: Why did you want to go out away to work?

文刚: 为了生存, 养家糊口, 面对土地和庄家成为百万富翁很难

Wen Zhang: To survive and feed the family. It is so difficult to become a millionaire if you are just dealing with land and crops every day.

麦: 但是很多年轻人仅仅是想去见见世面

Mai: And I know that many young people just want to see the world.

杨琴: 普通人就觉得毕业后不想干活就想到外面的花花世界去看看也是很正常的嘛, 因为农村的视野比较窄, 各种各样的新鲜的东西是看不到的, 只是农村的环境比较好, 我到外面打工, 一个是因为家庭, 生活不是那么好, 出去打工就是为了求生存, 多挣点钱养家糊口, 还有就是顺便看看外面的世界多么美好, 再学习一点新的东西, 新的观念因为在农村比较保守和传统。

Yangqin: Ordinary young people from the countryside after graduating don't want to work on the farm, so they decide to go away to work. As you know, we are out of touch with the outside world, and here in the countryside we don't see new things or get new ideas. Your vision gets worse even though it is a healthier place to live. I went away to work partly because of my family, since our standard of living is not so good. The only reason one goes away work is to survive, to make more money, and to support our families at the same time. I can first see whether life away from the village is worth living, and I can learn new things, have new ideas. People in rural areas are relatively conservative and traditional.

麦: 比方说?

Mai: For example?

杨: 比如说有的中国有的家庭父母觉得女孩子上学没有用, 因为一旦嫁人了就是别人家的人了把所有的都带走了

Xiuli: For example, some parents in China feel that girls don't need to go to school, because once they get married, they will always take always whatever they have to their new family.

麦: 重男轻女是吗?

Mai: So they see sons as better than daughters, right?

扬琴: 十年以前是这样的, 但是现在这个社会没有了

Xiuli: Yes, it was a very popular attitude of mind years ago. But this way of thinking has become less and less popular in today's society.

麦: 因为什么呢? 因为家里就只有一个女儿了是吗?

Mai: Why? Because they just got one daughter in their family now?

扬琴: 也不是的, 因为现在中国包括所有的阶层, 所有的人的生活条件都比以前翻了几倍, 所以大家觉得男女都无所谓了, 有钱自己的孩子就好了, 所以这种观点就打破了, 不像以前那样重男轻女了, 比如男孩子在家里不用做事啦, 女孩子什么都要做啦。

Xiuli: Not at all. In China today, and in every class in society, people's living conditions are several times better than before. So everybody feels that it does not matter whether they have a daughter or son as long as they get rich and the child is their own. So this concept has been broken, they are not viewing sons as better than daughters any more. For example, now boys are staying at home and doing nothing! But girls can do everything.

麦: 那你有没有感觉, 在城里有很多父母喜欢女儿, 因为女儿可以常常来帮父母

Mai: Do you feel the urban parents prefer to have daughters, as daughters can often go back home to look after them?

扬琴: 这个女儿比较体贴, 比较细致,

Xiuli: Yes, daughters are more thoughtful and take care of the details.

麦: 农村也是这样的吗?

Mai: It is the same in rural areas?

扬琴: 现在不一定的

Xiuli: No.

文: 你可以直接问她一年回家看几次父母就可以了

Wen Zhang: You can ask her directly how many times she goes back to her hometown to see her parents.

扬琴: 这个问题太重要没必要问的, 因为回家看父母是肯定要的

Xiuli: Going back to their hometown to see their own parents is really an important thing, I think it's not necessary to ask.

麦: 有些出外打工的人觉得在城市比较好就愿意生活在城市了不再回来了?

Mai: Some people go out to work and are not willing to come back to their hometown, as they enjoy the city life, right?

扬琴: 有这样的, 这种就是体验到了农村不能改变自己的命运, 觉得在农村比较苦, 他已经被城市的花天酒地、纸醉金迷的生活所迷惑了, 喜欢这种花花世界, 他喜欢这样的生活方式, 所以就不愿意回来, 但是我是一个很热爱家乡的人, 无论我在哪里无论是在美国还是英国, 我都会回到自己的家乡, 落叶生根, 这个是代表的中国的传统, 我是这样的, 在别人身上是没有的, 就是我自己, 呵呵, 再讲讲我自己的想法, 我的素质可能没有你们高, 但是我的素质比一般的人高, 我想中国人主要是太穷, 所以很多人为了孩子都外出打工, 但是小孩没有人管, 所以这些孩子就有点贪玩不是很好管教, 就像我们这里的孩子, 不像以前家教比较严, 现在的孩子就比较叛逆, 所以像这样的青少年就很容易走向不正之道

Xiuli: Yes there are cases like that. As they've experienced the difficult rural life and well know that they cannot change their destiny if just stay on in rural areas. But when they went away to work, they indulge in all the sensual pleasures and enjoy the life of luxury and dissipation. They like the world where it is full of sensual pleasures, or else they would not come back. But for me I like my hometown very much, no matter whether I'm in America or Britain, I will go back to my hometown. The leaf does not fall far from its root. This is typical of Chinese tradition and I am like that. This is me. Perhaps, others are not; my character is higher than the average person. I think the Chinese are mainly too poor, so a lot of people go like this. Ha ha! This is how I think. I might not be as good as others but this is how I am. When I am at work, children are left, uncared for and quite lacking in discipline, like the children here. In contrast to those children, today's are more rebellious, so it is easy for young people like this is to take to the Paths of Iniquity.

麦: 你觉得这个小孩长大之后还会孝顺父母吗?

Mai: Do you think children like this will retain any filial piety towards their parents after they grow up?

扬琴: 中国的传统有各种各样孝顺, 但是不一定用金钱来衡量

Xiuli: There are all kinds of traditional Chinese filial piety, but they are not necessarily measured in monetary terms.

麦: 恩, 第一方面结束, 第二方面是你觉得留守的这些人压力大不大?

Mai: Well then, that answers the first question: the second question is whether you feel that the people left behind are under much pressure?

扬琴: 我给你讲啊, 留守下来的人都是中年或者老年人, 他们就没有什么压力了

Xiuli: Let me tell you, they all are middle-aged or old people, they are not under any pressure.

麦: 但是他们要照顾小孩

Mai: But they need to take care of the children.

扬琴: 但是他们都是照顾的孙子嘛。我觉得中国的留守儿童缺乏的是父母的这种爱, 爷爷奶奶给的爱和父母的爱是不一样的, 爷爷奶奶的爱是溺爱, 父母的爱是真正的爱

Xiuli: Well, all of them look after their own grandchildren. I feel that the unattended children in China are lacking their parents' love, which is very different from grandparents'; grandparents' love is doting while the love from parents is real love.

麦: 你觉得现在的孩子长大后会不会有什么问题?

Mai: Do you feel they will have any problem when they are growing up?

扬琴: 肯定有问题嘛, 因为像 90 后的孩子, 他们就属于没有人照顾的, 他们的成长比较自由, 没有父母的关爱, 很容易误入歧途, 我觉得 90 后很大部分, 但不是全部, 我想他们能够担当国家的重任很少, 不像 70 后、60 后那些人成功比较多, 因为 90 后怎么样呢, 他们好吃懒做, 因为天塌下来有父母挡着, 父母在外打工, 虽然不能给他一个温暖的家, 但是在金钱上是可以满足他的

Xiuli: Definitely, like the 90s generation, they are unattended and grow quite freely without parents' love, and so they easily go the wrong way; I think that few of them can take the heavy responsibilities involved in building our country, and will not be as successful as the 70s and 60s generations. What are the children of the 90s like? They are lazy because if the sky falls, their parents will be there to protect them. Parents are away working to provide for them. Parents might not be able to provide a sweet home, but money-wise they can satisfy their children needs.

麦: 那你是在哪里打工呢?

Mai: Where did you work then?

扬琴: 广东

Xiuli: In Guangdong.

文: 哪一年去的?

Wen Zhang: When did you go there?

扬琴: 2001年, 因为文化低了嘛, 16岁就去了, 就是北京刚好申奥成功, 但是我去的那个时候, 广州也不是那么繁华, 现在比较繁华了, 那个地方在四川人眼里比较容易挣钱, 就是比较遗憾的是没有读书, 那个时候的理想就是法官或者就是检察官, 或者是哲学家, 因为我比较喜欢政治

Xiuli: In 2001, I am not educated so I went there at sixteen. That was the very year that Beijing successfully bid to host the Olympic Games. Guangzhou was not very flourishing then, but it is now. Back then it was easy to make money there at least in the mind of a Sichuanese. What I regret is that I hadn't studied, I had a dream that I could be a judge, either an attorney or a philosopher one day for I like studying politics.

麦: 为什么回来呢?

Mai: Why did you come back?

扬琴: 因为我热爱我的家乡, 家乡的水土养育了我这么多年我要回来, 这是个人的热爱, 中国的传统

Xiuli: Because I love my hometown, and I grew up here many years ago, so I came back. This is my own love, it is a Chinese tradition.

文: 你老家是哪里的?

Wen Zhang: Where is your native place?

扬琴: 东坝的, 东坝街上, 但是也是地地道道的农村孩子, 从小也吃苦, 什么活都干, 那个时候还是没有把握机会, 不是父母不让, 那个时候还是读书成绩差, 反正我觉得我至少比一般人好一点就行了, 我要求也不高, 就是无论人家来我能够知道一些就行了

Xiuli: Dongba, Dongba Street, but I was also a purely rural youngster, I endured hardships and did many different jobs in childhood. I didn't seize any opportunity at that time; it is not my parents' fault but my poor study, I feel it is fine to do a little bit better than average, my expectation is not high provided I can follow a little when they are talking about something.

麦: 那个时候是做什么的在广州?

Mai: What's your job then?

扬琴: 我从事的职业还是挺多的, 都是与苦有关的,

Xiuli: I have taken many vocations that were all connected with bitterness.

文: 出去九年, 讲讲你九年的经历

Wen Zhang: You have been outside for nine years, tell us your experience.

扬琴: 刚出去就是进厂

Xiuli: I worked in a factory at the beginning.

文: 是自己出去的吗?

Wen Zhang: Did you leave your village on your own?

扬琴: 跟我父母出去的, 刚出去的时候, 就近的鞋厂, 工作了两年, 那个老板真黑, 常常加班到 2、3 点, 而且上厕所都要规定时间, 吃饭的时间也常常是 30 分钟左右, 那时候很苦的, 干了一年多, 工资也低, 而且一个月没有休息

Xiuli: With my parents, I had worked in a nearby shoe factory for two years. The boss was very bad. We were required to work overtime until 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning; we even had to go to the restroom within the time allowed; only about 30 minutes were allowed for a meal break. Life was very hard then, I had worked for one year on low pay and not had a good rest for a whole month.

文: 你父母没有一起吗?

Wen Zhang: Did you work with your parents?

扬琴: 没有, 他们干别的, 我不能让我父母养活, 也是苦力的, 进厂我的体会就是没有自由, 像井底之蛙, 并且学不到什么知识, 包括为人处事都不行, 那里就是勾心斗角, 比如说我给当官的买东西吃, 当官的就给我发的工资高, 就学到这种知识了, 就是人心太险恶了

Xiuli: No, they did other jobs, I cannot live off my parents, and they also worked hard. I feel I didn't have any freedom in the factory. It was like a frog living in a well with very limited outlook. I could not learn anything worthwhile, nor did I learn how to deal with matters; people were only interested in getting more pay. This is all I have learned, that the human heart is treacherous.

文: 在工厂就是简单重复劳动, 就是 12 个小时哈

Wen Zhang: Your job was simply to repeat something for the whole twelve hours of the working day.

扬琴: 什么啊, 有时候 16 个钟头, 所以我说老板的心黑嘛, 是台湾人开的

Xiuli: It was not real; sometimes you needed to work for sixteen hours, the boss's heart was so black. The factory was owned by the Taiwanese.

文: 你在工厂干了多久?

Wen Zhang: How long were you working in the factory?

扬琴: 刚好一年吧, 因为当时自己比较小, 比较喜欢自由, 然后我就出来了

Xiuli: Just one year; at that time, I was quite young and I wanted my freedom, so I came out.

文: 然后又去了哪里?

Wen Zhang: Where did you go then?

扬琴: 就去了一个三星级的招待所, 那里是比较自由, 工资也还可以, 休息时间也还好, 但是人们依旧是勾心斗角, 人们就是披着羊皮的狼, 在那里我呆了两年多就走了, 这种地方不值得一提, 因为人的心太黑了, 我们老板看人是这样的, 如果你犯过一次小错误, 那么你在他那里永远都不可能翻身, 作为一个老板, 一个男人他应该有宽宏大量的心, 但是这个人不行

Xiuli: Then I worked in a three-star hotel. I was free. All of them are wolves in sheep's clothing, I left there after working two years, it was not worth working there any longer, because their hearts were too dark and our boss judged a person on the basis of a single small mistake; you would never be able to stand up for yourself and be free again. As a human being, the boss should be tolerant but he was not.

文: 然后呢?

Wen Zhang: And then?

扬琴: 然后就回家呆了一年

Xiuli: And then I came back home and stayed at home for one year.

文: 你父母一起回来了吗?

Wen Zhang: Did your parents come back too?

扬琴: 没有他们没有回来

Xiuli: No, they didn't.

麦: 为什么你父母在外面打工你要回来?

Mai: Why did you come back but your parents still worked elsewhere?

扬琴: 首先我在外面呆太久了, 几年没有回来了, 我想回来看看我的家乡, 第二就是说“男大当婚, 女大当嫁”就是回来找对象, 还有一个就是我弟弟那个时候要参加高考了, 顺便回来玩玩, 看看他考哪个大学。

Xiuli: First, I had been away from here for a long time without coming back, and I wanted to be back to see my hometown. Second, as the saying goes “A man should get married on coming of age, and so should a girl”: I came back to find a husband. Third, my younger brother enrolled in the college entrance examination then, I came back to hang around and see whether he would be admitted, and to which university.

文: 你们是结了婚就没有出去吗?

Wen Zhang: You didn't go out since you got married?

扬琴: 没有没有, 我们结了婚, 都出去打工了的, 2009 年底我们结婚, 然后过年我们在家把玉米种好又出去广东打工了, 然后他的爷爷生病了我们就回来了, 就没有出去了

Xiuli: No, both of us went out to work, we got married in 2009, we grew corn then and went to Guangdong after the spring festival, and then, we came back as his grandpa was ill, and haven't been out again.

文: 是几月份回来的?

Wen Zhang: When did you come back?

扬琴: 6月20多号回来的

Xiuli: We came back on June 20th.

麦: 是你不要离开他?

Mai: Was it because you didn't want to be apart from him?

扬琴: 也是不的, 他要我回来的, 他说不回来看老人不孝顺, 他就是传统的孝顺

Xiuli: Not so, he asked me to go back too, he said that it is not filial if I don't come back; he is traditional and a good man.

文: 你们一起去那里是一起做工作吗?

Wen Zhang: Did you work together there?

扬琴: 不是的, 住在一起的, 工作不一样, 因为我父母也在那里

Xiuli: No, we lived together but we did different jobs, and my parents were there too.

麦: 是谁介绍的呢?

Mai: Who introduced him to you?

扬琴: 他们家亲戚, 我对婚姻也是讲缘分的, 缘分真是上天定的

Xiuli: His relative, I take marriage as a fate, it is destiny.

文: 乡村新一代女性代表, 呵呵

Wen Zhang: You are a representative of the new generation in the countryside, ha ha!

麦: 是的

Mai: Yeah.

杨: 农村就是这样生活, 我现在的的生活方式就是平平淡淡走过这一生, 我也不需要什么轰轰烈烈, 什么金银财宝, 我就想自己以及自己以后的小孩这样平平淡淡的过一生就算了, 没有像以前, 你们这种成功人士的壮志雄心没有了

Xiuli: The life style here is like this; our way of life is to let things be simple and quiet, I neither need dynamic life nor any treasure; my thought is to live out my life simply and quietly in the company of my own children, I have no ambitions such as a successful man like you once had.

文: 你父母还在打工?

Wen Zhang: Do your parents still work away from here?

扬琴: 是的, 他们也不是为了自己, 是为了我弟弟, 我弟弟现在在读大学, 还有一年大学毕业, 他们再奋斗一两年就回家种地了, 再做回农民

Xiuli: Yes, they are working not for themselves but for my younger brother; he is still studying in university and will graduate next year, they will come back to plant after one or two years, to be farmers again.

麦: 还需要修房子么?

Mai: Do you need to repair the house?

扬琴: 不用了, 我弟弟工作以后就在成都买房子了

Xiuli: There is no need; my younger brother will buy a house in Chengdu when he works there.

麦: 那父母就?

Mai: How about your parents?

扬琴: 回到家里, 种点地养活自己就可以了, 不用像以前那么辛苦

Xiuli: They will be back at home; they can plant on the land to support themselves, it will not be as hard as before.

文: 你爷爷奶奶还在吗?

Wen Zhang: Do you still have grandparents?

扬琴: 我爷爷过世了, 奶奶还在, 但是我爸爸的兄弟姐妹很多, 养他的人很多。老年人也就是养老了

Xiuli: My grandpa has passed away, my grandma still lives, my father has many siblings and she is looked after by them, the old people's need is to enjoy life.

文: 刚刚还没有讲完才讲到了 04 年

Wen Zhang: You haven't talked about what happened after 2004 just now.

扬琴: 我们的经历都很平凡都没有什么可讲的, 成功人士的打工生涯比较精彩, 我们的没有什么好听的

Xiuli: What we experienced then is somehow very ordinary; successful people had a more brilliant time, and had no need to listen to ours.

文: 不是, 麦老师就是要研究普通人的打工生涯

Wen Zhang: No, what teacher Mai wants to know is the working experience of ordinary people.

麦: 是的

Mai: Yes.

文: 04 年以后呢?

Wen Zhang: Where were you after 2004?

扬琴: 那里干了两三年就回家了, 差不多 08 年就出去打工, 我还去过西安打工, 我当时也没想去挣钱, 我同学在那里, 我主要是想去看看曾今 13 个王朝建都的地方, 看看那个城市, 那种古文化比较多, 在那里呆了几个月, 那里的天气很热, 西安的生活没有广州繁华, 生活水平比较低, 当地人好像也是好吃懒做的, 老婆做事

Xiuli: I worked in Guangzhou for two or three years and went back home, and went out again in 2008. I also worked in Xi'an when my schoolmates were there, I went there not to make money, I mainly wanted to see the place since it was a capital of 13 dynasties, to look around and feel the ancient culture. I stayed there for several months and it is very hot there. Life in Xi'an was not as bustling as it was in Guangzhou. The standard of living there is very low. The native people like to enjoy leisure and are lazy. The wife does everything in a family.

文: 在西安做什么的?

Wen Zhang: What was your job in Xian?

扬琴: 那是真的干苦力的, 跟我同学一起做建筑工的, 因为我是体验生活, 我觉得人要吃苦才能为人上人, 比我进厂的生活还苦, 太阳出来的时候很热的, 我同学还更辛苦, 从他们的精神能看出来更能够吃苦, 我同学的老公是砌墙的, 我干了一段时间就回来了, 去了广州, 然后我就去了网吧, 因为网上信息比较多

Xiuli: We were construction workers, which is really hard labor; I did it just to experience the life, for I know that if you wish to be the best human you must be prepared to suffer the bitterest of the bitter. It is really hard working in factory, it becomes very hot when the sun rises; even my schoolmates were bitter, but I feel that they are able to overcome the hardships. Their husbands built the wall. I worked for a short period and returned to Guangzhou to work in an internet cafe. I could get more information through the website.

文: 但是网吧需要晚上工作?

Wen Zhang: But you need to work through the night.

扬琴: 对的, 他的那个生活方式就是比较单调, 上班下班, 吃饭睡觉, 不用动脑子, 然后 2009 年就回来, 别人介绍就结婚了, 就这样

Xiuli: Yes, the way of life is very monotonous, on duty and released from duty, having a meal and sleeping. It doesn't require any brain work. Then I came back in 2009, and got married, that is all.

文: 一介绍就结婚了?

Wen: You got married just after meeting each other?

扬琴: 这个不叫一见钟情, 我们见了第一感觉觉得这个人还可以就结婚了, 这个属于介绍的不叫一见钟情, 还有就是日久生情, 我们又不是什么要选有钱的, 只要人好就行了, 只是两个性格不同的人, 不能在一起。

(02: 17: 12 之前是聊天内容, 未整理)

Xiuli: It is not same as falling in love at first sight; we get married if we feel that the other person is ok after meeting: so it is called 'introduction' not 'falling in love at first sight', and our feeling grows with the passing of time, for we do not choose to marry a rich person. It is OK as long as he is a kind man; while I think I will not marry him if we have different characters.

杨: 老师我现在有个问题是, 我现在觉得出去打工没有意思了, 我宁愿给自己挣一元钱, 也不愿意给别人挣 10 块钱, 老板太黑了, 我在网吧的时候, 工资很低, 老板精打细算, 始终不长工资, 那个时候只包住不包吃, 这个钱拿到手里都只能够养活自己, 不能做什么其他的,

我弟弟说你打工这么多年, 这么多年还不如做一件事情说不定会成功。

Xiuli: Teacher, I have a question, I see no point in leaving here to get work. To tell the truth, now I would rather earn a yuan for myself than earn 10 yuan from someone else. The boss is too mean to bear. When I was working in the Internet cafes, there were low wages, and the boss calculated everything to fit his strict budget; so I had no chance to increase my salary; the only offer was free accommodation, but not free food. The money we got was just enough for us to survive ourselves; we could not do anything else.

文: 你弟弟说做什么事情?

Wen Zhang: What did your younger brother say about what he is going to do next?

扬琴: 他不是说做什么事情, 他的意思是专心做一件事情可能会成功, 他说你九年就这样白白的浪费了

Xiuli: He did not saying anything about what he would do; what he said is that people will be successful only if they put their whole heart into doing just one thing. He said 'You have wasted 9 years.'

文: 是的

Wen Zhang: Yes.

杨: 有的人的确用了 7、8 年的时间人家成功了, 但是我们文化素质太低了, 根本没想到这么多, 只是想着挣点钱, 比较肤浅

Xiuli: Some people do only take 7, 8 years to be successful, but our cultural level is too low for us to think so far ahead. All we think about is relatively superficially how to make more money.

文: 没有我觉得住在农村里面的其实很有思想, 他们只是没有形成文字, 他们很有经验, 我觉得他们思考的问题就是哲学大家思考的问题, 如果你天天把你想的写下来就可以出一本书

Wen Zhang: No, I think people living in the country have very valuable ideas,, they just don't put them into words, but they've got a lot of precious experience. I think what they think is a kind of philosophy: if you write down the things that you think about every day, you could publish books.

麦: 是的, 因为现在很多跟我一样的外国人, 他出来调查, 然后回去写书, 但是都是观察, 而不是自己经历的, 我觉得你可以自己把感兴趣的写下来

Mai: Yes, because now a lot of foreigners like me come out here to investigate, and then go back home to write books. But they write about what they have seen, not about their own experiences. I think you could write your own story yourself.

扬琴: 我是有想法, 但是没有坚定的信念

Xiuli: I have many ideas, but I do not have any firm conviction.

文: 每个人都有自己的想法, 但是官员们却忽视了我们

Wen Zhang: Everyone has his ideas, but the officials always ignored us.

杨: 中国现在就是, 就算你很有才但是没有钱和关系你也很难走出去。

Xiuli: That how China is now. Even if you have talent, if you have no money or connections, it's still very difficult to get a result.

扬琴: 中国现在有很多东西都不公平的。

Xiuli: A lot of things are unfair in China now.

麦: 在中国什么都可以

Mai: Everything is possible in China?

文: 但是又都不是什么都可以

Wen Zhang: That doesn't mean we can do anything we want.

麦: 去网吧要检查证件是从什么时候开始的?

Mai: When does a public internet café start to check documents?

杨: 对于中国人来说是要身份证, 对于你所以是要你的护照, 这个主要是家长反映太强烈说自己的孩子不用功读书, 老是去网吧, 这个规定好像是 2006 年, 说未满 18 岁的人, 不能进网吧

Xiuli: For Chinese people, we ask for their ID. But for people like you we check their passport. The main reason is that parents say that their children go to the internet cafe instead of studying hard. This regulation dates from 2006, I guess. Children under 18 years cannot enter an internet cafe.

杨: 我不会再去广州了, 我想去北京, 因为那里的文化和生活方式我没有体会过, 但是人家说北京人看不起外面的人, 很高傲自大

Xiuli: I do not want to go to Guangzhou anymore. I want to go to Beijing. As I have not been there I have no experience of their culture and life-style. But some people say that people in Beijing are very proud, they look down on outsiders.

文: 那你准备什么时候去北京?

Wen Zhang: When will you go to Beijing?

扬琴: 主要是我去那里没有熟人

Xiuli: The important thing is I need to have connections and know people there.

文: 但是你去那里旅游一次没有必要要熟人吧

Wen Zhang: You do not need to know anyone there if you just go there to travel once.

扬琴: 我是这样想的, 等我有钱了, 我要把中国有名的地方全部走完。

文刚: 老师有没有宗教信仰?

Wen Zhang: Teacher, do you have any religious background?

麦: 没

Mai: Yes.

文刚: 越南是信什么教呢?

Wen Zhang: What religion do people in Vietnam believe in?

麦: 佛教

Mai: Buddhism.

杨: 因为 80 后的年轻人形成了一种风俗, 结婚以后就要出去打工, 我们 80 后没有什么文化的人和特殊的一技之长, 就是第二代农民工

Xiuli: The 80s young people formed a tradition that we would go out to work after getting married, since we are not educated and do not have a profession. We are the second generation of rural migrant workers in the cities.

麦: 但是我觉得有没有文化对我们没有关系, 就像你说的那个在网吧脱鞋的人, 文化不是关键, 素质才比较关键

Mai: I don't think there is any connection between whether you are literate or not and whether you take your shoes off in the internet café. That is not a cultural matter; it is a matter of politeness.

杨: 在我们农村就认为只有读书才是改变命运的唯一途径, 我弟弟他们当时的选择也是这样的, 只有读书才能改变命运

Yang: We think only study can change our destiny in our place, as this is also my younger brother's choice.

麦: 这不是农村, 这是政策, 要帮农村人

Mai: Are we not in the countryside? This policy is to help rural people.

文: 不过慢慢在改变了

Wen Zhang: But it is changing gradually.

麦: 是的

Mai: Yes.

扬琴: 城市的孩子想法不一样, 他们的父母有工作, 不一定读书才能改变命运, 在广州那边

的孩子不喜欢读书, 初中毕业就去读一个职业学校, 学了以后就出去打工, 父母也可以给一笔钱打工, 但是我们梅家就不行了

Xiuli: Urban children's thinking is quite different; they do not need to study hard to change their destiny as they have their parents to earn money. Children in Guangzhou do not like to study. They go to study at a vocational school after junior high school and then they leave there in order to find work. Their parents will give them some money as support. But this is not available in Meijia.

文: 像你刚才所说, 9年如果你干一件事情, 成功了还好, 但是不成功的话怎么办呢

Wen Zhang: That's all very well if you have at least had one success in your nine years, but.....

扬琴: 不成功也是学到了经验嘛, 至少还是有 60%的收获

Xiuli: I have gained some experience, at least sixty percent.

麦: 但是你就算没有成功, 等你有孩子了你可以给你孩子讲你的经历

Mai: Even if you failed, you can still tell your children your experience when you have children.

文: 对的, 等你有了孩子的时候你给孩子讲, 妈妈当年在广州的事情

Wen Zhang: That's right, you can tell your children your story that things happened in Guangzhou when you have children.

杨: 因为我觉得这种平凡的事情没有必要将给他听

Xiuli: In my opinion there is no need to tell them these ordinary things.

文刚: 因为你也是从小孩子长大的, 当你的父母给你说当年的事情你肯定也听不进去, 他们说怎么怎么孩子也不能体会

Wen Zhang: As you also grew up from babyhood, when your parents told you your childhood memories, you would not listen, and they could not comprehend either. I have no clear idea of this: is it when you are no longer a baby and your parents tell you things about your childhood, you don't remember them and they would not understand you either?

麦: 但是这个还是有很多的方法

Mai: But there are many ways to do so.

杨: 还有在中国农村的妇女还是有个观点就是要做一个贤妻良母

Xiuli: The other picture of Chinese rural women is they are to be understanding wives and loving mothers.

文: 我觉得四川比北方要好很多, 四川男人可以牺牲自己成全老婆

Wen Zhang: I feel men in Sichuan are much better than in the north, as I know that Sichuan men can sacrifice themselves to help their wives.

杨: 北方人存在大男子主义的思想, 我们这边的人比较随和

Xiuli: Northern men have a chauvinist ideology, men in Sichuan are more easygoing.