

- *Multi-locational households – Non-permanent migration – Reciprocity – Social networks – China*

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Living in Two Worlds: Multi-Locational Household Arrangements among Migrant Workers in China

Leben in zwei Welten:

Multilokale Haushaltsstrukturen bei Wanderarbeitern in China

With 2 Figures and 2 Tables

In the past, the concept of multi-locality has hardly been applied to the study of livelihood strategies of migrant workers in China. The authors of this article present the findings of a research project in five selected rural-urban migration corridors in different parts of China. On the basis of qualitative interviews at both ends of the multi-locational households' activity spaces, they were able to establish economic reciprocity, strategies for caring and the transfer of knowledge, values and beliefs at the household level. The multi-locational households – defined as units of joint planning – were found to be firmly embedded in informal social networks.

1. Migrant Workers in China – A Unique Phenomenon or a Variant of Multi-Locality?

Since the turn of the century China has become the most dynamic member of the globalised market economy. Its success of some 30 years of government-induced economic transformation, measured in terms of economic growth, has made it into one of the leading trading and manufacturing countries. This process has changed and is still changing the country's social and spatial structures. Accelerated urbani-

sation has led to the emergence of an increasing number of cities with a population of more than a million as well as to a growing number of megacities like Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Chongqing, Chengdu, Wuhan etc. Most of these growth centres are situated in the eastern part of the country and along its coast (with the exception of the latter three cities).

Before the Second World War there had been frequent out-migration waves from poverty-

stricken rural areas to the cities, and there had been emigration from the cities along the coast to other countries overseas. From 1958 until the end of the 1970s, only a very limited number of the rural population was allowed to move freely and settle legally and permanently in the cities. In the early 1980s the implementation of the rigid household registration, known as the *hukou* system, which had prevented people from moving freely within the country¹, was loosened in urban areas. This policy change had a clear purpose. It was intended to allow the inflow of labour for the construction of infrastructure and housing. At the same time the growing demand of labour-intensive manufacturing industries and the service sector had to be met. But even today there are indications that the majority of internal migrants can be considered as circulatory migrants or temporary *floating population*, as they are called in Chinese parlance². This special form of migration in China, along with the residence control system and its partial lifting, has led to an enormous number of migrant workers without resident status.

Due to the *hukou* system, and in contrast to most other countries of the world, there is a body of reasonably accurate statistics on the number of non-permanent migrants in China. The National Statistical Bureau and the Ministry of Agriculture each keep their own data base. If only those who are currently in the big cities are counted, the total number at the end of 2009 was 140 to 150 million migrant workers, but if the township and village enterprise workforce is included, the number of migrant workers in the country totals 225 to 230 million (Watson 2009, Li and Li 2011: 21). Since many migrants frequently change between employment on a construction site in their home province and employment in the big cities, it appears reasonable to use the higher figure for all practical purposes. This means that roughly 30 percent of China's total workforce are migrant workers. Even if there were periods in the history of the United States

and the former Soviet Union, when a large percentage of their workforce were on the move, it is safe to say that the extremely large number of temporary migrants in China today is unparalleled elsewhere in the world.

Many authors have claimed in recent years that seasonal, circulatory and other forms of temporary migration have become the dominant type of migration in the developing world. This has given rise to a distinct strand of research on new forms of urban transition, temporary migration and multi-locality in many Asian and African countries (see Schmidt-Kallert 2009 and also some of the other articles in this issue of DIE ERDE). A large number of empirical studies has been published in this field, especially on Southern Africa (Lohnert 2002, Greiner 2008, Steinbrink 2009) and on the Indian subcontinent (Deshingkar and Farrington 2009), from which distinct patterns of urban transition are emerging which are valid for the particular region. The international discourse on temporary migration and multi-locational households, however, has hardly taken cognizance of the situation of migrant workers in China. Given the exceedingly large number of temporary migrants in China this may appear odd. But likewise, Chinese migration research has seldom been informed by the international discourse in the field. One reason might be that much of the literature on migrants in China has focused on *hukou* as a peculiar governance system and a serious institutional constraint to which migrants are subjected (see for example Zhang 2012, in this issue). Most researchers tend to view labour migration in China as a unique phenomenon, and not so much as a specific variant of temporary migration and multi-locational household arrangements. There are exceptions though, for example Kenneth Robert's comparison between Chinese labour migration and the Mexico-US labour migration (Roberts 2007). Based on the theory of new economics of labour migration, Zhu has argued that Chinese migrant workers diversify and

maximise economic opportunities and spread economic risks, thus *hukou* is interpreted as one element of the opportunity structure, but by no means the only determinant for temporary migration (Zhu 2007: 67). Other authors contend that in China interventions by state institutions shape the migrants' opportunity structure to a much greater extent than elsewhere (e.g. Fan 2002: 108). Interestingly, some authors have described the internal migration in China as a phenomenon that can more easily be compared with international migration in other parts of the world, as "the *hukou* system serves as an internal passport system, granting citizenship to migrants deemed deserving by the city" (Fan 2002: 107). It would not be too far-fetched to draw parallels to the migration flow of the Turkish *Gastarbeiter* (migrant workers) to Germany since the 1960s.

Internal migration has become a highly topical issue in China in recent years; but research in this field is older than the current debate. Numerous scholars and institutions in China have contributed to this body of research over the last 20 years. "One of the most important achievements of academic research has probably been the establishment of a *migrant-centred* narrative which focuses on migrants' experiences and problems, as opposed to treating *migration* as an aggregate phenomenon to be managed by the state. In doing so this narrative helps win wide sympathy for migrants" (Xiang and Tan 2005: ii).

Large-scale studies have been conducted to describe and analyse the migration flows (e.g. Rozelle et al. 1999; numerous Chinese sources summarised in Steinbach 2004; Roberts 2007). Many researchers have looked into the situation of migrants in the receiving areas, e.g. their social status, the social security situation (e.g. Watson 2009; Gransow and Zhou 2010; Zhang and Xu 2010) and the impact on the settlement pattern of the *receiving areas*, particularly in the so-called 'urban villages' or

'villages in the city' (Qi 2006; Wehrhahn et al. 2008; Gransow 2008). Other authors have recorded the experience of migrant workers at their place of work, especially at the factory floor, in the dormitories and in the cities to which they have migrated (e.g. Pun and Li 2005). The emergence, or rather the making, of a new type of working class has been postulated (Pun 2005: 23ff.). Recently, distinct differences between aspirations and outlook between the first and second generation of migrants have been highlighted (Pun and Lee 2010). Other authors have endeavoured to relate the situation of migrant workers to the formal-informal paradigm. According to Anne Braun 50 per cent of all work places in China can be classified as informal, and 80 per cent of all migrant workers have only access to informal jobs (Braun 2011: 13).

There is another body of literature dealing with the effects of migration on the areas of origin. The poverty reduction impact of migration through remittances to the home areas has been quantified in several studies (Zhu 2003: 499; Zhang 2010: 180). Jonathan Unger's longitudinal study of village life graphically captures the changes of village life, including those brought about by migration of able-bodied villagers to the industrial centres (Unger 2002). An interesting aspect of social change in the sending regions was studied by Connelly et al. in their study on the impact of circular migration on skills and values of returned women migrants (Connelly et al. 2010).

Social networks which enable migrants to establish a foothold in the city and which are a necessary pre-condition for maintaining multi-locational household arrangements are another field of study (Zhang 2007; Zhang 2009).

All these studies make reference to the migration process as a whole, as a movement from villages to the city; many of them describe migra-

tion as a circular movement between the two worlds, and yet in most studies the main focus is either on the sending or the receiving areas. Our contention is: In order to fully understand the ongoing process of mega-urbanisation and re-organisation of the entire spatial fabric in China, it is absolutely essential to take a holistic view of the migration process, encompassing sending and receiving areas and also the social networks linking the two. Moreover, we need to understand the articulation between the *rural* and the *urban* at the household level before moving to more complex social aggregates. In fact, as early as 2003 *Zhu* called for more analysis of migrant household strategies at the micro-level (*Zhu* 2003: 491). Already in 1999 *Solinger* published a study which used such a holistic reference frame comprising institutional, economic and regulatory aspects to capture the integration of rural migrants in the city and which, at the same time, made frequent references to the situation of the sending provinces. At a less academic level, the collection of life stories of female migrant workers compiled by *Pun* and *Li* gives an in-depth and vivid account of how rural life still impacts on the migrants' experiences in the cities (*Pun* and *Li* 2005). Following this tradition, we wanted to start by listening to the migrant workers' own stories before analysing and dissecting them and eventually synthesising them into more generalised findings.

2. The Research Design

In the following sections of this article we shall report some results of a qualitative study into the livelihood strategies of multi-locational households, which we conducted in 2010 in different parts of China³. The underlying idea of the study was to interview members of the same multi-locational household at both ends, in both their home village and the urban centre, so as to be able to better understand the linkages between both parts of the household.

Previous studies at the household level have primarily looked into economic linkages between urban and rural household members through the transfer of remittances. But household livelihood strategies (either deliberately or subconsciously pursued by the household members) have many dimensions, economic reciprocity being only one of them. We have thus looked into the following key dimensions:

- Economic reciprocity;
- Strategies for caring (for example caring for the elderly or for school children) and
- Building and transferring knowledge, beliefs and values (for this classification see *Schmidt-Kallert* 2009: 324).

Obviously most households pursue more than one of these strategies at the same time. Moreover, it is not always easy to draw a clear line between the categories. For example, money sent to the village may be used for general consumptive purposes, for house construction or for feeding the left-behind children. But in the Chinese context most people know fairly accurately which purpose a particular amount of money has been assigned for (see also: *Murphey* 2009: 47ff.). Apart from the dimensions of reciprocity within the multi-locational household we also placed our respondents' strategies in the context of support networks in which they were embedded.

Between July and November 2010 we conducted 77 in-depth interviews with urban-based migrant workers and rural dwellers, whom we presumed to be members of multi-locational households. All interviews were subsequently transcribed and translated into English. The fieldwork sites covered five distinct migration corridors between the rural areas of origin and cities (see *Fig. 1*):

- Wuzhi Township of Jiaozuo County in Henan Province linked with Beijing (subsequently

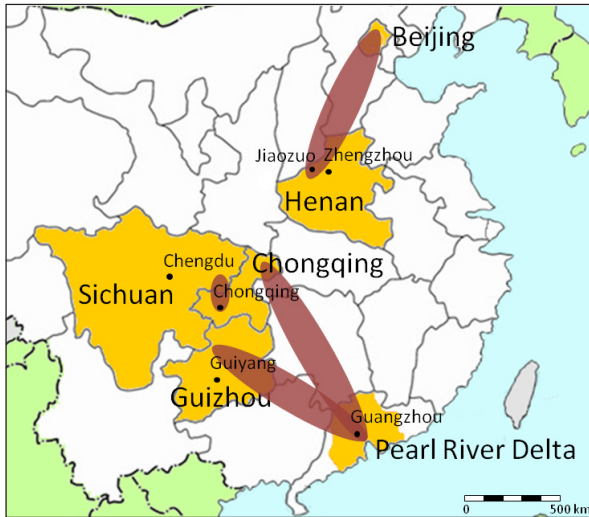


Fig. 1 The migration corridors studied (authors' design) / Die untersuchten Migrationskorridore

referred to as the Henan-Beijing corridor) with a distance of ca. 650 km by train;

- Qinglong Township of Fengjie County in Chongqing Municipality and Shangji and Xinmin Townships of Zunyi County in Guizhou Province linked with Dongguan and Shenzhen in the Pearl River Delta (subsequently referred to as the Fengjie-Dongguan corridor and the Zunyi-Dongguan corridor respectively), with a distance of ca. 1600 / 1500 km by train and boat), and
- Ganzu Township of Linshui County in Sichuan Province and Honghu Township in Changshou District of Chongqing (rural), both linked with the City of Chongqing (subsequently referred to as Sichuan / Chongqing (rural) – Chongqing City corridor (with distances of 150-200 km by bus).

Thus we had two long-distance (about 1500 km), one mid-distance (650 km) and two short-distance corridors.

Care was taken to interview, wherever possible, members of the same multi-locational household in the city and at their place of origin. In some cases, our urban respondents refused to make arrangements for us to meet their family back home in the village; in other cases logistics failed. But in the end we managed to conduct interviews at both ends in each of our migration corridors. We met most of our respondents at their houses. In some cases an urban household member would accompany us to his or her home village to introduce us to the family there. In the case of the Henan-Beijing corridor, 15 urban-based and eleven rural-based respondents were interviewed, in the Sichuan/Chongqing (rural)-Chongqing City corridor ten urban- and 16 rural-based respondents (with five matching families), in the Fengjie-Dongguan corridor 13 urban- and eight rural-based with seven matching families, and in the Zunyi-Dongguan corridor eight urban and ten rural respondents with four matching families. The information obtained from these sources was complemented with interviews with key informants such as brigade leaders or teachers for the village profiles.

3. A Note on the Definition of Households versus Networks

In most countries and cultural settings the household is defined as a basic unit of reproduction consisting of a number of people (usually from the same kin, often at least two generations) who share the same living quarter and pool their economic resources (monetary and non-monetary). A similar definition is also used in China. Due to the *hukou* system, there is also a clear-cut statistical definition of the household (see *Murphey* 2009: 60). For the purpose of our research we used an extended notion of a household which takes account of the special arrangement of multi-locational households; i.e. the household is still made up of members from the same family or kin pooling their economic resources and planning together the expenses for the purpose of reproduction of all household members, but the members may well live in two or more spatially split locations.

The intensity of linkages between the two parts of the household varies from one setting to another, and it is also subject to variations over time. There may be very rigid joint planning in order to meet certain short-term objectives, there may also be a tacit agreement over the frequent exchange of money or/and services for each other, i.e. buying a house, investments in small businesses and agricultural goods or machinery, harvesting, looking after children at different stages in their upbringing and education, marriage, overcoming certain hardships like illness with high medical costs or loss of property, taking care of the elderly. In these cases one can definitely speak of a multi-locational household. But the arrangement may change over time and in line with the family cycle. Starting as one household at the place of origin, i.e. the home village, a person may leave the parents, grandparents and siblings behind to make a living for himself as well as for the left behind family with their help and support. This phase may be fol-

lowed by a period when remittances or the exchange of non-monetary services do not flow any more. Once children are born, the linkages between village and city may intensify again; the flow of remittances and services becomes more regular again. Thus it is not easy to exactly determine for how long a migrant should be regarded as a member of his or her original household. The distinction remains fluid to some extent. In other words: A multi-locational household may well change into a loose family network, where mutual obligations still exist, but where the criterion of joint planning is absent. In fact, most of our interviewees confirmed closer household ties, i.e. economic dependencies between the migrant and those left behind, at some stages in their migration history, which can be characterised as multi-locational households. But it also became clear that the latter is by no means a static institution in a migrant worker's livelihood strategy. It may be most applicable in times of desperate need, and occasionally in periods of relative affluence when careful joint planning is crucial.

In a different context, *Greiner* and *Schnegg* have recently recommended to avoid the term 'multi-locational household' altogether and to speak of 'multi-locational livelihoods in networks' instead (*Greiner* and *Schnegg* 2009: 255). Obviously not all multi-locational livelihood arrangements are characterised by the same high intensity of interaction and reciprocal obligations which are typical of 'households', but we would still argue that the concept of multi-locational household can be very productive to explain the Chinese context in all those settings where the criterion of joint planning is present. We shall, however, subsequently differentiate between multi-locational households and other place- or kin-based support networks.

Mutual help between (not only spatially) separate households takes place because of contacts in specific non-family-related networks. In

China these relationships or connections in different social contexts are called *guanxi*.

“In appearance, *guanxi* is a common platform that one shares with others, such as locality, kinship, workplace, and friendship. Having some kind of kinship, or just being *tongxiang* (hailing from the same home village), *tongzong* (same surname), *laotongxue* (schoolmates), *jiutongshi* (former colleagues), can always become a strong base for *guanxi*. In contemporary China it increasingly signifies a personal network of influences” (Au et al. 2010: 3).

4. Results

4.1 The move from the village to the city

The first step in a person’s migration history is the initial decision to leave one’s home village for a town, a city in one’s home province or one of the big megacities. In our interviews with migrant workers, we wanted to establish what prompted their decision to move or leave; and we also wanted to find out who was instrumental in bringing about the decision, e.g. the young migrant himself/herself, the parents, pressure by the extended family or peer pressure.

After more than thirty years of modern migration history in the country, some of the older migrant workers find it difficult to recall the exact circumstances of their initial decision to leave home; some of their memories may also be blended with interpretations and experiences gained later in the course of their working life. Generally speaking, those who first migrated within the last ten years tend to recall their initial decision to migrate as a conscious choice. In contrast, those who first left home in the 1980s and in the early 1990s did what appeared to be the obvious thing to do. “Because our family was poor”, was a common answer given by male migrants of the first generation.

Some of the respondents added: “After completing school, I had nothing to do at home” (Interview B4, Henan-Beijing), which was another way of alluding to extreme land fragmentation and lack of non-agricultural job opportunities in the village and the nearby township. There are cases, where the parents had pushed their sons into seeking urban employment. It appears that this pattern became even more common among the second generation of migrants. Once migrant work had become acceptable for unmarried girls, many parents put pressure on their teenage daughters to look for urban employment (similar findings have been reported by Connelly et al. 2010: 10, and Roberts et al. 2004). On the other hand, many of the migrants made the decision very consciously, sometimes against the will of their family (Interview DF7). Some of them wanted to escape the restrictive village life or family pressure (this is also in conformity with some of the findings by Zhang 2010: 176). Attractions of city life and the prospect of having some money for oneself were other reasons mentioned in the interviews: “I wanted to have fun, and I wanted to see more things than in the village. And, above all, at that time I was very keen to buy a yellow overcoat, which of course, I could not afford in the village ...” (Interview B2). The wish to own some fancy consumer goods, like a sophisticated mobile phone or a motorcycle, was more frequently expressed by the most recent migrants. Some interviewees, especially from bigger families, said they wanted to relieve their parents of the burden to feed another mouth, thus somehow reconciling their personal aspiration of experiencing city life with the family interest (Interview B10). At the time when they arrived in the city for the first time, all migrants interviewed saw their move to the city as something temporary. None of the interviewees expected to settle there permanently.

The destination of the migration is, in most cases, determined by family members (brother, sister, uncle or a more distant relative), school-

mates or people from the same village, who could provide some kind of a foothold during the initial stages of orientation in the city. Those without family in the city tend to be more timid to make the first move, as a 20-year-old female migrant worker from Henan explained: “Other families have relatives in Shenzhen, Suzhou or Guangzhou. As a matter of fact, our family has nobody in the big cities. But how can you live in a totally unfamiliar place alone?” So she decided to work as a waitress in a restaurant in a township near her village, which served as a stepping stone for the onward migration to Beijing. Once she had met another adventurous girl in the restaurant, they made the move to a factory in Beijing together (Interview B8).

Interestingly, in many of the villages visited, the dominant migration trajectory seems to be determined by long-standing rural-urban linkages, such as arrangements between a particular rural production brigade and a former state enterprise in the city, whereby workers from the rural production brigade were ferried to a particular construction site to do civil works or to provide unskilled labour for house and factory construction. This is particularly obvious in the case of the Henan-Beijing corridor.

Some twenty years ago the Women’s Federation from the areas of origin played a facilitating role in the move of young women from remote villages, e.g. in Fengjie County of Chongqing Municipality to the Pearl River Delta (Interview DF6). In more recent times this role of an intermediary has been adopted by so-called ‘vocational schools’, especially in parts of Sichuan and the rural parts of Chongqing whose headmasters and teachers informally establish links with particular factories in the electronics or chemical sector, in many cases charging fees of one or two monthly wages from the future factory girls (e.g. Interview B10).

Most migrants have gone through a long and varied migration history, often with a succession

of short-term employments in different cities and provinces, in some cases also alternating with attempts at self-employment or informal employment as traders or in small workshops. Some of our respondents have always commuted within the same migration corridor, e.g. between rural Henan and Beijing or between rural Chongqing and the Pearl River Delta; others have worked in a wide variety of provinces. *Mr. Fan*, a carpenter of 47 years originating from Henan, is a case in point. At the age of 20 he first migrated to Wuhan to work for three years in a quarry, thereafter he worked for a year as a carpenter on a construction site in Chengdu. From there he moved to a county town in Xinjiang to work there in the hotel business. After a year he wanted to take the train back home, but on the way back he got off at Lanzhou where he established himself as a hawker selling dumplings and other foodstuff to fellow migrant workers. Eventually he got to Beijing where he has worked on different construction sites for the last thirteen years (Interview B3). Such varied migration trajectories are by no means the rule, but even the majority of those who have been migrant workers in Beijing or the Pearl River Delta for the last twenty years or so have an impressive employment record. Changing jobs three times a year is by no means unusual – something that is reminiscent of the situation in the early stages of industrial development in Europe, for example in the Ruhr Area in the 1870s.

The reasons for these frequent job changes are manifold: “The work place was too dirty”; “The wage was too low”; “Working hours were too long and at times irregular”; “The work was monotonous and very boring”; “I didn’t learn any skills”, were some of the reasons given by our respondents. In many cases the wages were not paid in full or only belatedly, or overtime was not paid as agreed. Other reasons were conflicts with foremen or supervisors. There were also cases when a foreman, who was a relative or a

kinsman, left the factory or the construction site, and subsequently life at the workplace became unbearable for our respondent (e.g. Interview B10a). This is another clear indication of the importance of family- or kin-based networks. Serious injury was another frequent reason for losing a job.

Those in the informal sector reported about harassment by the police or by gangs of criminals, which resulted in the loss of a month's earnings and eventually in changing their workplace. Policemen demanded bribes when migrant workers could not produce their temporary residence permit or their children's birth certificate. Another respondent, a dealer in scrap metals, reported about gangs of robbers blackmailing and extorting money from him (Interview B4a).

There seems to be a tendency for some migrant workers, who first migrated to far-away places like Guangdong, to seek employment in cities closer to their home villages later on. In Sichuan we interviewed a number of first-generation migrants who, after twenty years of employment record in different factories in the Pearl River Delta, had found work in one of the newly established industrial estates in Chongqing.

Beyond the initial stages of migration, the family-/kinship-/village-/dialect-based network seems to persist over many years. Even those migrants, who have established small-scale businesses in the city, heavily rely on such networks. The owners of small car-repair workshops in Chongqing City, for example, invariably employ mechanics from their own village of origin in Sichuan only (Interviews Ch2 and Ch3). Similarly, a Beijing based former migrant worker from Sichuan who had gone through a remarkable process of upward social mobility and had established himself as a provider for exhibition stalls and equipment with more than 30 employees, still exclusively employs people from his home province (Interview B 10a).

4.2 *The villages of origin*

The rural households of the respondents of our study differ in line with key characteristics of the villages of origin⁴, such as

- the geographical location, i.e. mountain area or lowland;
- fertility and climate with distinct rainfall patterns and farming seasons;
- population density and availability of arable land (distribution of land⁵);
- settlement history (traditional village versus rural settlements set up after land reform (i.e. through the people's commune).

Our interviewees come from four different regions in China. What is called a village in the low-lying, flat and very fertile agricultural Jiaozuo region (Henan Province) differs considerably from those in the mountain counties Fengjie (Chongqing), Linshui (Sichuan) or Zunyi (Guizhou). The villages in Jiaozuo were rural settlements (production units originally planned as production brigades in a people's commune) with big contiguous arable plots of land around them, good roads to the neighbouring settlements, the county town and bigger provincial towns with good transportation links as well as other infrastructure facilities. Within an hour villagers are connected to greater China and the rest of the world. The villages visited were planned rural settlements for workers: The housing units with courtyards had all the same plot size and were arranged in a grid iron pattern with shops, school and administrative facilities in the centre. In these lowland villages, farming operations have largely developed into monoculture of maize and wheat, requiring a high input of fertilizer. Earlier extensive livestock keeping had been abandoned by most farm households. Farm work is mainly done by ('left behind') women and the older generation. No land is left fallow;

normally those who have migrated make arrangements for renting out the land to another family or for a relative to cultivate it on their behalf. Market-oriented production had an established tradition in these villages.

In contrast, the villages visited in the counties of Fengjie, Linshui and Zunyi were composed of clusters of neighbouring hamlets or small mountain settlements with some 50 houses in close proximity and a number of isolated farms farther away. The term 'village' is still being used today as an administrative entity in reference to the production brigade as it was set up in the time of the people's commune. Subsistence production and localised barter trade are still very prevalent in these regions. Only a limited percentage of the agricultural surplus reaches the provincial or the national markets.

In the mountain villages, considerable tracts of land are left fallow. The younger generation when leaving the village to work outside tend to abandon the more distant and steeper plots on the slopes. In the remote mountain village in Fengjie County many of the slopes were overgrown with bushes and trees.

Villages in Zunyi and Linshui County are closer and have better access roads to the bigger towns and cities (e.g. to Zunyi and even Chongqing City). Most interviewees in Linshui County still retain mixed farming, cultivating a large variety of food crops, and keep pigs and poultry, which enables some of them to use natural manure on their fields and to practice a more integrated farming system. A big portion of the crops grown was used for home consumption. Moreover, cultivation of the fields seems to be the exclusive responsibility of the elderly.

Generally speaking, the more remote villages are less market-oriented in their production than those in the lowlands and consequently offer fewer economic opportunities to their inhabitants.

4.3 Multi-locational household arrangements – the flow of remittances

If viewed from the migrants' own perspective, economic reciprocity appears to be the dominant purpose of multi-locational household arrangements in China. The more or less regular transfer of remittances is evident in all households interviewed, though the amount and frequency vary considerably from one household to the other. Some urban based household members, especially unmarried girls, transfer the better part of their wages to the family back home. Some remit money every month, others at irregular intervals in accordance with the schedule of receiving their own wages, others remit only token amounts on birthdays and on the Spring Festival. There are cases of migrants who faithfully adhere to the same schedule of remitting money over years, but there are also other families where the village-based wife never knows whether a money transfer from the husband is forthcoming or not (Interview H4). Likewise, some unmarried daughters or sons tend to reduce the amount of money sent, once they have gone into the habit of spending money. Remittances are commonly used for consumptive purposes, but also for investments in fertilizer and agricultural machinery and house construction.

Obviously, remittances normally flow from city to countryside. But there are also cases of money flow in the opposite direction, for example when an urban-based son had to meet unexpected medical expenses and could fall back on savings by the grandparent generation (Interview HCh4). In-kind transfers are more common with the first generation of migrants, while they are no longer practiced by the recently migrated workers, with the exception of some fruits or a bag of groundnuts given as a token to visiting family members. Only few cases of migrants who go back to their village regularly to do farm work were reported. In many cases,

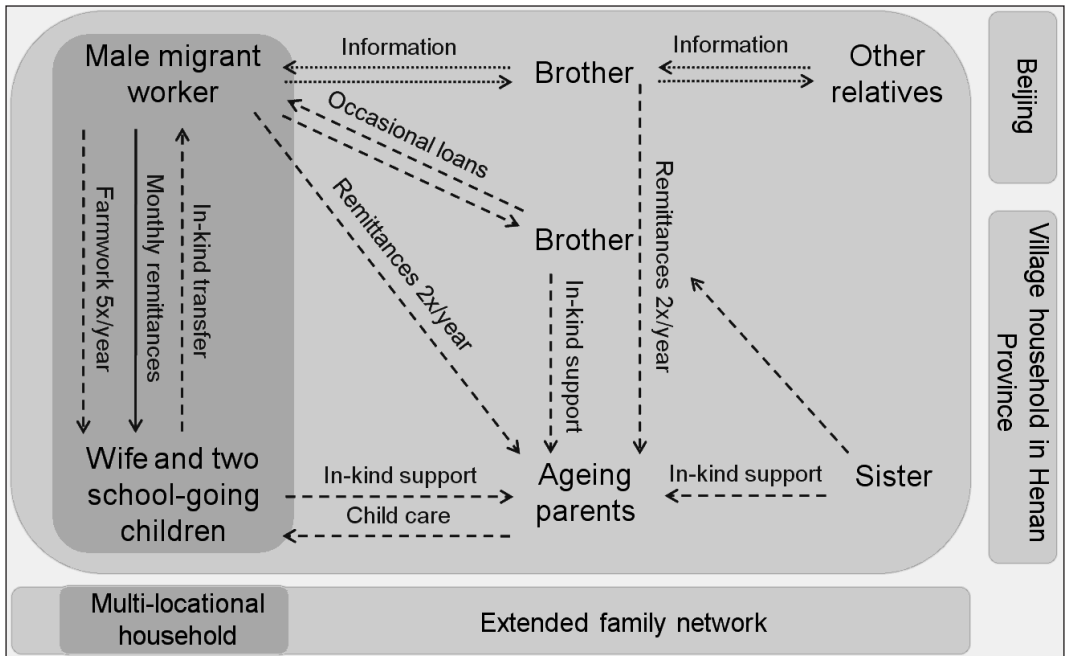


Fig. 2 Flow of remittances and information in a multi-local migrant household in Henan province (authors' design) / Geld- und Informationsströme innerhalb eines multilokalen Haushalts in der Provinz Henan

the farmland is either rented out or given to distant relatives for cultivation. It would appear that this applies especially to the first generation of migrants in China.

Figure 2 gives a simplified summary of the flow of remittances in one of the respondents' households (Interview B4). Initially we interviewed the male migrant worker, who hailed from B. village in Henan province, in Beijing and solicited information on the flow of remittances and services within his household and the wider family based network. Subsequently, the information from this narrative was complemented and triangulated with interviews with other household members and more distant relatives (e.g. his brother) in his home village (Interviews H1 and H2). In this particular household, regular home

visits during the peak farming season were an important feature of the household economy. Based on the criterion of joint livelihood planning, the boundary between the multi-local household and the wider family-based network of obligations and support is shown in the graph by different shading. For example, remittances to the ageing parents in the village are much lower than the flow of money within the nuclear family. The brothers in this family have agreed on fixed amounts of money transfers to the ageing parents twice a year on festive occasions (on the Spring Festival and the mother's birthday). In addition to the regular flow of remittances and in-kind transfer within the core (multi-local) household, the latter is embedded into a wider family-based network of obligations and support, as can clearly be read from the arrows in the figure.

Tab. 1 Household budgets of two families in B. village, Wuzhi county, Henan province (source: interviews on 02/09/2010 and 03/09/2010) / *Haushaltsbudgets zweier Familien in Dorf B., Bezirk Wuzhi, Provinz Henan*

	Li family	Sun family
Farm holding size	4 mu	6 mu
No. of household members	4 persons	6 persons
Crops grown	Wheat, maize	
Inputs: seeds, fertilizer, pesticide	- 1.272 ¥	- 780 ¥
Irrigation fee	- 360 ¥	- 150 ¥
Fee for ploughing, harvesting and threshing	- 530 ¥	- 580 ¥
Gross income from the sale of maize and wheat/a	7.800 ¥	11.000 ¥
Net income from farming/a	5.638 ¥	9.490 ¥
Income equivalent for home consumption of wheat	1.000 ¥	1.300 ¥
Remittances from husband's wage as a migrant labourer/a	14.000 ¥	-
Remittances/gifts from married daughters	-	2.000 ¥
Income from casual labour in the village	-	1.500 ¥
Total annual household income	20.638 ¥	14.290 ¥

Note: 1 mu \cong 0.067 ha; 1 ¥ \cong 1 Yuan \cong 0.12 €

Various authors have attempted to estimate the amount of remittances and their contribution to the GDP of the provinces of the rural areas of origin (e.g. *Zhu* 2002: 499 and *Connelly* et al. 2010: 10). Some have estimated the migrants' remittances to account for 40 to 50 % of rural households' annual income (*Zhang* 2010: 183). Since our focus is on the household level, we tried to shed some light on the contribution of migrants' remittances to the family income of their rural household. As mentioned, the amount and frequency of remittances vary from one household to another. We thus made an attempt to collect agro-economic data for the rural households of our respondents and relate these to responses on the amount of regular remittances (the information was triangulated between the information solicited from the rural household and what the urban-based migrant had told us). *Table 1* gives the result for two households in B. village in Henan

province, where mainly monoculture of maize and wheat is practiced. *Table 2* shows examples of two households in D. village in Sichuan province, a rice-growing area with traditional mixed farming. In the Li family's rural household remittances from the husband's wage as a migrant worker represent the better part of the family income, while the Sun family's income is mainly derived from farming, with remittances and gifts being a small topping up. *Table 2* shows the situation in a village dominated by mixed farming with a sizable portion of subsistence production. Although the absolute amount of remittances is fairly low in both households, the remittance element constitutes more than half of the cash at the family's disposal, thus making the household more robust and resilient. It must be noted that savings used for house construction were not counted as part of the regular family income. In the migrants' own perception, building a house

Tab. 2 Household budgets of two families in D. village, Linshui county, Sichuan province (Source: Interviews on 02/09/2010 and 03/09/2010) / *Haushaltsbudgets zweier Familien in Dorf D., Kreis Linshui, Provinz Sichuan*

	Zhu family	Qiu family
Farm holding size		
– Irrigated land (<i>tian</i>)	1.5 mu	3 mu
– Dryland (<i>di</i>)	1.2 mu	3 mu
No. household members	2 adults 2 grandchildren	2 adults
Crops grown	Rice, maize, groundnuts, vegetables	
Inputs: seeds, fertilizer, pesticides	- 300 ¥	- 2.160 ¥
Fee for ploughing with buffalo	- 90 ¥	-
Gross income from the sale of rice, maize and groundnuts/a	2.400 ¥	2.700 ¥
Net income from farming/a	2.010 ¥	540 ¥
Income equivalent for home consumption of wheat	600 ¥	1.200 ¥
Income from the sale of chicken/buffalo	120 ¥	3.000 ¥
Income from ploughing other people's fields	-	400 ¥
Remittances from unmarried daughter (migrant worker)	-	2000 ¥
Remittances from son for two grandchildren	3.200 ¥	-
Total annual household income	5.930 ¥	7.140 ¥

Note: 1 mu \cong 0.067 ha; 1 ¥ \cong 1 Yuan \cong 0.12 €

in the home village is an activity in its own right and not part of the more or less regular contribution to the cost of living. Many migrant workers build a house for their own old age, but in actual fact, it is in many cases the grandparent generation and children left behind in the village who enjoy the benefit of better housing.

4.4 Care for children, the sick and the elderly

Apart from a strategy of economic reciprocity, a large percentage of multi-locational migrant households pursue what we have called

'strategies for caring' and what has been described as 'social remittances' by some authors (*Deshingkar and Farrington 2009*). Obviously, such strategies are often coupled with the transfer of money for the purpose of caring for young children, the sick or the elderly.

The importance of rural places of origin in the upbringing and education of migrants' children has been emphasised by many authors (e.g. *Zhu 2003: 494*), since educational facilities are not easily accessible for migrants at their urban place of residence. This has been confirmed in our interviews with both parts of multi-locational households.

In the setting of a migrant household, children are the most vulnerable group which has to be taken care of. At the same time they are seen as the most precious part of the family, quite in line with the strong value of the family in the traditional rural society in China. Like all parents who have encountered or are still experiencing hardship they want a better future for their children. In the absence of other social security nets or systems, children's success in life will also have a bearing on the quality of life the parents are likely to enjoy after retirement. Thus the upbringing of children is one key element of the migrants' livelihood strategy once they get married. This is reflected in all interviews from the different perspectives of parents, grandparents and grown-up children in households with members working outside their home region.

Since the upbringing of children is mainly seen as the responsibility of the individual core family, the household as a socio-economic unit is the place where this process takes place. The different phases in a child's development, starting with maternity, giving birth and the first year, kindergarten age up to primary, secondary and even tertiary education, require careful planning by the mother and (in most cases) the father. In nearly all cases studied, the migrant workers involve their own parents as well as possibly siblings, thus constituting a bigger household with binding reciprocal obligations to adequately cope with this process. Monetary remittances for children are just one layer of these mutual obligations. Caring for the migrants' children by grandparents or other relatives back in the rural area is one of the main non-material services which enable the parents to make a living outside.

Among our respondents, most of the female migrants returned to their home village and to their parents or parents in law to give birth. Without paid maternity leave pregnant women have to quit their job. Moreover, crowded living conditions like in Dongguan are not conducive to live with a new-

born baby in the city (Interviews D2, D5). Furthermore, the cost to give birth in a hospital or with a midwife are prohibitively high in the city. In the village they normally enjoy the support of their parents during the first year. Fathers usually hold on to their job in the city to earn money. After the first year, the young mother will normally go out for work again, usually joining her husband and leaving the child with her parents or her husband's parents. Among the young families interviewed some tried to have their child in the city tackling the situation by either bringing along one of the grandparents to look after the child or changing to flexible working hours. One couple interviewed tried this by setting up a small restaurant expecting to be more flexible to take care of the child (Interviews DF2, DF5).

Another main obstacle is the rural *hukou* which does not entitle those coming from rural areas to enrol freely in state-run kindergarten, primary and secondary schools in the cities. This makes education expensive incurring additional costs (Interview DF5). Furthermore, entrance examinations to senior middle school and university can only be taken in the region where the student has a *hukou* and the curricula differ between the provinces. Studying at school in one province does not prepare him or her for the exams in another province where he or she would sit for the exam.

It seems that especially in the Pearl River Delta region there is hardly any space and time for the children of migrant parents. They live in small flats in overcrowded multi-storey buildings and have long working hours in factories throughout the week, with low wages. Only few of the second generation of migrants make enough money to afford the higher living costs that enable them to live with one or two children in the city. In contrast, the suburban villages around Beijing with big migrant communities provide comparatively more space with reasonable infrastructure, and lower prices make it easier for parents to bring their children along.

As most of the children can hardly stay with their working parents in the cities, their fate then depends very much on the service their grandparents can provide as well as on the educational facilities available in or nearby the home village. Most grandparents are still engaged in farming and have limited time to look after their grandchildren. Most of the villages visited have a kindergarten and a primary school for the first two of six years. Carrying on with primary school after the first two years and proceeding to secondary education in junior and senior middle school is usually only possible in the township or the county town, more often than not more than an hour's drive away. The school-going children live in a boarding house attached to the schools during the week and come back for the weekends to the grandparents in the village. Sometimes grandparents or other relatives rent a flat in the town to live with the children during the school term. This may be one reason for migrants to buy a flat in a town in their home region instead of repairing or building a new house in the village of origin.

For the young children up to the age of seven or eight years this seems to work well, giving them a healthy environment and opportunities to move freely, but at the cost of potential alienation from their parents. The latter obviously depends on whether and how the parents stay in touch with their children, i.e. how often they talk with them and come to see them. With telephone connections to nearly every corner in China, talking with the children on the (mobile) phone is the most common way to keep in touch with both children and (grand-)parents. The frequency of such calls varies between several times a week and once a month. This could be regarded as an indicator of the intensity of the relationship. But as the interviews also showed, it is the personal encounter and its frequency which has a much higher weight. The further the distance between the working place and the home village, the more difficult it is to keep up communication and the relationship.

There are many reports of gross negligence of the so-called 'left-behind children'. In the village in Fengjie we interviewed an elderly couple (Interview DF6) taking care of their daughter's seven years old mentally retarded, autistic son. When he was small, the mother went out to work and gave him to an aunt who locked him up in a room with little food. After two years the grandparents took the child, who then did not speak and communicate. Only after joining the kindergarten, he tried again to communicate with others in a very disorderly way. Visiting the junior middle school in Longquan/Fengjie, teachers told us that most parents of their 2000 students worked outside their home region and about one third of the students had not seen their parents for years. Even during the weekends and holidays they have to stay in the school's dormitory because their parents work far away in South China and no grandparents or other family members can take care of them.

Estimates are that only 19 million children in China live with their migrant worker parents in the cities, while 58 million children are left behind. They account for one quarter of all children in China (*Chan 2009: 5*). In recent years, the unresolved fate of the left-behind children has become a topic of general public debate and outcry. For sure, their problems cannot be solved by a caring strategy within the family network alone.

Health care for migrant workers is equally deficient. Until recently most migrant workers were not covered by health insurance at all. According to a nation-wide sample survey, in 2008 a mere 17 % of all migrant workers had a health insurance (*Li and Li 2011: 25*). In the meantime, new health insurance systems have been set up in most provinces. Thus roughly half of our interviewees confirmed that they paid regular contributions to the newly established health insurance, but many complained that in cases of serious illness or hospital treatment, only a small portion of the expenses was refunded by the insurance. Others simply did not

know how to claim a refund (e.g. Interview L1; similar experiences have also been reported by *Darimont* 2010: 119). Another problem with the existing health insurance is the province based or city-based nature of the systems, which means that often migrant workers living in bi-locational household arrangements have to return to their home province in order to seek medical treatment. Consequently, many migrant workers avoid seeing a doctor unless they fall seriously ill. Operations and long-term treatment of illnesses, such as a slipped disc, force migrant workers and their rural-based family members alike to borrow money from family members or through other sources. A male migrant worker of 24 years told us he was still in debts because he had taken loans from various family members to pay for his mother's operation some seven years before (Interview B7).

Many female migrants returned to their home village when an elderly family member, a parent or an in-law, fell sick. Male respondents felt the obligation to return home as well, but more often decided to stay in the city because they did not want to quit their job.

As for care for the elderly, the younger, urban-based generation among our respondents were aware of their obligation to provide care for the elderly when they become frail; but their parents appeared also to be aware that in case of need the support from the urban-based children may not be forthcoming. As mentioned above, house construction in the home village or a nearby township is also a way of caring for the older generation.

4.5 *Transfer of knowledge and beliefs*

The third layer of reciprocity within multi-locational livelihood strategies is the transfer of knowledge, beliefs and attitudes. In some of the earlier literature the aspect of knowledge transfer through returned migrant workers has been emphasised (e.g. *Steinbach* 2004). In our own

field research the emerging picture was rather mixed. There were a number of migrant workers who, after many years in Beijing or in the Pearl River Delta, set up a tractor repair workshop or a restaurant in a township near their home village. This was possible with savings from the previous employment in the city; but at the same time they could take advantage of skills acquired as workers in big industry. For example, in the remoter towns in Fengjie county, there was evidence of small-scale businesses that had been set up by returned migrants. But many others, especially female migrants working in assembly lines, had not acquired any skills which could be put to good use in the home area.

Recently, evidence of changing decision-making powers among returned female migrants have been reported (*Zhang* 2010: 176). Among our sample, there was also a noteworthy change in attitudes. At the time of the initial out-migration, many migrants of school-leaving age perceived their own father, occasionally the grandfather, the most powerful decision-maker within the household. It would appear that this perception changes gradually, very often in parallel with the importance of remittances for the family income. A son or daughter who contributes half of the family income can no longer be excluded from key decisions. In some cases this amounts to a reversal in decision-making powers within the family. The migrating child becomes more influential than father and mother. The remittances are appreciated, but likewise the time the migrating family member spends with the villagers is valued as something precious. The left-behind family members speak with pride of the achievements of the absent son or daughter in the far-away city – though in most cases these can be measured in terms of acquisition of consumer goods and not so much in terms of upward social mobility.

But transfer of values may also work towards politicising rural society. A migrant worker who

had been badly injured in an accident at his workplace in Guangzhou received support through a local group of labour activists. When he returned to his home county Zunyi in Sichuan he decided to initiate a similar group. And in a village in the Changshou rural district of Chongqing a group of urban-based activists had set up an ecological farm and started to disseminate knowledge about principles of eco-farming.

4.6 Migrants' long-term visions

At first sight, the migrant workers' identity is, even after more than twenty years in the city, very much tied to their place of origin. Most of them consider themselves as people from a particular rural region. Their identity seems to be anchored in peasant life and their rural home: "In my dreams I am always in the village", as a Beijing migrant worker, originally from Henan province, said in the interview (Interview B 11). However, this persistence of the identity as peasants is only one half of the story. To be sure, most of the migrant workers live in dormitories, in urban villages or other ghettos segregated from the local population. And yet, they live in the city, the experience of factory work or the work on construction sites and the everyday exposure to urban-type infrastructure undoubtedly has a profound impact on their identity. Especially the younger ones feel attracted to consumerism and other aspects of urban lifestyles. They develop a hybrid identity of their own, intertwining both their rural and urban backgrounds. Many of them take pride in being peasants, in having a plot of farmland in their home village, but at the same time they are wage earners in the big city.

When asked to give their long-term aspirations, about 80 per cent of our respondents said they would like to eventually return to their home province or home county, but they preferred life in a township or the county town to village life.

When asked how they saw the prospects for their own children, none of the respondents saw the child end up as a farmer: "He will be a migrant worker and if he does well in school, he may go to university" was a typical statement (Interview H5).

5. Conclusions

In this article we have tried to apply the concept of multi-locality to Chinese migrant workers' livelihood strategies. The migrants' opportunity structure is still strictly regulated by state intervention through the *hukou* system. Within these constraints, some distinct livelihood strategies have emerged which combine elements of economic reciprocity through remittances, care within the family and the transfer of knowledge and beliefs. But it would be too simplistic to interpret these strategies exclusively through the unique regulatory framework in China, though *hukou* has exacerbated the need for multi-locational living arrangements.

Interestingly, certain phenomena we have highlighted in this article are also reminiscent of multi-locational household arrangements described for other parts of the world. For example, left-behind children are common in many parts of Africa (e.g. *Lohnert* 2002). Likewise, changes in the internal decision-making structures within multi-locational households have been ascertained in various other settings (e.g. *Raitelhuber* 2001; *Deshingkar* and *Farrington* 2009).

Some of the findings from our interviews can be synthesised into the following key insights:

1. Most migrant workers have lived in multi-locational household arrangements for a long time. But these arrangements are by no means uniform. One can distinguish between a variety of different household configurations: households where only an unmarried young daughter or son, usually immediate-

ly after leaving school, works in the city; households where the husband works in the city remitting money to his wife and children in the village; households in which husband and wife have migrated to the city, occasionally with their children, but more often leaving the children in the care of the grandparents in the village.

2. Multi-locational households which function as units of joint planning (see our definition in Section 3 of this article) tend to be smaller than in Africa or India. They are normally composed of two to three generations, and they rarely include in-laws or siblings. The one-child policy, although often not implemented strictly in rural areas, further limits the size of households.
3. Multi-locational livelihood strategies evolve in consonance with the family cycle. Finding a husband or a wife, marriage and the upbringing of children are the key phases which shape migrants' livelihood strategies. It would appear that only a minority of migrants has severed all ties with the rural part of the household, thus deliberately abandoning the specific opportunities which living in two localities offers.
4. Living in two worlds is not easy and migrants are faced with many hardships. But surprisingly, hardly anybody complains about the implications of the *hukou* system. They rather see their rural *hukou*, which is tied to land ownership in their village of origin (though not in the form as an individual title), as an unalienable right and as an element of social security on which they can fall back in times of crisis. Most of our respondents intend to hold on to the usufructuary rights to the land.
5. Distance matters. Multi-locational livelihood strategies of families who have to bridge longer distances differ from those who have to travel only 150 kilometres to their home village. But even where distances are relatively short, only few migrants commute every weekend. Long working hours, combined with high travel costs, prevent parents from paying a visit to their children every weekend.
6. The flow of remittances is usually maintained over many years, even decades, though amounts vary over time and in accord with the family life cycle.
7. There are discernible differences between the strategies of the first generation of migrants and the more recent ones. While the first generation is more attached to the village of origin (they are the ones who save the better part of their income for house construction in the home village), the younger generation is more attracted by consumerism and has a less concrete attachment to the home village – though the county of origin, and even land ownership in the village, remains an emotional anchor for them as well. Moreover, the home village remains the reference point for marriage, giving birth and the early upbringing of children.
8. In the process of migration, decision-making structures and the internal power relations within the household have been transformed in favour of the migrated younger generation with their cash income.

Over the years, Chinese migrant workers have adopted a hybrid identity which is far removed from the peasants' identity some 30 years ago, but equally distant from the life of the emerging urban middle class.

With or without *hukou* reform, multi-locational living arrangements are bound to persist in China for many decades to come. In the past five

years or so, China has witnessed a highly topical debate on the future of the urban-rural interface at all levels, involving government bodies, academics and NGO activists. A broad range of different propositions have been put forward. Some writers have advocated the return of the peasant migrants to the countryside, others advocate more balanced urbanisation, and some are even in favour of more megacities. No consensus is in sight, not even within the Communist Party. In whatever direction urbanisation policy in China will move in the future, we do contend that urban development will not only be shaped by strategies from above, by locational decisions emanating from the logic of capital accumulation and the labour market, and by related changes in the regulatory framework introduced by central or provincial governments. There is always a dialectical relationship between economic development and policies pursued by the institutions in power on the one hand and the response by the people themselves on the other hand. This may come in many forms, e.g. as a social movement, as open resistance, but also in the form of accelerated migration.

Up to now, not many migrant workers have returned to their home villages for good. Even those who migrated 25 years ago tend to defer the final return to the nice house they have built for their old age year after year. Interestingly, many of the more recent migrants clearly said that they planned to eventually return to their county town (and not to the village) to open a small workshop or a restaurant there. As a matter of fact, this is already happening, especially in the more remote migrant sending areas. If this trend continues, this would amount to a re-industrialisation of the countryside, this time rooted from below.

At this juncture, future economic developments and government urbanisation policies are not entirely clear, but the future rural-urban interface will equally be shaped by the people's livelihood strategies between cities and coun-

tryside. It is therefore of paramount importance to do more research to ascertain and understand the livelihood strategies people engage in.

Notes

¹At the time when the *hukou* system was first introduced in 1958 it was intended to encourage rural development. In reality, however, it soon turned into a mechanism that effectively disadvantaged the rural people. Under the system the entitlement to social security was tied to the place of residence, where people were registered. This applied to health care, education, housing and staple food: "The role of the rural population was to provide cheap resources to the urban areas and to be self-reliant. Consequently, a dual social and economic structure was formed. On the one hand, a highly subsidised and protected urban population and, on the other hand, a poor struggling rural population. The *hukou* system was adopted as the institutional barrier to prevent the rural population from claiming benefits that most city dwellers enjoyed, which includes subsidised housing. (...) The *hukou* system resulted in discrimination against the rural population, and made permanent family settlement in the cities extremely difficult for rural migrants till this day" (Qi 2006: 16).

²... the notion of floating migrants (or temporary migrants) is peculiar in China's contemporary context because it does not necessarily denote a time frame but an official designation. Those spontaneous migrants moving without changes of their *hukou* status, who make up the bulk of China's internal migration, are expected to eventually return to their home places" (Qi 2006: 17).

³Apart from the authors of this article Lin Zhibin (The Beijing Migrant Workers' Home) was part of the research team.

⁴Village names are not rendered in full to protect the respondents' anonymity.

⁵All land is owned by the state, i.e. production brigades, provinces or the nation in China. Each rural *hukou* holder is entitled to a plot of land distributed to him/her by the production brigade.

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Summary: Living in Two Worlds: Multi-Locational Household Arrangements among Migrant Workers in China

In the past, the concept of multi-locality has hardly been applied to the study of livelihood strategies of

migrant workers in China. The authors of this article present the findings of a research project in five selected rural-urban migration corridors in different parts of China. On the basis of qualitative interviews at both ends of the multi-local household's activity spaces, they were able to establish economic reciprocity, strategies for caring and the transfer of knowledge, values and beliefs at the household level. The multi-local households – defined as units of joint planning – were found to be firmly embedded in informal social networks.

Zusammenfassung: Leben in zwei Welten: Multi-lokale Haushaltsstrukturen bei Wanderarbeitern in China

In der Vergangenheit ist Multilokalität als konzeptioneller Ansatz kaum auf die Lebensstrategien von Wanderarbeitern in China angewandt worden. Die Autoren dieses Artikels stellen die Ergebnisse eines Forschungsprojekts in fünf ausgewählten Migrationskorridoren in verschiedenen Teilen Chinas vor. Auf der Grundlage qualitativer Interviews an beiden Standorten der Aktionsräume von multilokalen Haushalten gelang es ihnen, ökonomische Reziprozität, Strategien der sozialen Fürsorge sowie für Wissenstransfer und die Weitergabe von Wertorientierungen auf der Haushaltsebene nachzuweisen. Alle multilokalen Haushalte (definiert als Einheiten, die gemeinsam planen) waren fest in informelle soziale Netzwerke eingebunden.

Résumé: Vivre dans deux mondes: organisation des foyers à localisation multiple chez les travailleurs migrants en Chine

Par le passé, le concept de multi-localisation a très peu été appliqué à l'étude des stratégies de subsistance des travailleurs migrants en Chine. Les auteurs de cet article présentent les résultats d'un projet de recherche mené dans cinq couloirs sélectionnés de migration rurale-urbaine dans différentes parties de la Chine. Sur la base d'entretiens qualitatifs, aux deux extrémités des aires d'activité des foyers multi-localisés, ils ont été en mesure de mettre en évidence une réciprocité économique, des stratégies pour prendre soins des autres membres ainsi que le transfert de connaissances, de valeurs et de croyances au niveau des ménages. Les foyers multi-localisés – définis comme des unités de planification conjointe – se sont avérés être fermement ancrés dans des réseaux sociaux informels.

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