

Table A2. Descriptive Statistics of Variables in Multivariate Analysis, 25-City Survey, 2000.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	N
Income (Yuan)	132,256	341,768	4,000	3,600,000	915
Female	0.242	0.428	0.000	1.000	980
Firm size (log)	2.853	0.664	1.099	4.898	966
Partner	0.201	0.401	0.000	1.000	980
Prior work in court	0.086	0.280	0.000	1.000	980
Years of practice: <4 years	0.299	0.458	0.000	1.000	948
Years of practice: 4–10 years	0.488	0.500	0.000	1.000	948
Years of practice: 11–20 years	0.201	0.401	0.000	1.000	948
Years of practice: >20 years	0.012	0.107	0.000	1.000	948
% Billings/cases from corporate clients	46.696	20.276	0.000	100.000	965
% Cases in court	37.930	19.271	0.000	100.000	980
City-level per capita GDP (log)	9.535	0.553	8.444	10.349	980

Table A3. Descriptive Statistics of Variables in Multivariate Analysis, 8-Province Survey, 2007.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	N
Income (Yuan)	356,721	568,333	3,000	3,580,000	998
Female	0.189	0.392	0.000	1.000	1,293
Firm size (log)	2.413	0.749	0.000	5.176	1,323
Partner	0.608	0.488	0.000	1.000	1,301
Prior work in court	0.031	0.174	0.000	1.000	1,337
Years of practice: <4 years	0.149	0.356	0.000	1.000	1,337
Years of practice: 4–10 years	0.435	0.496	0.000	1.000	1,337
Years of practice: 11–20 years	0.322	0.468	0.000	1.000	1,337
Years of practice: >20 years	0.040	0.195	0.000	1.000	1,337
Years of practice missing	0.055	0.227	0.000	1.000	1,337
% Billings/cases from corporate clients	35.335	29.847	0.000	100.000	1,337
% Cases in court	59.602	34.587	0.000	100.000	1,337
City-level/provincial per capita GDP (log)	10.549	0.471	9.373	11.052	1,337

FLEXIBLE WORK, FLEXIBLE HOUSEHOLD: LABOR MIGRATION AND RURAL FAMILIES IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

The assumption that the family migrates as a unit downplays migrants' circularity. This chapter focuses on China's rural–urban labor migrants that travel back and forth between the sites of work and home community and between places of work. I argue that migrants and their households pursue work flexibility in order to obtain the best of the urban and rural worlds, by gaining earnings from urban work and at the same time maintaining social and economic security in the countryside. Work flexibility demands flexibility in household organization, in the form of division of labor and collaboration between genders, generations, and households. Based on a study in Sichuan, I examine household biographies and narratives to identify migrants' work and household strategies.

Migrants change jobs frequently, switch from one type of work to another, and one location to another readily, and often return to the home village for months or even years before pursuing migrant work again. Not only are migrants ready to split the household between the city and the countryside, but also they frequently change from one form of division of labor to another. The inside–outside model, where the wife stays in the village and the husband does migrant work, used to be the dominant

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arrangement. Over time, the outside-outside model, where both the husband and wife migrate to work and leave behind other family members, is increasingly popular. This is facilitated by intergenerational and interhousehold division of labor in the form of assistance by the extended family. Intergenerational division of labor takes place when the second generation is replacing the parents in migrant work. This research's findings support the notion that rural-urban migrants are fast becoming a hybrid segment of Chinese society, playing dual roles of farmers and urban workers and straddling the peasant and urban worlds.

INTRODUCTION

The assumption that the family – customarily considered to consist of two parents and their children – migrates as a unit underlies many studies of migration. Yet, a split-household arrangement, where the migrant worker leaves behind the rest of the family at his/her place of origin, is not uncommon. Labor migration in less developed economies, international migration, and transnational migration are often characterized by migrants' circularity between the sites of work and their home community. Rural-urban migrants in China, likewise, persistently pursue the split-household strategy. China's floating population, estimated to be 150 million, consists mostly of rural migrants working in urban areas (National Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Most of these migrants leave the family behind, and many change jobs frequently, switch from one type of work to another and one location to another readily, and return to the home village for months or even years before pursuing migrant work again.

This chapter has two objectives. First, I seek to illustrate the ways in which rural migrants in China are flexible in their work. I also offer an explanation, based on the concept of security, for such flexibility. Second, I argue that migrants' work flexibility demands flexibility in household organization, and I identify the forms of organization that entail division of labor between genders, generations, and households. My analysis uses household biographies and narratives from a field study of a village in Sichuan.

The next section reviews selected studies on the relationship between labor migration and household organization. It is followed by a section that articulates an argument that security is the key to explaining for Chinese migrants' work flexibility. Then, I describe the field site and the biographical materials used in the analysis. Part one of the analysis focuses on the work

flexibility of rural Chinese, and part two examines migrant households' organization and division of labor.

LABOR MIGRATION AND HOUSEHOLD ORGANIZATION

In the literature on migration, the relationship between labor migration and household organization has generated much debate and interest. The conventional approach to analyze such relationship focuses on family migration, that is, the family moving as a unit. Because family migration often aims at improving the earnings or advancing the career of the primary wage earner, most likely men, other members of the family are viewed as tied migrants. Castro and Rogers (1983), for example, examine the migration of children with their parents and of wives with their husbands. Other studies have supported the argument that family migration has detrimental effects on the employment and earnings of trailing wives (e.g., Mincer, 1978), an argument increasingly challenged by recent findings that women also benefit from family migration (e.g., Clark & Withers, 2002). Underlying these studies is the assumption that members of the family, especially husbands and wives, stay together in one physical location, regardless of who benefit more from migration and whether they decide to migrate or not. It is also this assumption that underlies the observation that families migrate less than individuals. Odland and Ellis (1988), for example, find that potential migrants may forgo the economic benefits of migration in order to keep the household intact.

At the same time, three bodies of work, focusing mostly on contexts other than inter-rural migration in Western advanced economies, address migrations that split the household into two or more locations. Studies of rural-urban migration in less developed economies examine situations where some household members undertake migrant work and others stay behind. Temporary, circular migration that results in split households has always been common in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Chant, 1991; Deshingkar & Start, 2003; Nelson, 1976; Wilkinson, 1987). In countries experiencing rapid urbanization and industrialization, such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and China, rural-urban circular migration is rapidly increasing (Deshingkar, 2005). Research by Stark (1991, pp. 23–31) and his associates has advanced the New Economics of Migration theory, which considers remittances as part of an implicit agreement between the migrant and the left-behind that is grounded

on a plan for the migrant's eventual return. Contrary to the expectation that a large family deters migration, Stark and Taylor (1991) argue that having more adult members in the household facilitates labor migration because the left-behind can assume the migrant worker's farm duty.

The second body of work focuses on international labor migration. Skinner (1976) shows that laborers from southern China that worked on US mines and railroads in the 19th century were expected to eventually return, despite their long absences from home (Pan, 1998, p. 261). Prior to the mid-1990s, most Mexican immigrants to the US did not settle permanently because they did not intend to stay or were compelled to return (e.g., Reyes, 2004). Women from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand leave behind husbands and children for overseas domestic work and return home only after long periods and between contracts (Silvey, 2006). The above are just some of the many examples of international labor migrants splitting the family between the host country and the sending country.

The above two bodies of literature concern primarily poor segments of society, many from rural areas, that have few options other than migrant work to improve their families' livelihood (e.g., Deshingkar & Start, 2003). The third body of literature deals also with high-skilled, highly educated migrants. Studies on transnationalism focus on sustained flows across national borders, including migrants with multiple identities and ties, and familial, social, and professional relations and networks stretched across nations and facilitated by increased ease in mobility and communication (Mitchell, 1997; Ong, 1999; Saxenian, 2005). There are overlaps between studies on international labor migration and studies on transnationalism, but the latter emphasize fluidity, flexibility, shifts in mobility, and repeated activities across national borders (Willis, Yeoh, & Fakhri, 2004). Research on transnationalism focuses on not only labor migrants seeking to alleviate poverty, but also those that champion mobility and flexibility, including transplanting the family overseas, as a formula for success. Waters' (2002) study of "astronaut wives" in Vancouver, for example, examines "flexible families" of highly educated immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Unlike earlier examples, the astronaut syndrome is one where the wives and children are "left behind" on foreign soil while the breadwinner husband returns to the home region to work (Skeldon, 1997).

Although the above three bodies of literature examine migrations that differ in context, scale, and composition, they share the commonality of involving split households. They challenge the conventional assumption that keeping the family physically together is the norm and is of primary importance to migrants. The prevalence of split households begs the

question why – why do families, and husbands and wives, tolerate being apart for long periods of time, and why do they choose this arrangement?

One explanation portrays migrants in a passive light, that is, migrants want to bring their family along but are unable to do so, because they are not citizens of the host country, they have only limited access to the social benefits of the host society, they cannot afford the high cost of living there, etc. Laborers barred from entering the US due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, guest-workers from Eastern and Central Europe no longer welcome by Western European countries during the economic downturn of the 1970s, and Indonesian domestic workers at the end of their contracts are some examples where migrant workers have little control over how long they can stay, not to mention bringing their family along.

The second explanation is that migrants prefer circular migration to permanently leaving the home region. Hugo (2003a, 2006) argues that migrant workers do not always desire to settle in destination countries. Modern forms of transport and communication have reduced the friction of distance and allowed migrants to maintain closer and more intimate linkages with their home communities than before. By keeping some family members at the origin, migrants can maintain valued traditions and family ties via frequent visits. In contrast to the first explanation, this explanation emphasizes migrants' agency and strategies. When a family is split into two locations, its members can tap into resources and opportunities in both locations. Migrants can obtain the best of both worlds by earning in high-income destinations and spending in low-cost origins. For rural-urban migrants, the city offers employment and higher wages and the countryside has farmland and is inexpensive. For the astronaut families, Asia offers attractive economic opportunities to breadwinners, whereas Canada and US afford quality education for their children.

In reality, decisions on splitting the household to accommodate labor migration are likely based on a combination of the above two explanations. Likewise, rural-urban migrants in China can be viewed in a passive light, but it is important to also recognize the strategies they pursue to benefit from *both* the city and the countryside.

CHINA'S RURAL-URBAN LABOR MIGRANTS

Split households are prevalent in rural China. The typical model is one where one or more adult members of the family undertake migrant work, send home remittances, and return home infrequently, while other members

stay in the village to farm and fulfill care-giving responsibilities. Although there is some evidence of increase in family migration (Zhou, 2004), split households remain the most popular form of organization among rural-urban labor migrants. In other words, most rural-urban labor migrants are physically separated from their families for extended periods of time.

What explains split households in rural China? Despite the proliferation of research on migration in China, relatively little attention has been paid to migrants' household organization. The dominant view of rural migrants is that they are passive, helpless victims. In particular, a large body of work highlights the *hukou* (household registration) system as a source of migrants' plight. *Hukou* is a socialist institution that bifurcates China into urban and rural segments and blocks rural citizens from the rights and benefits reserved for their urban counterparts. In cities, rural migrants do not have access to the full range of jobs and services, and are exploited, segregated, and discriminated against. The impacts of *hukou* on migrants are a subject of many studies (e.g., Alexander & Chan, 2004; Chan & Buckingham, 2008; Fan, 2002, 2008; Solinger, 1999; Wang, 2005) and are not repeated here, but a popular view is that *hukou* prohibits migrants to stay in the city permanently and bring their families along, forcing them to split the household into two places.

There is no question that *hukou* disadvantages rural migrants and prevents them from becoming full-fledged urban citizens. Yet, this explanation alone downplays the desire, agency, and strategies of migrants and their households. Below, I articulate another explanation, one that centers on the concept of security and a strategy of flexibility.

Security is related to protection, safety, continuity, reliability, and a sense of future and permanence. After more than two decades of massive rural-urban labor migration, the countryside continues to be the basis of economic security for China's rural migrants and their families. The countryside is the site of three types of economic security. First, peasants have access to farmland contracted from village authorities. Agriculture is a source of subsistence and serves as an insurance against adversity – for example, when migrant work fails – and a security for migrants' future return. In addition, rural Chinese are not free to buy or sell farmland, and conversion of farmland into other purposes is strictly controlled by government authorities (Lin & Ho, 2005; Yusuf & Nabeshima, 2006, pp. 57–58).¹ Although the Chinese government has recently signaled a willingness to allow farmers to lease or trade their land-use rights, they still do not have land-ownership rights (Lim, 2008). Thus, migrants are motivated to leave behind family members to farm, ask relatives to farm for them, or lease out the land to other villagers. Such arrangements not only

yield output, but also guard the farmland's boundaries (against infringement by others) and prevent it from being fallow.

Second, Chinese peasants are allocated non-farm land where they can build houses. To many rural Chinese, building a new house or renovating or expanding an existing house is of great importance. For example, it is expected that in order to find a wife, a man must have a house or a partition of his parents' house. Only when a new house or an extension to an existing house is complete can a married son and his wife and children have their own space independent from the parents'. Indeed, housing-related expenses are a main reason for migrant work. Third, the cost of living in the countryside is low. Affordability to live in a place permanently is an important dimension of economic security.

By contrast, the city does not offer rural migrants economic security. Migrant jobs are neither stable nor secure and most demand youth and manual labor. The global financial crisis since 2008 that led to the closing of many manufacturers and rendered millions of migrants unemployed, is a vivid reminder of the precarious nature of migrant work. As migrant workers age, their chance of being hired deteriorates and they must contemplate returning to the countryside. In addition, cities are expensive. Unless migrants have considerable savings and access to health care, education, housing, and other benefits, cities are less desirable places to live than the countryside.

The countryside is also the basis of peasant migrants' social security, namely a support system made up of the spouse, children, parents, siblings, relatives, and fellow villagers. In rural China, the age-old concept of *jia* (family or home) – which refers to not only the nuclear family, but also the extended family and even the home village – remains strong. Members of a family are related to each other by blood or marriage, and their budgets, properties, and interests are interconnected (Croll, 1994, p. 163; Woon, 1994). The institution of marriage is fundamental to the social structure and is keenly protected. Within marriage, traditional gender norms are determined by the age-old inside-outside (IO) ideology, which defines the woman's place to be inside the family and the man's sphere to be outside (*nan zhu wai nu zhu nei*) (Entwisle & Henderson, 2000, p. 298; Hershatter, 2000; Mann, 2000). The boundary between the feminine inside and the masculine outside is not fixed and has, indeed, shifted such that the inside now includes all village responsibilities, and the outside refers to migrant work (Jacka, 1997). When migrants talk about *jia* or *huijia* (return home), they refer to not only the physical home, but also the village and the home community. When they talk about *chuqu* (go out), they refer to leaving the

home community to seek work elsewhere. Thus, because of migrant work, the IO model is repackaged as gender, spatial division of labor – the husband is more likely than the wife to pursue migrant work, and the wife is more likely than the husband to stay behind in the village.

Children and the elderly also constitute important elements of the rural support system. Children are still the main source of old-age support, and fulfilling obligations to parents is an important means to keep the traditional social support system intact. Siblings and relatives that live nearby, likewise, can help in farming or care-giving when a need arises.

By contrast, in the city, peasant migrants are seen and treated as outside labor rather than members of the urban society (Chan, 1996; Fan, 2002; Solinger, 1995; Zhou, 1992). Their social interactions with urban locals are minimal, and they rely mainly on fellow villagers from the same native place (*tongxiang* or *laoxiang*) for support. Although there is some evidence of thriving migrant communities, such as the Zhejiang Village in Beijing (Ma & Xiang, 1998; Xiang, 2005), in general peasant migrants' social support system in the city is much weaker than that in the countryside.

In summary, the very consideration of security is an important explanation for peasant migrants' anticipation to eventually return to the countryside. The terms *dagong* – literally “being employed,” but more specifically peasants seeking work in industrial and service sectors – and *chuqu*, for example, highlight migrants' crossing of the rural–urban border but also connote that the countryside is still their home. For example, some studies have found that migrants' desire to settle in cities is not strong and the majority wants to eventually return to the countryside (Wang, 2003; Zhu, 2003, 2007). During their *dagong* tenure – which for some has been over 20 years – migrant workers straddle the urban and rural, seek to benefit from both, and “earn in the city and spend in the village” (Fan & Wang, 2008; Hugo, 2003b).

Migrants' straddling the urban and rural also explains their strategies for work, strategies that center on flexibility. Using household biographies and narratives, the rest of the chapter illustrates how and why rural migrants pursue work flexibility and highlights various forms of household division of labor that support work flexibility.

HOUSEHOLD BIOGRAPHIES AND NARRATIVES

Qualitative materials based on small samples tend not to be as representative as macro-level quantitative data, but the former are especially useful in

revealing complexity, details, and subtle processes such as family politics. In this study, I examine both household biographies and villagers' narratives to highlight the strategies of rural–urban labor migrants and their households. Jarvis (1999) has summarized succinctly the advantages of household biographies in social sciences research: “[Household] biographies can be used to reach beyond revealed or material action to the negotiation of action and thus non-action; that which is taken-for-granted, ruled out, or modified in the process of blending individual narratives within household narratives.” Although Jarvis' research is on urban households, her argument about qualitative life-history is equally applicable to rural households: “In effect, a biographical representation of household behaviour comprises not only the interweaving of parallel histories (work histories, family mile-stone events, personal relationship histories) but also the negotiation of the interlinkage and temporal ordering of such events” McHugh (2000) argues eloquently that the conceptualization of migration as a one-way journey is inadequate. Rather, he calls attention to the value of ethnographic research for understanding “migrations as cultural events rich in meaning for individuals, families, social groups, communities and nations.” In addition, personal stories and narratives are powerful means for identifying migrants' agency, negotiation, and conflicts, and they enable a bottom-up research approach that foregrounds the voices and experiences of marginalized individuals in society (Jacka, 2006, p. 10; Nagar, Lawson, McDowell, & Hanson, 2002).

I draw from two related projects, conducted during the Spring Festival in 1995 and 2005. In 1995, the Research Center for Rural Economy of the Ministry of Agriculture conducted in-depth interviews with 300 households from 12 villages – 3 villages each from 2 counties in Sichuan and 2 counties in Anhui. Sichuan and Anhui are major sources of rural–urban labor migrants in China. The counties and villages for the 1995 project were selected based on the following criteria: that in terms of economic development they were representative of the respective provinces; that they had been sending out migrant workers for quite some time; and that migrant workers accounted for at least, respectively, 20% of the county's labor force and 30% of the village's labor force (Du, 2000; Du & Bai, 1997, p. 5). In each of the villages, 15 migrant households (where one or more members had had migrant work experience) and 10 non-migrant households were randomly selected. Interviewees' responses are in the form of narratives and are transcribed verbatim. The 2005 project, which I participated in and which was administered by Renmin University of China, sought to re-interview the same 300 households. Each of the accounts is again transcribed verbatim.

In this chapter, I focus on one village – Village A – selected randomly from the original 12 villages. In 2005, Village A had about 310 households and a total population of approximately 1,200. For the sake of confidentiality, in this chapter, I do not disclose Village A's location and I use pseudonyms for villagers (see Table 1). Suffice it to say, Village A has many features in common with villages across China that send out migrant workers. First, agricultural activities center mainly on farming and animal husbandry, but labor surplus is persistently large because arable land is of short supply. Second, although some non-agricultural economic activities exist in and near the village, the employment and income they generate are limited. A small brick factory, built in about 1997, for example, hires villagers mostly on a part-time basis. Third, by the mid-1990s, labor out-migration had already become an important source of income for most households in the village, and this trend had further intensified by 2005. Fourth, over time the number and range of labor migrants have increased. In the 1980s and early 1990s, significantly more men than women were engaged in migrant work, largely seen at that time as a new, short-term, economic opportunity. By 2005, migrant work had become an established way of life, and participation in this activity was more extensive, involving more women and almost every household in the village. Finally, despite more than 20 years of migrant work history, very few households had moved out from the village altogether. Officials in Village A estimated that by 2005 only 15 households, or 5% of the village and involving a total of approximately 60 people, had done so. Among them, only four households had moved their *hukou* elsewhere – thus giving up their contract land in the village. Eleven households – of which eight remained in the same county – continued to keep their village *hukou*.

Of the 25 households in Village A originally interviewed in 1995, 16 were successfully re-interviewed in 2005 (Table 1). Our priority was to interview migrants that returned home for the Spring Festival, but if they were not available then we would interview other family members, most likely migrants' parents, that were familiar with the household biography and migrants' work history. In the following, I do not distinguish households originally categorized in 1995 as migrant households from those categorized as non-migrant households, because most of the latter had had some degree of participation in labor migration by 2005. A limitation of the study is that it does not include households where no members stayed in the village or returned during the 2005 Spring Festival. Since only 5% of the village's households had moved out, that limitation is not expected to affect this study's findings in significant ways.

Table 1. Inventory of the 16 Sampled Households in Village A.

Household	1994	2004	Wife	Age (Years)	Husband	Age (Years)	2004				Other Inside	Other Outside			
							Child #1	Age (years)	Child #2	Age (years)			Parent #1	Age (years)	Parent #2
1	OI	II	Zhao Xiaolan	42	Wang Guohui	53		21	I	14	I	60s	I	60s	Brother and his wife, age 40s
2	IO	OO	Hu Weiling	40s	Wang Qingping	40s	O	18	I	14	I	60s	I	60s	Brother's two children, age 12 and 13 years
3	IO	IO	Deng Yuling	37	Wang Xinmin	38	I	15	I	13	I	60s	I	50s	
4	IO	OO	Zhang Shuzheng	31	Wang Cheng	33	I	9	I	4	I	50s	I	50s	
5	OO	OO	Wang Mingli	32	Yu Zhongliang	34	I	11	I	1	I	50s	I	50s	
6	OO	OO	Fang Biying	30s	Jiang Guanghua	38	I	14	I	12	I	60s	I	60s	
7	IO	IO	Pan Yueqin	38	Wang Gen	40	I	17	I	14	I	60s	I	60s	
8	IO	IO	Hu Wenfen	37	Wei Daming	39	I	12	I	1	I	60s	I	60s	
9	IO	OI	Wang Huitan	40s	Li Wangping	46	M (boarding school)	20	M (boarding school)	19					
10	IO	II	Tan Sunmei	47	Wang Xueqiang	53	I	25	M (school)	22					Grandchild, age 1 year
11	IO	IO	Tan Meirong	47	Jiang Zhengyi	53	M (non-dagong)	24	O	22					Son-in-law, age 20s
12	II	II	Jiang Mingfang	48	Wang Jiankun	49	M (non-dagong)	22	I	19	I	73			
13	II	OO	Jiang Xiaohi	33	Wang Yonghua	33	I	11	I	2	I	62	I	50	
14	II	II	Li Chenxia	41	Chen Guowei	47	O	21	O	19					Grandchild, infant
15	OO	OO	Pan Yuefang	42	Wang Yuanjian	43	I	19	I	16	I	68	I	67	
16	II	OI	Wei Yufang	38	Jiang Fucheng	46	M (non-dagong)	22							Daughter-in-law, age 20s

ote. Age refers to the age in 2005; I: inside; O: outside; IO: wife inside-husband outside; IO: wife inside-husband outside; OI: wife outside-husband inside; OO: wife inside-husband outside; M: miscellaneous.

Table 1 is an inventory of the 16 households that were re-interviewed in 2005. I consider the wife and husband as the core of a household, and include also their unmarried children, married children if living together, parents who live or spend considerable time in the house, and siblings and their families that live in the house. I selected the pseudo names of the wife and husband to be consistent with their real surnames. For example, all the Wangs have the same real surnames. The village is clearly dominated by one lineage – nine of the husbands and two of the wives are Wangs – as is the case in many Chinese villages.

In Table 1, I use the IO framework to describe household organization. Inside (I) refers to living in the home village, including working in nearby towns; outside (O) refers to doing migrant work and not living in the village for a significant part of the year. For wife–husband division of labor, the first letter refers to the wife and the second refers to the husband. Thus, inside–inside (II) represents wife inside–husband inside; inside–outside (IO) wife inside–husband outside; outside–inside (OI) wife outside–husband inside; and outside–outside (OO) wife outside–husband outside. For the sake of simplicity, this table indicates for wife–husband divisions of labor for only 1994 and 2004, respectively, the years prior to the two Spring Festival interviews. As the case studies in the next section will show, two points in time are not adequate to show all the changes, but they are used here to describe overall trends. For other family members, Table 1 includes only their inside/outside status for the year 2004. In addition to summarizing demographic and household information, the table is an overall reference for the case studies to be discussed in the next two sections.

FLEXIBLE WORK

China's rural migrants are flexible workers. Their flexibility allows them to tap into urban and rural economic opportunities and to maintain the economic and social bases in the countryside. Below, I identify three features of their work flexibility – frequent changes in work location and activity, changing work location for wage, and switching between agricultural and non-agricultural work – and illustrate them via household biographies and narratives.

Frequent Changes in Work Location and Activity

Wang Cheng was 17 years old when he first left home for work (Table 2). In 1989, he decided to pursue migrant work because the family, having

Table 2. Biography of Household #4 (Zhang Shuzheng and Wang Cheng).

Year	Age (Years)	Husband's Location of Work	Husband's Work	Husband's Change of Migrant Status	Husband's Change of Work Location	Husband's Change of Work Type	Wife's Change of Migrant Status	Change of Division of Labor	Other
1989	17	Xinjiang	Construction; coalmines	N to M	L to D	W (twice)			Completed house project Got married
1993	21	Guangdong (Guangzhou)	Construction; miscellaneous jobs			W (twice)		II to IO	
1995	23	Home	Unknown	M to N	D to D	W		IO to II	Birth of son
1996	24	Guangdong (Guangzhou)	Construction	N to M	L to D	W	N to M	II to OO	
1997	25	Home; town near home	Brick factory; passenger transportation	M to N	D to L	W (twice)	M to N	OO to II	
2000	28	Town near home	Passenger transportation						Adoption of daughter
2001	29	Guangdong (Guangzhou)	Construction	N to M	L to D	W	N to M	II to OO	
Plan for 2005	33	Same	Same				M to N	OO to IO	

Note: Change of migrant status – N (non-migrant), M (migrant), Change of work location – L (local), D (non-local), Change of work type – W (change), Change of division of labor (see also Table 1) – II (wife inside–husband inside); IO (wife inside–husband outside); OI (wife outside–husband inside); OO (wife outside–husband outside).

completed a house project, was in debt. Being the oldest son, with two younger siblings still in school, Wang Cheng was expected to shoulder the financial responsibility for the family.

Wang Cheng's first destination of migrant work was Xinjiang, where he was hired by a construction team. When the team lost its contract a month later, he stayed in Xinjiang to look for jobs. Between 1989 and 1993, he worked in several coalmines. In 1993, Wang Cheng returned home to get married. After staying home for two months, he left for Guangzhou, Guangdong, while his newly wedded wife, Zhang Shuzheng, stayed home. In Guangzhou, Wang Cheng first found construction work through a *laoxiang* and later held a variety of miscellaneous jobs. In 1995, Zhang Shuzheng gave birth to a son, and Wang Cheng returned home and stayed for a year. His narratives are not clear on what work he did during that year, but in 1996, both Wang Cheng and Zhang Shuzheng left for construction work in Guangzhou, leaving the infant behind to be cared for by Wang's parents. A year later, the couple decided to return home.

At home, Wang Cheng first worked at the newly built brick factory, but he was soon involved in a legal battle about the factory and was forced to quit the job. He decided to buy his father's passenger tricycle and worked on passenger transport in a nearby town. In 2000, Wang Cheng and Zhang Shuzheng adopted a baby girl. In 2001, the passenger transport business was increasingly unprofitable, so after four years of staying home, the couple left for Guangzhou to find construction work again, leaving behind both their children – a six-year-old and an infant – and farmland to Wang's parents. The couple's goal was to earn and save as much as possible in order to fund a house renovation project. To reduce expenses, for three consecutive years they had forgone returning home for the Spring Festival. At the time of the 2005 interview, the plan was for Zhang Shuzheng to return home later that year in order to relieve the burden on Wang's parents (see also the section "Outside-Outside").

In summary, during a period of 16 years, Wang Cheng had left home for migrant work three times (1989, 1996, and 2001) and returned home twice (1995 and 1997) for extended periods of time, not counting short visits during Spring Festivals and the two months in 1993 when he returned to get married. Each of the two extended returns coincided with the addition of children. Between 1989 and 2005, Wang Cheng was outside for about 11 years and home for about 5 years. He had worked in construction, coalmines, brick factory, and passenger transportation. All told, he had changed work location five times and work type nine times. Other than towns near home, he had

worked in two provinces other than Sichuan – Xinjiang and Guangdong – both distant from home.

Li Wangping was 24 years old when he first left home for migrant work (Table 3). In 1983, he worked in a brick factory in Hunan. One year later, he returned home to get married and moved into his wife's (Wang Huilan) village. This practice is much less common than the patrilocal tradition where the wife moves to the husband's village. Nevertheless, when the wife's village has more resources, such as arable land, than the husband's, a matrilocal arrangement may be pursued. Li Wangping explained: "My home village was poorer than my wife's village. ... Our economic situation was very bad." After getting married, the wife's village became his home. Another household in the sample (#5) also has a matrilocal arrangement (Table 1).

After farming for more than two years and the birth of two daughters, in 1987 Li Wangping decided to go out (*chuqu*), because "we had too little farmland. At home I had too much idle time and made too little money. So I wanted to go out again." His wife stayed home to farm and care for their two daughters. This time, Li Wangping worked in a coalmine in Hebei. He made 300 yuan a month, an income much higher than his previous work in Hunan, but he found mining work too demanding and dangerous. After five months, he quit and returned home. From 1988 to 1991, Li Wangping stayed home to farm and build a house. In 1991, through a *laoxiang*'s connection, he found construction work in Zhangjiagang, Jiangsu. He worked there for two-and-a-half years, and in 1994 he concluded that "the wages were lower than other places. I wanted to try other places." Again, with the help of a *laoxiang*, Li Wangping found work at a petrochemical factory in Guangdong.

A year later, in 1995, Li Wangping returned home, because he and his wife had decided³ to lease farmland from fellow villagers who had left for migrant work. Given the prevalence of migrant work, it is not uncommon for rural families to lease out farmland to others.² After about a year (the narratives are not clear about the exact year) – in 1996 or 1997 – Li Wangping went out again to Zhangjiagang and did construction work there until 2004. The reason for his working in Zhangjiagang for more than seven years, instead of trying other places, was "my boss was nice, and the job was stable."

During the period when Li Wangping was doing migrant work, every year he returned home before the Spring Festival and helped with planting before leaving again. In 2004, he returned home to farm and for the first time his wife Wang Huilan went out. She worked in the garment factory in Zhejiang that her sister had been working in. This "experiment" turned out to be

Table 3. Biography of Household #9 (Wang Huilan and Li Wangping).

Year	Age (Years)	Husband's Location of Work	Husband's Work	Husband's Change of Migrant Status	Husband's Change of Work Location	Husband's Change of Work Type	Wife's Change of Migrant Status	Change of Division of Labor	Other
1983	24	Hunan	Brick factory	N to M	L to D	W		Beginning of II	Got married
1984	25	Home	Farming	M to N	D to L	W			Birth of daughter
1985	26	Same	Same						Birth of daughter
1986	27	Same	Same						
1987	28	Hebei	Coalmine	N to M	L to D	W		II to IO	
1988	29	Home	Farming	M to N	D to L	W		IO to II	House building project
1991	32	Jiangsu (Zhangjiagang)	Construction	N to M	L to D	W		II to IO	
1994	35	Guangdong	Petrochemical factory		D to D	W			
1995	36	Home	Farming	M to N	D to L	W		IO to II	Leasing farmland from others
1996 or 1997	37	Jiangsu (Zhangjiagang)	Construction	N to M	D to D	W			
2004	45	Home	Farming	M to N	D to L	W	N to M	II to OI	
Plan for 2005	46	Jiangsu (Zhangjiagang)	Construction	N to M	L to D	W		OI to OO	Leasing out farmland

successful, and thus the couple's plan for 2005 was to both go out but to different places: the husband to Zhangjiagang and the wife to Zhejiang. Unlike the previous case (Wang Cheng of Household #4), Li Wangping's daughters were older, aged, respectively, 20 and 19 years. Li's plan was to send them to boarding school. And, since Li Wangping's and Wang Huilan's parents had passed away, no one was available to help with farming. They decided, therefore, to lease out their farmland to other villagers and keep their house vacant.

Between 1983 and 2005, Li Wangping had left for migrant work 5 times (1983, 1987, 1991, 1996, and 2005), returned home for extended periods 4 times (1984, 1988, 1995, and 2004), changed the location of work 10 times, and changed the type of work 10 times. In addition to working at home, he had worked in four different provinces (Hunan, Hebei, Jiangsu, and Guangdong).

In both of the above case studies, the husband's work location and activity changed frequently, underscoring the following factors that determine the mobility and work of migrants. First, migrants' returning home for an extended period of time tends to coincide with major life-events such as birth of child, household events such as a house project, and new economic opportunities such as leasing farmland from others (see also Wang & Fan, 2006). This shows that the social and economic activities that physically take place in the countryside may disrupt migrants' work and explain for long breaks in an otherwise continuous migrant work tenure. Farming is still important. To Li Wangping, for example, farming (the land leased from others) explained one of his extended returns. Second, after each extended return, both husbands decided to go out again. This suggests that despite migrants' returns and commitment to rural activities, migrant work is still considered a more attractive source of income than those in the countryside, and is something rural Chinese would resort to especially when village-based activities are not successful, as in the case of Wang Cheng.

Third, wages, ease of finding jobs, and *laoxiang* connections appear to be much more important determinants than long-term considerations such as seniority, skill acquisition, and career development, of the location and type of migrant work. Thus, migrants switch from one type of work – be it construction, mining, or manufacturing – to another readily, and they are footloose in terms of work location. In short, rural migrants are highly mobile and flexible. Fourth, the jobs these migrants are channeled to require low skills, accounting in part for the relative ease with which they switch from one type of work to another. Finally, migrants' moves between jobs and between work locations can be frequent or may not occur for years.

before settling on Zhangjiagang. His experience again supports the observation that wage, ease of finding jobs, and a migrant community are important determinants of the location of migrant work, and that migrants' flexibility allows them to choose locations that offer attractive wages.

Switching between Agricultural and Non-Agricultural Work

Not only are migrants flexible, but villagers who spend considerable time in the countryside are also flexible in terms of location, type, and schedule of work. The following two cases illustrate two different models of combining agricultural and non-agricultural work.

Jiang Zhengyi's (Household #11) experience may not be typical but it shows that urban work is not necessarily the primary income source for a migrant worker. Aged 53 years in 2005, he had done migrant work since 1991, mostly in construction in Fujian and Guizhou. His wife, Tan Meirong, stayed home to farm and care for their two sons. Different from the husbands in the previous case studies, Jiang Zhengyi spent considerable time farming in the home village. Every year, he left home in March or April after planting, and returned home in July for harvest and stayed until the next spring. In other words, he did migrant work for only four to five months a year. The rest of the year, he helped his wife to work on not only their farmland, but also the farmland leased from three families. As a result, farming constituted the leading source of income for Jiang Zhengyi and his wife (excluding the income from their sons), followed by animal husbandry and Jiang's migrant work. Their diversification of income sources was enabled by the husband's seasonal migration between home and outside and seasonal switch between agriculture and non-agricultural, migrant work.

Among the left-behind, it is not difficult to find examples of combining and switching between agricultural and non-agricultural work. In Household #3, discussed earlier, Deng Yuling stayed in the village all along, while her husband Wang Xinmin did migrant work. Deng's main responsibilities were to farm and care for their two children. Her agricultural work consisted of farming 2.1 *mu* (1 *mu* = 1/15 ha or 1/6 acre) of paddy field and 0.4 *mu* of "dry" field for wheat and sweet potatoes, as well as raising pigs. At the same time, she worked every other day, from 7 to 11 in the morning and 3 to 5 in the afternoon, in the local brick factory. This schedule allowed her to earn wages from non-agricultural work and meet her agricultural and care-giving duties, simultaneously and without leaving the village. Different

from Jiang Zhengyi in Household #11, Deng Yuling's switch between agricultural and non-agricultural work was not seasonal but daily.

The above two cases show that not only are rural Chinese flexible about their location and type of work, but they are also flexible about the tenure and temporal arrangement of the work. They can switch back and forth between different types of work seasonally or even daily. Such flexibility highlights the objectives to diversify income sources, augment income, and balance various household responsibilities. It also reinforces the notion that farming is still an important activity for migrant households, one that may entail migrants' extended returns.

FLEXIBLE HOUSEHOLD

Migrants' flexibility in the location, type, and tenure of work is possible because of their economic and social bases in the countryside, namely the house and farmland on one hand and the spouse, parents, and other family members on the other. Work flexibility also requires that household organization be flexible. Using the division-of-labor framework, this section focuses on migrants' household organization.

A split-household strategy is the key to understanding how rural households support migrants' work flexibility. Considering the wife and husband as the core of the rural household, Table 5 summarizes how the wife-husband division of labor had changed between 1994 and 2004. Given the fluidity of migrant work, as described in the last section, examination of two specific points in time may miss important changes in between and before the first point in time. Nevertheless, Table 5 highlights common

Table 5. Changes in Gender Division of Labor.

1994	2004				Sum
	II	IO	OI	OO	
II	2	0	1	1	4
IO	1	4	1	3	9
OI	1	0	0	0	1
OO	0	0	0	2	2
Sum	4	4	2	6	16

Note: See Table 1.

forms of household organization and the overall trends, while the case studies that follow reveal more detailed changes.

In 1994, the most prevalent household arrangement was the traditional IO gender division of labor, which described 9 of the 16 households (Households #2, #3, #4, #5, #7, #8, #9, #10, and #11; see also Table 1). Indeed, during the 1980s and 1990s, the most common form of split households was one where the husband does migrant work and the wife stays behind to farm and raise children (Fan, 2004, 2008, pp. 89–92; Tan, 1996). In 1994, the OO model accounted for only 2 of the 16 households (#6 and #15). By 2004, however, OO had become the most popular arrangement, accounting for 6 households (#2, #4, #5, #6, #13, and #15). In addition, both of the OI households in 2004 planned to switch to OO in the following year (#9 and #16). By contrast, the number of households with an IO arrangement decreased from 9 in 1994 to 4 in 2004.

Inside–Outside (IO)

The dominance of the IO arrangement in 1994 underscores the prominence of traditional gender norms in the Chinese rural household. Below, narratives selected from three households illustrate the expected gender roles, especially those of women.

Wang Gen (Household #7) had done migrant work since 1983 and continued doing so after getting married in 1987. His wife, Pan Yueqin, stayed home to farm and care for their two children. She explained the division of labor they chose:

Men should make greater [economic] contribution to the family than women. Just like our family, the husband goes out to make money [and the wife stays home].

Her comment underscores the persistence of gender norms and the expectation for women to play care-giving roles.

Likewise, in Household #8, Wei Daming had done migrant work for more than 20 years, while his wife, Hu Wenfen, a teacher at a local nursery school, stayed in the village to take care of their son. Wei Daming explained why his wife did not pursue migrant work:

If my wife did migrant work she could probably earn quite a bit, but I do not want her to go out. Children in the countryside must study hard or else their future [livelihood] is bleak.

His comment suggests that not only are wives expected to provide care-giving to children, but a mother's constant presence is considered very

important for children's education, a reason the IO arrangement persisted in this household.

Children's education is also an important reason why migrants do not transplant their households to the city. Wang Xinmin (Household #3), also discussed earlier, had done migrant work for more than 20 years, while his wife shouldered all village responsibilities, including taking care of two children. Wang Xinmin returned home at least once a year, during the Spring Festival. And, in 1997, he installed a telephone set, the first in the village. By calling home once a week, he was able to maintain close contact with his wife and children. Once a month or every other month, he would send money home. Wang Xinmin explained why he and his wife chose a long-term split-household arrangement, rather than moving the family to the city (Zhangjiagang) altogether:

I cannot take the children with me. School is too expensive in Zhangjiagang; the fee is twice what we pay at home. Expenses for the children at home are about 2,000 yuan a year but would be 5,000 yuan over there. ... I live at the construction site. If my wife and children go there, we will have to rent a place ...

The above three cases all underscore the persistence of traditional gender norms – the wife taking care of the inside and the husband bringing home income from the outside. Through the split-household arrangement, these households can take advantage of higher wages in the city and low cost of living in the village and ensure that the children would be well taken care of (by the wives) and would receive education.

Outside–Inside (OI)

Households where the wife does migrant work and the husband stays in the village are not common. When an OI arrangement is selected, it is usually short-lived. For example, in Household #9 (discussed earlier and in Table 3), after one year of staying home while his wife did migrant work (in 2004), Li Wangping planned to leave for migrant work as well in the following year, thus changing the household arrangement from OI to OO.

Household #1 illustrates another failed attempt of OO arrangements. In 1994 and 1995, Zhao Xiaolan worked in a sewing machine factory in Jiangsu while her husband Wang Guohui stayed home to farm and take care of their two children. Even though Zhao Xiaolan was proud of her economic achievements, she was pressured by her husband to return home. When interviewed in 1995, they were fighting about this matter. In 1996,

Zhao Xiaolan decided to return to the village for good. Her decision reflected the high priority given to preserving traditional gender norms, despite the lost economic opportunities by not pursuing migrant work. Often, topics such as gender norms are discussed in connection to the children. Zhao Xiaolan explained why she returned:

The main reason for my return was I was unable to go out [due to family responsibilities]. Both my daughters were at school age, and my younger daughter in particular needed care [because of her young age]. ... In terms of raising children, migrant households – especially those where both the husband and wife are outside – are usually unable to supervise the children's schoolwork.

By electing to stay in the village, Zhao Xiaolan fulfilled the traditional norm that mothers raise and educate children and managed to safeguard the husband-wife relations. These social accomplishments were made at the expense of economic opportunities for her and standard of living for the family. Nonetheless, the couple was flexible in their work:

... a brick factory was built nearby ... we began part-time work there. This way, we live at home and there are no additional living expenses [compared to *dagong*]. Beginning in 2001, we also leased land from relatives to farm.

Like several case studies discussed earlier, this household engaged in both agricultural and non-agricultural work locally, and they took advantage of non-farm economic opportunities in the village. The husband and wife's flexibility in the type and schedule of work, therefore, helped to mitigate the opportunity cost due to their unwillingness to pursue a split-household arrangement. For both Households #1 and #9, the brevity and failure of the OI arrangement underscores the depth and persistence of gender norms.

Outside-Outside (OO)

When both the husband and wife leave home for migrant work, the most common strategy is to recruit their parents' help to farm and take care of the left-behind children. Among the six OO couples in 2004, all had parents living in the same household. In households that previously had an IO arrangement, the departure of the wife is made possible by the migrants' parents replacing her as care-givers, thus changing the household arrangement from gender division of labor to intergenerational division of labor.

In Household #5, Wang Mingli's husband, Yu Zhongliang, had for years been doing migrant work in Fujian. In 1996, Wang Mingli left home to join her husband, leaving their two-year-old son to her parents' care. The

migrant couple did not return every Spring Festival. Instead, their communication with the left-behind parents and child was mostly via telephone, especially since they installed a telephone set in the house in 2002. Wang Mingli's father explained the rationale for choosing intergenerational division of labor:

It is impossible for them to take their son with them to the city. Their main goal doing migrant work is to earn money. They don't have energy to take care of the child. ... It's better that the husband and wife stay in the same place [versus one doing migrant work and another staying home]. ... I am a retired teacher, so I know how to teach a child. ... I take good care of their son, so they can make more money outside. Unless something happens, I don't expect and I don't want them to return home, not even for the Spring Festival. ... Train tickets are expensive and hard to get ... returning once every three or four years is fine.

Like many grandparents in the countryside, Wang Mingli's father felt obligated to help raise the grandchild during the migrants' absence. His explanation shows not only selflessness on his part, but also the pursuit of efficiency – migrants' social support system in the village can enable them to maximize the time spent outside and also their earnings from migrant work.

Intergenerational division of labor, however, is not problem-free. Since 2001, Wang Cheng's (Household #4) children had been taken care of by his parents, while he and his wife did migrant work. By 2005, the children were, respectively, nine and four years old. Increasingly, however, Wang Cheng's parents found this arrangement problematic, because of their deteriorating health and inability to supervise the nine-year-old's schoolwork. They asked the couple to return. After some negotiation, a compromise was reached: Wang Cheng's wife would return in the summer of 2005 while he would stay in Guangzhou. In other words, intergenerational division of labor would soon be replaced by the traditional IO arrangement.

The above cases show that rural Chinese are flexible in not only work location and activity, but also who participate in migrant work. Wives may join the migrant husbands if their parents are available to help. Thus, work flexibility entails flexibility in household division of labor. Nevertheless, if intergenerational division of labor fails, then it is likely replaced by an IO arrangement, once again underscoring the persistence of gender norms.

Extended Family

Household division of labor may involve many members of the extended family. The elderly, siblings, and other family members can pool their

resources together to fulfill household and farming responsibilities, such that migrants can maximize their time in and earnings from migrant work. Such a strategy would inevitably affect the traditional practice of *fenjia*, where adult sons establish their independent households after they get married.

In Household #2, two married brothers and their wives and children were living under one roof, together with the brothers' parents (see Table 1). The brothers and their wives were all migrant workers. Of their four children, the 18-year-old was doing migrant work and the other three – ranging from 12 to 14 years old – stayed in the village with the brothers' parents. *Fenjia* was postponed in order to facilitate the intergenerational division-of-labor arrangement. Of the 10 people in the extended family, 5 were migrant workers and 5 were staying in the village. The two brothers' father commented:

We tried *fenjia* once but changed our minds the next day. The adults are all doing migrant work. My wife and I are taking care of the grandchildren. How can we *fenjia*?

Because travel was costly, none of the migrant workers in this household returned regularly for the Spring Festival. Instead, a telephone set was installed and the migrants frequently called home. That an increasing number of migrants skip returning for the Spring Festival suggests that over time the economic benefits of migrant work are given priority over social and cultural traditions. Nevertheless, the more widespread use of the telephone – by 2005, about 120 households in the village had telephone sets and 250 households had mobile phones – may have, to a significant degree, substituted for physical travel as the preferred means of maintaining ties with the stay-behind family members.

The above case reinforces the observation that migrant households are flexible in their division of labor and suggests that the pursuit of migrant work may increase the appeal of extended family.

Second-Generation Migrant Workers

Increasingly, the children of migrants are themselves joining the labor migration streams. In 2005, Jiang Zhengyi (Household #11, also discussed earlier) was 53 years old and among the oldest migrant workers in the village. His oldest son, having graduated from college, had found a technician job in Chongqing and was therefore pursuing a career path different from the vast majority of migrant workers. Jiang Zhengyi's youngest son, however, chose a path similar to the first-generation migrants.

On finishing (senior secondary) school, he found work in factories and later as a painter. Now that both sons were financially independent, Jiang Zhengyi planned to return to the countryside in the near future:

I will continue migrant work for two or three more years. When my sons are older I will stop *dagong*. ... We are getting old, and it is our hope that one of our sons will stay in the village and take care of us. The main reason for many years of hard work raising children is for old age security.

His comment underscores the effect of the life cycle and the deep-rooted tradition that grown-up children are part of the social support system and are the main source of old-age security, especially in the countryside.

Household #14 is an example of how the second-generation's migrant work has lifted the family out of poverty. Three years after Chen Guowei began migrant work, in 1990, he was injured and became paralyzed. His wife, Li Chenxia, then became the family's sole breadwinner. Her farming activity supported their two sons' education, paid off a debt, and paid for the disabled husband's medical expenses. Not until their two sons were old enough to do migrant work was there enough food for the family. The oldest son began migrant work at the age of 14 years and the younger son at the age of 17 years.

By 2005, Chen Guowei's younger son, aged 19 years, was married and had an eight-month-old child. Both the son and the daughter-in-law were doing migrant work, leaving the infant to Li Chenxia's care. Chen Guowei and Li Chenxia were pleased with the remittances sent by their children. Their dream was that both sons would make enough money to build their own houses in the village. In this household, the second-generation's pursuit of migrant work had motivated intergenerational division of labor. Just like Households #4 and #5 discussed earlier, such household organization is mutually beneficial: the stay-behind grandparents take care of the grandchildren so that migrant workers can focus on making money, building up their economic security and benefiting the entire household.

Both the above cases show that migrant work as a means of livelihood is being passed from one generation to the next. Veteran migrants that are physically capable may still be doing migrant work even after their children are old enough to contribute financially to the family, but the second generation's joining migrant work can provide much needed relief to the parents and pave way for their retirement. The second-generation's migrant work, in turn, may entail intergenerational division of labor as their parents stay behind in the village and are available to help.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have sought to foreground the relationship between labor migration and household organization. In particular, I have highlighted households that are split into two or more places as a result of migrants leaving their family members behind. This split-household arrangement may be due to migrants' inability to bring along their family, but I have argued that it is also due to migrants' preference for circulating between the site of work and the home community, a strategy that enables them to obtain the best of both worlds and protect their economic and social security in the countryside.

In the case of rural-urban labor migration in China, I have shown that the split-household arrangement is an outcome of migrants' pursuit of a strategy of flexibility. My analysis of household biographies and narratives from a village in Sichuan highlights migrants' flexibility in the type, location, and tenure of work as their strength. By changing jobs and the type of work and by being footloose, rural migrants take advantage of regional wage differentials. By switching back and forth between the countryside and urban areas, they play dual roles of farmers and urban workers and enjoy the best of both worlds – urban work to boost income and improve rural living, and the countryside for security, livelihood, and long-term settlement. Their continuing to support agriculture reinforces the notion that access to farmland is still highly valued. Despite agriculture's low return, migrants still have strong desire to protect and take care of their farmland (Zhu, 2003, 2007). At the time of this chapter's writing, millions of rural migrants have lost jobs as one after another Chinese manufacturer goes out of business because of the global financial crisis. Many migrants are compelled to make the difficult choice between returning home to farm and facing unemployment in the city. This is a vivid reminder that agriculture remains an important source of subsistence and economic security for rural Chinese.

To accommodate migrants' work flexibility, their households are, accordingly, flexible in organization. Not only are migrants ready to split the household between the city and the countryside, but households frequently change from one form of division of labor to another. The IO model highlights traditional gender ideology that defines women in relation to village and care-giving responsibilities. But, over time, the OO arrangement, where both the husband and wife pursue migrant work, is increasingly popular and may be replacing the IO model. Despite this change, migrants frequently return for extended periods of time, and when the return is for the purpose of caring for children, it is often the wife rather than the husband that returns. Usually, the OO arrangement is facilitated by

intergenerational division of labor in the form of help by the elderly and assistance by the extended family. Intergenerational division of labor takes place also when the second generation begins migrant work and replaces first-generation migrants. The readiness to collaborate and negotiate mutually beneficial household organization supports the observation that migration has not undermined the tradition of extended families in the Chinese countryside (Goldstein, Guo, & Goldstein, 1997). On the contrary, the need for and popularity of gender, intergenerational, and even interhousehold divisions of labor suggest that the extended family tradition is strongly appealing.

NOTES

1. Roberts (2007) compares this situation to Mexico-US immigrants who have access to farmland in rural Mexico that cannot be sold and that has become not only an economic asset, but also a base for all household activities.

2. In the Chinese countryside, land "leasing" arrangements are largely informal. A popular arrangement is one where the leaser pays agricultural tax, and the lessee takes all the yield during the period of the lease and pays no rent to the leaser. This arrangement benefits both parties as the lessee is rewarded for his/her time and effort while protecting the farmland's boundary and keeping it fertile for the leaser's return.

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THE RUBIK'S CUBE STATE: A RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF POLITICAL CHANGE IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

Bai Gao

China presents a major puzzle for our time.

At first glance, foreign observers are often perplexed by China's two sharply contrasting images in globalization. On the economic front, China has been the forerunner in expanding trade and global production. Emerging as the world factory in the international division of labor, the might of the Chinese economy can be felt in every corner of the globe. On the political front, however, China is still ruled by an authoritarian regime, remaining untouched by the third wave of democratization, a powerful political current that has swept through many countries in Europe, Latin America, Asia, and elsewhere over the past three decades. According to conventional wisdom, it simply does not make sense for a country to engage its economy in the world capitalist system so deeply but at the same time retain a political regime that is widely perceived as a legacy of past centuries. The ongoing global financial crisis has added a new twist to the debate on China: since many Western countries are debating whether to nationalize their banks and China is suddenly being perceived as the

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