Extended Abstract

In migration studies, a key inquiry is the *initiation of migration*. Several theoretical explanations have been developed since the 1960s, offering the interpretation of migration either as a rational individual choice, such as the school of neoclassical economics (Schultz 1961, Sjaastad 1962, Todaro 1969), or as a household decision, typically argued by scholars in the school of "new economics of migration" (Mincer 1978, Katz and Stark 1986). Feminist scholars extend the "household approach" by investigating intra-household power relations, including gender relations and migrants' agency (Chant and Radcliffe 1992, Momsen 1992, Silvey and Lawson 1999, Lawson 1998). While theories from both analytical levels (individual and household) are well supported by empirical studies, how individuals within the same family interact with each other, especially, how children and parents, the very important members of a family, impact people’s migration decision over time has not received enough attention.

*Return migration* is another focus of migration studies. Debates about whether returned migrants contribute to the development of the place of origin have been going on for many years (for example, Ma 2001, Bai and He 2002). However, few scholars who study the internal migration in China relate the return migration with the general migration processes – returners may join migration again. In international migration studies, circular migration is suggested a strategy to gain “the benefits of the both worlds” (Hugo 2006, Bieckmann and Muskens 2007). In this paper, I seek to combine
the discussions of *initiation of migration, returned migrants, and circular migration* together. I argue in China, people constantly change their migration status to contribute to the economic prosperity and social-economic security of the household. Particularly, in this paper, I seek to illuminate how people’s migration behaviors are impacted by their parents and children over time, and whether children and parents impact men and women differently.

The data I used in the paper were coded according to interview records of the same 300 households in twelve villages in Sichuan and Anhui provinces in the year 1995, 2005, and 2009. All the household members’ migration status, meaning whether the member was in the village, or outside doing migration jobs in the cities between the year of birth (or the year 1980 if he/she was born before 1980) till 2009 was recorded. The dataset provides rich information on all family members’ individual demographic characteristics, such as age, education level, self-reported health, as well as some details on important family events, such as birth, marriage, death, and illness. Migrant’s type of work in the destination cities, and the community level information, such as the distance of the origin village to the town, the number of paved road from the village to the town, and migrant’s destination cities are also recorded in the data. This dataset is one of few longitudinal dataset on internal migration in China.

In the paper, I adopt a multi-level migration model developed by Douglas Massey and his colleagues (Massey 1990, Massey and Espinosa 1997). By controlling the impact of individual, community and macroeconomic level factors, I try to evaluate the impact of children and parents on people’s migration status. In particular, I study whether the change of the number of children, children’s age, education level and health status, and
the change of parents’ age and health, impact people’s coming in and withdraw from the
migration to the cities. Most indicators, such as the age, education level, health, and
the number of children and parents vary through time to yield a repeated event discrete-
time event-history analysis.

Findings: I find the age and the education level of the children, as well as the health
condition of the parents significantly impact the probabilities of initiating the change of
migration status, although the impacts work in different directions on men and women:
when the increase of children’s ages generally increases the probability of starting
migration for men, the change of the children’s ages only starts to impact women’s out-
migration when the children reach the age of six – the age when children about to start
primary school in China. Women are very likely to return to the villages when the
children are 16 years old and still in school – the time when the children are preparing
for senior high school entrance exam. When children of the household start going to
college, both men and women’s migration probability significantly increases. Although
having parents in villages significantly increases both genders’ migration probability,
when the parents report bad health issues, the women are very likely to return to
villages, while men’s migration status usually do not change. The results show the
importance of seeing migration as a household strategy in China. People migrate in
order to support the economic demand of the family, such as supporting children's
education needs and subsidizing parents’ medical spending. However, when there is a
conflict between making money and investing for the household’s security – taking care
of the children when they are preparing for senior high school entrance exams, which
may lead them to a city hukou if they can get into colleges, thus they are more likely to
have a stable future in the cities -- security becomes the priority. Women in rural China are still the major care givers of both children and parents. Gender still plays an important role in the division of labor within a household in China.