

Family Characteristics of Internal Migration in China

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Social factors and family considerations play an important part in shaping migration patterns and influencing outcomes

Family life in China has changed extensively since the founding of the People's Republic, as evident in trends towards later marriage, lower fertility and smaller households. Some consider that these are the direct result of government policies on the family, while others interpret them as outcomes of industrialization and urbanization (Wolf, 1986). At first sight, there appears to be little room for similar debate in relation to migration and the family in China, because of the strength of government influence on population redistribution. Yet despite the dominance of the State, social factors and family considerations play an important part in shaping migration patterns and influencing outcomes. The goals of enhancing family welfare and meeting family obligations could create a willingness or eagerness to move when opportunities arise, and they are undoubtedly contributing to the rising tide of "temporary" movement in China.

This article discusses the family characteristics of internal migrants to urban areas in China and the influence of family considerations as direct and indirect causes of movement. A particular concern is the association between migration and life-cycle events which mark the transition points in individual and family experience. The article is based on a survey of migration in China, conducted by the Chinese Academy of the Social Sciences (CASS) in 1986. The survey covered 0.2 per cent of households in 74 cities and towns in China and collected information on 100,267 persons. The data refer to the volume of movement to cities and towns, characteristics of movers, reasons for movement and its consequences (Ma Xia, forthcoming); the survey did not collect information on intra-urban migration or movement to rural destinations, and the definition of "temporary migration" excluded persons who had been in an urban area without official registration for more than a year.

Statistics on family characteristics in the survey include family type, relationship to the head of the household, issue and marital status. Further information, which is particularly helpful in developing a life-cycle perspective on migration, can be gleaned from other questions about reasons for moving and occupation at the time of the move. The latter are discussed here, not for their own sake, but for the insights they provide into the family characteristics of movers. As in the survey as a whole, the data refer to urban China. The survey statistics offer a number of options in terms of analysing the timing of migration. Two approaches were adopted in this article in order to make full use of the most relevant data, namely (a) analysis of the characteristics of persons who moved in the 10 years prior to the survey and (b) analysis of characteristics at the time of the last move by age at the last move, irrespective of the year in which the movement occurred. The first approach has the advantage of minimizing temporal variations in the data while the second permits use of the whole sample, rather than a subset. Because the survey recorded only the most recent migration, the data are weighted to more recent changes such that 47 per cent of all the in-migrants (17,890 out of a total of 38,104 in-migrants) had moved during the previous 10 years, and 72 per cent had moved in the period 1966-1986. The data on year of last in-migration broadly reflect that city ward migration in China is most typical during youth and old age, although historical events have complicated the picture. The oldest people in the sample had relatively high proportions moving either within the preceding 10 years or 30 to 40 years before the survey.

Migration and the family

In demographic studies, a household definition of the family is commonly employed on the assumption that the co-resident kin are the main decision makers in relation to matters such as fertility and migration, as well as because the family household is seen as the basic unit of society in which individuals receive nurture and support. Defining the family as co-resident kin (Burch, 1979), however, poses the risk of ignoring the kin network, members of which may influence decision making and figure prominently in the everyday lives and concerns of the family. Migration studies in developing countries have observed repeatedly that individuals or families move not only for their own ends but also to contribute to the welfare of a wider circle of relatives. The family is significant as a decision-making unit in migration, but the decision makers and the movers need not be the same. A review of the literature on this subject (Nisa, 1986, pp. 22-26) has drawn attention to a number of important ideas about migration and the family in several countries in Asia and Africa, although their general relevance is unknown:

The family, rather than the individual, is the basic decision-making unit (DeJong and Gardner, 1981)

Migration decisions are made for the welfare of the family, often by the head of the family (Connell et al., 1976).

Parental pressure can discourage the permanent migration of children in small families and eldest children in large families in order to maintain occupancy of family land and support for the aged (Caldwell, 1969).

While economic motives are important in migration, social factors, such as the presence of supportive relatives at the destination, can be decisive, leading to family-based chain migration. Equally, migration may be ruled out in order to enable the family to stay together and assist each other irrespective of economic circumstances (Hugo, 1981).

If migration requires on-going financial support from the family to the migrant, for instance to obtain further education, only wealthier families encourage such movement (Kothari, 1980).

While these ideas may have less relevance to a centrally planned economy than to a market economy, the continuing importance of the family as a source of economic and social support in old age in China, together with new policies fostering some initiatives in individual enterprise, suggest that family welfare is likely to be a significant underlying influence on the patterns and selectivity of migration in China. For women, family considerations are commonly the decisive factors in their migration, whether because of marriage, accompanying the husband on an employment transfer, or going to live with relatives, especially in later life. The underdevelopment of government support for vulnerable groups in China, such as the poor, the disabled and the elderly, implies that the family necessarily has the key role in this sphere and migration is one important response to its obligations. Recent research on the elderly in developing countries, however, has indicated that they wish to preserve their economic independence as long as they can such as by continuing to work and by not distributing their assets to children (Torrey, 1988, p. 495). The CASS survey data help to elucidate some aspects of migration and the family, but clarification of the nature of the family as a source of welfare, and the role of migration in facilitating this role, must await more detailed inquiry into questions such as the extent to which migrants send remittances to relatives, the role of the family in supporting the frail elderly and the frequency with which relatives live in neighbouring dwellings and render mutual assistance.

Family structure

The latter point is very relevant since extended family households are uncommon in contemporary China, thereby making linkages and exchanges between households more important. The family in China has changed greatly since 1949. The proportion of multi-generation households has declined from possibly 50 per cent of households in 1930 to 19 per cent in 1982, while the representation of one- and two-generation households has increased to a level approaching Western patterns of household composition. At the 1982 census, 67 per cent of households in China consisted of two generations, and 14 per cent had only one (Ma Xia, 1987, p. 17). The nuclear family has become the dominant family form (Zeng Yi, 1986, p. 675). Most of the previous economic functions of the family in production and distribution have declined, a change which underlies not only shifts in household structure but also changes in family allegiances placing greater emphasis on responsibilities to children and elderly parents (Ma Xia, 1987, pp. 2-5). Nevertheless, the Chinese family remains patriarchal, despite the Government's commitment to sexual equality. There is still a strong preference for sons, who have better access to education, desirable employment and family inheritances, and the ideology of male dominance persists (Arnold and Zhaoxiang, 1986).

Family characteristics in contemporary migration flows may be expected to reflect the new situation where the nuclear family has unprecedented prevalence. The emergence of smaller and less complex family units could be conducive to higher rates of movement and greater flexibility in adapting to altering economic opportunities, but the overriding influence of the State in migration decisions means that responses to change are often managed rather than spontaneous. Nevertheless, poverty and a shortage of land for agriculture are still responsible for a sizeable spontaneous movement from rural areas to border provinces, where there are uncultivated lands as well as employment opportunities in local industries and mining (Ma Xia, no date). Also, the high volume of temporary and unsanctioned migration in the 1980s is indicative of a resurgence of individualistic migration.

In the 1986 CASS survey, the nuclear family was predominant at all but the youngest and oldest ages of household heads (table 1). In the prime years of child-rearing, i.e. 25 to 44 years, more than 80 per cent of household heads were in nuclear family households, consisting of a married couple and their unmarried children. "Stem families", which include a married couple plus at least one of their parents, were the next most important family type and were most frequent where the household head was aged 50 years or more, reflecting that the younger generation had taken up residence in the parent's home. Stem families represented 25 per cent of families among heads aged 50-54 years, rising to 41 per cent at ages 65 and over. A variation on this type, the "joint-stem family", was also most common at older ages of the household head; it was characterized by the presence of two adult generations with two married couples in the same generation. "Joint families", with at least two couples in the same generation, nowhere accounted for more than 2 per cent of family types. The remainder, "other" households, had no married couples and included persons living alone. These households, many of which do not strictly qualify to be called "family" households, occurred mostly at the youngest and oldest ages. Overall, the figures suggest that while it is common in urban China for married couples to form separate households, co-residence of different adult generations occurs frequently as a result of the movement of the younger generation into the older generation's home as well as through older people joining the household of a son or daughter.

Table 1: Family type and age of household heads, urban China, 1986

Age group	Nuclear	Stem	Joint	Joint-stem	Other	Total	N
15-19	42.6	8.2	1.6	1.6	45.9	100	61
20-24	62.6	7.6	1.2	0.5	28.2	100	433

25-29	82.1	6.9	1.4	1.1	8.5	100	1,619
30-34	84.9	7.2	1.5	0.8	5.6	100	2,963
35-39	84.5	9.0	1.1	0.6	4.8	100	2,794
40-44	82.8	11.4	1.0	0.7	4.1	100	2,303
45-49	76.8	16.4	0.8	1.3	4.6	100	2,475
50-54	63.7	24.8	1.3	4.5	5.7	100	2,883
55-59	51.4	32.0	1.6	6.7	8.3	100	2,584
60-64	48.9	32.1	2.0	7.6	9.3	100	2,158
65+	34.6	41.5	1.8	6.0	16.1	100	3,378
Total	66.4	20.8	1.4	3.3	8.1	100	23,651

Source: CASS Migration Survey, 1986

Note: A third of household heads (permanent residents) were female, but the distribution of family types by age did not differ appreciably according to whether the head was male or female. This table presents combined figures for both sexes.

Zeng Yi (1986, p. 677) noted that the three-generation household remains an important family type in China, representing 19 per cent of households at the 1982 census. The author used the term "extended family" to describe three-generation households, but many of these would not be extended in the strict sense of having more than one intact married couple. The proportion of three-generation households also understates the role of the family in supporting the older generation since, while the elderly often live with a son or daughter, such households inevitably have two rather than three generations after the grand-children leave home. Thus, the frequency of two-generation households in urban China is by no means due exclusively to the prevalence of the nuclear family. Statistics on the number of two-generation households of the elderly and their offspring are not yet available but the proportion could rival the figure for three-generation households: for example, in the 1986 survey, 31 per cent of women aged 65 and over dwelt as a parent or parent-in-law of the household head, compared with 12 per cent of men of the same age.

The reasons for co-residence underscore the role of migration in the establishment of such households. In many instances the movement entails intra-urban migration rather than only the rural-to-urban and inter-urban movement covered in the CASS survey. Changes such as shifts in family life-style preferences and growth in the numbers receiving pensions could reduce the propensity for co-residence, but the following factors are more likely to sustain it (Zeng Yi, 1986, pp. 691-694):

Under the responsibility system, introduced in the early 1980s, peasant families have been replacing production teams as the unit of production, which can make larger households advantageous.

In urban areas, there has been rapid growth in the number of privately owned industrial and commercial enterprises, in which ownership by a large family offers the benefits of an inexpensive and committed labour supply.

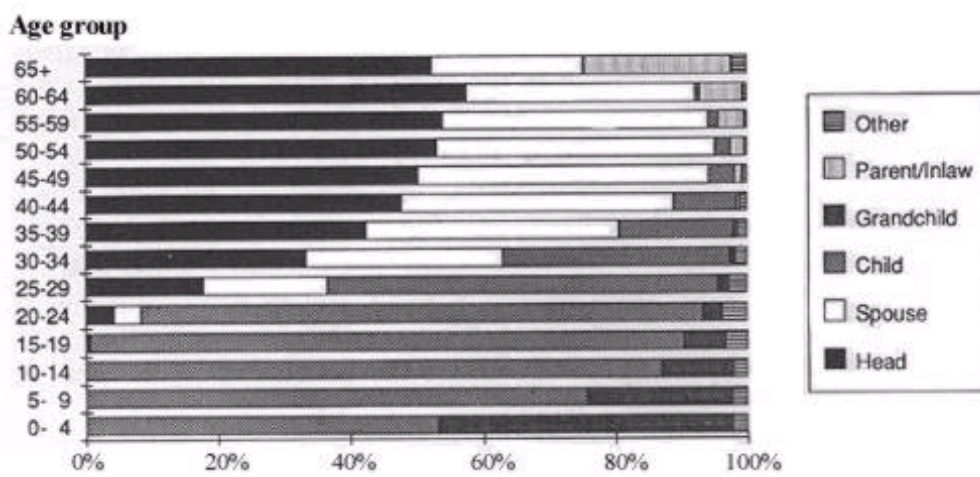
The lack of an old-age pension system in rural China.

The Government favours three-generation families because they uphold a Chinese cultural tradition and because "it enables the State to spend less on old-age care. Both the current Marriage Law and the Chinese Constitution state explicitly that children have full responsibility for caring for their parents in old age".

Migration to towns and cities is expected to increase the number of "extended" families because relatives provide temporary accommodation for young migrants and because such migration may outpace the construction of new housing.

Continuation of the ethical tradition of respect and care for the elderly. Article 49 of the 1982 Constitution of China states that "... children who have come of age have the duty to support and assist their parents".

Figure 1: Relationship of permanent residents to household head by age, 1986



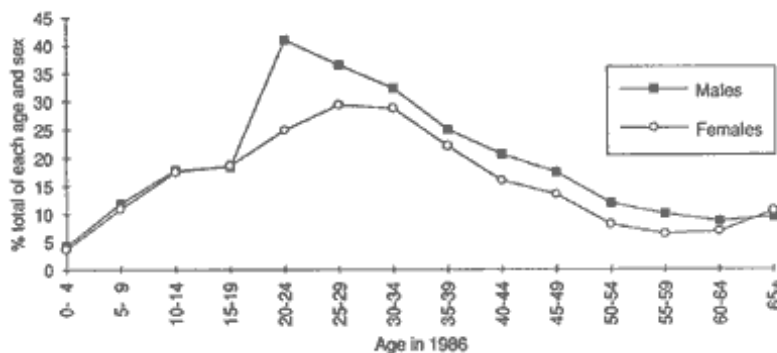
Source: CASS Migration Survey, 1986

Information on the relationship of family members to the household head confirms the pervasive simplicity in the structure of urban family dwellings, most of which, in a Western context, would be regarded as variations on a nuclear family structure. In the West, the presence of a single elderly relative in an otherwise nuclear family is not regarded as creating an extended family household. Moreover, since inheritance of land is no longer an option in China, creation of a stem family does not function in the traditional sense of serving to allow an eldest son to take early responsibility for the family's property. The principal continuing function of the stem family household is to facilitate mutual support between generations, although, since the 1980s, the responsibility system and the encouragement of private enterprise have been renewing the role of the family as a unit of production. The simplicity of household structures is evident from the predominance of nuclear family relationships (head, spouse, child, parent) and the rarity of siblings, other relatives and non-relatives in households (figure 1). An important unknown here, however, is the frequency with which relatives live in adjacent dwellings and function as an extended family for many purposes. In such a context, for example, living alone but next door to relatives could be almost equivalent to sharing their dwelling.

Age, sex and marital status

The events and types of behaviour which commonly precipitate migration are typical in the younger adult ages, and rates of movement have been highest among people in their twenties and early thirties. In order to reveal the pattern of age and sex differentials in migration, statistics were compiled on the proportions whose most recent move was in the interval 1977-1986 (figure 2). The patterns of movement which emerge differ from the Western experience in the contrast between the migration rates of young men and women, since males in their twenties in China are much more likely to move. The highest mobility occurred among males 20-24 years of age, among whom 41 per cent had moved at least once since 1977. The corresponding figure for females was 25 per cent. This mismatch between the proportions of young men and women moving denotes that the migration of married couples and families is less typical in the young adult years. At later ages the proportion of males moving is only slightly above the figure for females, because of family migration, and the age differences between husbands and wives could account for the tendency, apparent in figure 2, for males and females in adjacent five-year age groups to have similar levels of mobility.

Figure 2: Proportions moving 1977-1986, by age and sex



Source: CASS Migration Survey, 1986

Data on marital status and reasons for moving bear out these conclusions. The statistics here refer to age and other characteristics at the time of migration and represent a composite of information for many different birth cohorts and periods of

time. While it cannot be assumed, for instance, that younger cohorts will eventually have the same marital status distributions as older cohorts, broad features of the selectivity of migration could well be persistent. The main contrasts between the marital status statistics for male and female in-migrants are the high proportion of younger males never married, and the high proportion of older females widowed (table 2). Only 18 per cent of males in the sample whose most recent move was at ages 20-24 were married at the time, compared with 56 per cent of those at 25-29 years and 90 per cent of those at 30-34 years. The corresponding percentages of female in-migrants married were 50 (20-24 years), 78 (25-29 years) and 94 (30-34 years). Most movement in the peak years of migration involves single people rather than families, but between ages 30 and 59 years, 90 per cent or more of male in-migrants were married, and wives and dependent children presumably accompanied them in the majority of cases. Widowhood is a factor in the migration of many women, since 23 per cent of female in-migrants at ages 50-54 were widowed, a figure which rose to 69 per cent at ages 65 and over.

Table 2: Marital status at time of in-migration by age in 1986

Age group	Never married	Married	Widowed, divorced	Total (per cent)	N
Males					
15-19	96.5	3.5	0.0	100	2,986
20-24	82.3	17.5	0.2	100	5,197
25-29	43.5	56.2	0.4	100	3,367
30-34	9.6	89.6	0.8	100	1,938
35-39	4.8	94.0	1.2	100	1,221
40-44	3.0	95.5	1.5	100	824
45-49	2.1	96.5	1.4	100	518
50-54	1.0	93.2	5.9	100	307
55-59	2.2	90.6	7.2	100	223
60-64	1.7	84.5	13.8	100	181
65+	2.2	70.9	26.8	100	179
Total	52.6	46.3	1.0	100	16,941
Females					
15-19	79.4	20.6	0.0	100	2,688
20-24	49.4	50.3	0.3	100	4,271
25-29	21.1	78.2	0.6	100	2,601
30-34	4.2	94.2	1.5	100	1,510
35-39	1.6	95.5	2.8	100	916
40-44	1.1	94.8	4.0	100	620
45-49	0.3	89.9	9.8	100	377
50-54	0.7	76.3	23.1	100	299
55-59	0.5	62.9	36.7	100	221
60-64	1.4	52.5	46.0	100	139
65+	1.5	29.7	68.7	100	323
Total	35.0	60.8	4.1	100	13,964

Source: CASS Migration Survey, 1986

Issue

In conjunction with improvements in the expectation of life, changes in fertility in China have far-reaching implications for the future realisation of traditional expectations about family support, since the older population will become larger relative to the size of the supporting population and many couples will see both sets of parents live to an advanced age. Opportunities for migration to form two- or three-generation households of the elderly and their relatives will become more restricted over the next 50 years as China's population ages (Quanhe Yang, 1988; Zeng Yi, 1988, p. 194; Ting Yu, 1990). Survey figures on the number of children still living portray the present and future course of the potential for family support in old age (table 3). In the past, high parities were a means of achieving security in later life. Despite high mortality in the past, only 9 per cent of women aged 65 years and over in the survey had no children surviving while 57 per cent had three or more still living. By contrast, the women aged 30-34 years in 1986 included 9 per cent with no living children and only 4 per cent with three or more. Resources

for family support were thus most abundant in the oldest cohorts, but declined progressively in younger cohorts as high parities became less common during the fertility transition and more particularly as they became rare during the era of the one-child campaign.

Variations in the total issue of women give rise to migration differentials in later life, because they affect opportunities for moving in with relatives. At ages 75 years and over, 43 per cent of women with five or more children had moved during the previous 10 years, compared with 24 per cent of those with no children (table 4). Physical and mental infirmities are most prevalent at these "old-old" ages, and family support is most needed. The proportions moving were generally lower among the "young-old" (65-74 years) - between a quarter and a third of mothers had moved in the previous 10 years - but there were no consistent variations by parity. A notable feature, however, was that 44 per cent of "young-old" women with no children had moved, possibly because many had sought more secure living arrangements after retirement, in anticipation of later need. The same peak mobility for zero parity women was apparent also at ages 55-64 years, and could be due to similar considerations.

Table 3: Total female permanent residents, children still living, 1986

Number:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	Total
Age group								
15-19	99.9	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100
20-24	85.8	13.0	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100
25-29	30.8	62.2	6.3	0.6	0.1	0.0	0.0	100
30-34	8.6	67.2	19.8	3.7	0.6	0.0	0.0	100
35-39	4.0	34.3	40.4	15.7	4.6	0.9	0.1	100
40-44	1.6	9.3	39.4	29.8	14.2	4.4	1.4	100
45-49	0.9	3.9	24.8	34.3	23.2	8.7	4.1	100
50-54	1.6	5.0	13.5	28.1	26.5	15.8	9.4	100
55-59	3.2	6.4	11.1	18.3	23.1	20.6	17.3	100
60-64	6.0	10.1	12.4	14.8	20.3	17.5	18.9	100
65+	9.4	17.8	15.5	15.8	15.5	12.0	14.0	100
Total	31.8	24.2	14.6	11.4	8.6	5.2	4.2	100
N	12,502	9,524	5,747	4,471	3,397	2,062	1,668	39,371

Source: CASS Migration Survey, 1986

Table 4: Proportion of female permanent residents who moved in the previous 10 years, by age and number of children ever born, 1986

Issue:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6+	Total
Age group								
15-24	71.8	83.4	*	*	*	*	*	73.1
25-34	71.2	69.1	62.1	53.6	*	*	*	67.5
35-44	44.6	44.6	34.6	30.2	32.3	*	*	35.2
45-54	21.6	27.0	21.3	18.7	16.2	13.8	14.5	17.8
55-64	36.8	24.5	15.9	15.8	12.6	12.3	15.1	15.7
65-74	43.8	33.0	25.3	34.2	28.8	28.8	31.1	31.1
75+	23.5	35.0	29.2	40.0	37.8	43.1	43.0	37.3
Total	69.1	61.7	36.8	25.3	20.4	16.9	21.0	44.1

Source: CASS Migration Survey, 1986

Note: * = Sample frequencies <30.

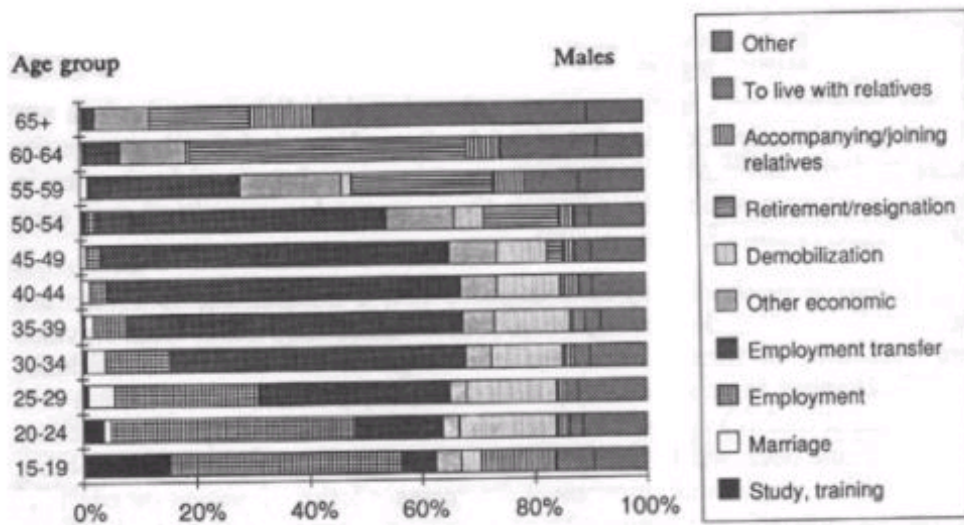
At younger ages higher parities are often an obstacle to movement because of the greater difficulty and expense in relocating large families. Indeed, after a couple have a child or children, family immobility is most typical, irrespective of family size. Also, in Western countries, the association between large family size and lower levels of educational and occupational attainment imply that the most fertile will be the least mobile, because their opportunities for occupational and social advancement are fewer. In China, where individual initiative is not so important in migration behaviour, family size might be

expected to be a less influential source of migration differentials. Nevertheless, the survey data show that women in the later years of child-rearing, ages 35-54 years, had relatively low rates of movement at the highest parities: in other words, the largest nuclear families had the lowest mobility. Between the ages of 25 and 44, the proportions moving were highest for those with no children or only one, but the rates of movement were higher at all parities than they were in the later years of child-rearing. The pattern suggests that at the principal ages of family formation, the size of the nuclear family has had only a minor influence on migration. As noted previously, however, high parities are uncommon in the younger cohorts of urban women and the sample numbers are too low to yield reliable results. The new emphasis on the one-child urban family is reducing the relevance of migration differentials by parity.

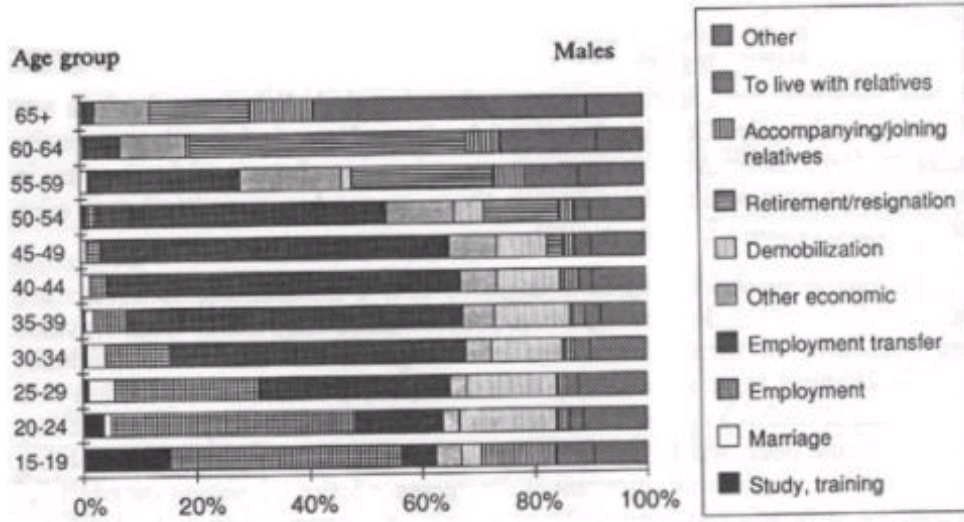
The effects of China's family limitation policies on urban populations are very apparent in the low fertility of young women in the 1986 migration survey. Two-thirds of women aged 30-34 years had one child and only 5 per cent had three or more children. These were women whose prime reproductive years had spanned the years of the one-child campaign, launched in 1979 (see Sun Yuesheng and Wei Zhanling, 1987; Hardee-Cleaveland and Banister, 1988). Their future, in terms of access to family support in later life will be dramatically affected as a result of these patterns of fertility. Women aged 35 years and over had much higher fertility, because national population goals were less influential during part or all of their reproductive years. The survey data reveal a spectacular fertility transition among urban women entailing a decline in average issue per woman, from 4.4 at ages 60-64 to 2.8 at ages 40-44, together with a downward trend in the modal issue from six or more children in the oldest cohorts to two children at ages 35-39. Future cohorts of urban women completing their fertility are likely to have one child as the mode.

Causes of movement and the life-cycle

Much movement to and between towns and cities in China is due to changing needs and opportunities arising from maturation and ageing. The coding of reasons for in-migration do not permit an assessment of the role of multiple reasons for movement and the role of family considerations in migration generally. Having any information on motivations, however, should be considered a bonus and the CASS survey is notable for its breadth of coverage accomplished through a relatively modest and straightforward set of questions. Eight of the 13 response codes concerning reasons for moving consist of economic factors in migration, while six refer to life-cycle or family considerations ("study or training", "marriage migration", "accompanying or joining spouse or parents or family", "recruitment of workers or take up retired parent's post", "retirement or resignation", and "going to live with relatives"). "Other" reasons for migration were most common after age 50, especially for females, and probably include needs arising from ill health and lack of income. Again, these data refer to the reason for moving by age at migration, and, no doubt, there have been changes through time in the relative importance of particular motivations. The data are for age at last move, irrespective of birth cohort.



Source: CASS Migration Survey, 1986



Source: CASS Migration Survey, 1986

"Study and training" are important reasons for in-migration early in adult life, especially for males, then "marriage" emerges as a major reason, especially for females (figure 3). During the middle and late years of working life, family and life-cycle considerations are unimportant in the motivations expressed by male respondents, although there must have been many moves prompted by family welfare considerations or by unexpected and unwanted life events such as becoming disabled through an illness or injury. Among women, family factors remained prominent in reasons for moving at all ages, as shown in the high proportions who said that they were "accompanying or joining relatives" or were moving "to live with relatives" (figure 3). Together, these two responses represented 41 per cent of the reasons specified by women aged 30-34 years at time of moving, rising to 78 per cent for those aged 65 years and over. Even among men aged 65 and over, these two family-focused reasons accounted for 60 per cent of movement. It is not known whether a clear distinction between these two reasons was maintained in the interviews, but they could imply that family migration to cities frequently takes place in stages, with the husband moving first and the wife and children following later, perhaps after suitable accommodation is obtained. The same figures also emphasize the importance of the family as a source of comfort and security for the elderly. "Retirement and resignation" also stand out as life-cycle events to which were attributed much of the in-migration of older males (figure 3). This reason peaked in importance at ages 60-64, where 49 per cent of moves were explained in this way, probably reflecting impelling factors such as lack of a retirement income and the necessity of living with or near younger relatives.

Migrations attributed to "employment" and "employment transfers" seem exceptions to any life-cycle patterning of movement, since these motivations are prominent at all the working ages, especially for males. Yet the immediate or stated reason for movement probably conceals complex underlying motivations, among which meeting the necessities of life for family members and, in some cases, enhancing their living standards could figure prominently. Considerations of family welfare and family prosperity must underlie movement from rural areas to start shops and businesses in towns, a process which the Chinese Government has permitted and even encouraged (Zeng Li, 1986, p. 692).

Analysis of the survey data suggests that a number of life events are commonly associated with higher probabilities of migration. These events are outcomes of three dimensions of change in the lives of individuals, namely changes in relation to (a) the family, (b) post-school education and employment and (c) ageing. In Western societies, the concept of the family life-cycle has been widely used in the interpretation of residential mobility within cities, explaining movement in terms of the changing needs and resources of families as household composition changes, such as through the birth of children and their growth to maturity. The family life-cycle per se is less relevant to the study of internal migration, because of the greater role of employment considerations, rather than housing needs, in motivating such movement. Nevertheless, the broader concept of the individual life-cycle, which seeks to identify the principal life events associated with higher probabilities of movement, provides a useful perspective on the process of internal migration.

Table 5: Principal life-cycle events associated with internal migration in China during the 1980s

Men	Women
Family	Marriage *
	Accompanying husband *
	Widowhood *
Employment	
Completion of schooling *	Completion of schooling

Completion of further education or training	Completion of further education or training
Completion of probationary years in the labour force	
Ageing	
Retirement *	
Onset of ill health or disability	Onset of ill health or disability *

Note: * denotes most prominent influences, as inferred from stated causes of movement.

Previous studies of migration and the life-cycle (e.g. Rowland, 1979, p. 101) have identified a single set of events and stages precipitating movement, but the contrast between the life-cycle experience of men and women suggests that better explanations may be forthcoming by separating the two. Table 5 presents a preliminary life-cycle framework for evaluating the influence of family factors in internal migration to towns and cities in China. Events marked with an asterisk are the most prominent influences, as inferred from stated causes of movement. The table emphasizes that employment-related factors predominate in the internal migration of men in China, whereas family reasons - especially accompanying or joining relatives - are more important to women. The contrast between "his" and "her" migration experiences, however, would probably be reduced if information could be obtained about the role of family welfare considerations in fostering movements which outwardly appear to be due to "employment". All of the events listed in the table are common migration-related occurrences in life-cycle experiences, although particular individuals may not experience such events or migrate in response to them.

Some employment-related moves, such as those due to promotions, can occur at both younger and older ages and are not tied to any stage of life. Yet a majority of employment migrations take place in the young adult years and are presumably associated with transitions such as leaving school and obtaining a first job, completing post-school education and training, and being transferred after obtaining initial experience in the labour force. No direct evidence is available on the last of these points, but it is likely that many employment transfers occur after people have been in the labour force for some years and have demonstrated their aptitude and potential. Employment-related internal migrations are relatively infrequent after the younger "probationary" years (figure 2).

Temporary migration

From the perspective of family welfare, a little known but potentially vital aspect of population mobility in China is short-term movement which, in other Asian countries, has assumed considerable significance as an alternative to permanent relocation. Questions in the 1986 migration survey addressing this issue are about some previous "out-migration" from the city of current residence and others concerned with "temporary in-migrants" in the household. These data are relevant to a discussion of family characteristics because of the role of families in accommodating temporary movers, and because short-term migration may be part of individual efforts to provide a more secure future for themselves and dependent relatives. Only information about temporary in-migrants will be discussed here because, compared with the data on previous out-migration, it provides better coverage of rural-to-urban movement and is more indicative of the most recent trends.

The temporary in-migrants, or temporary residents, were defined as "persons who, at the time of interview, had been in their households without official registration for at least two days but less than one year". The system of urban household registration is intended to prevent unauthorised movement from the countryside to the cities. Registration is necessary in order to have access to the necessities of life, including food allowances and services such as health care and support for the elderly. Even marriage to an urban resident does not bestow residence status and contributes to "the not uncommon Chinese phenomenon of married couples living apart" (Ebanks and Cheng, 1990, p. 38). Unlike permanent migrants, temporary migrants have not received permission to change their place of registration. They are allowed to live in cities or towns until the Government requires them to return to the countryside (Goldstein, 1990, p. 675). By 1988, the demand for construction workers, domestics and other service providers was estimated to have attracted more than 50 million temporary migrants (the "floating population") to the cities (Goldstein, 1990, p. 682).

The CASS survey statistics on temporary migration understate the size of the floating population, because the figures exclude persons who had been "temporary" for more than a year, and because of unsanctioned movement to towns and cities in China due to poverty, periodic under-employment, family crises, adventitious opportunities and temperamental behaviour. Government regulations require temporary registration for stays of three or more days in an urban area, but it appears that temporary residents often do not register with the local authorities. There were 3,376 temporary in-migrants in the sample, with a sex ratio of only 84 males per 100 females.

Table 6: Age structures of in-migrants and temporary migrants, 1986

Age group in 1986	In-migrants 1977-1986		Temporary migrants 1985-1986	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
0- 4	0.7	0.6	0.8	0.6
5-14	5.7	5.2	0.5	1.2

15-24	15.6	12.0	11.8	18.2
25-34	17.0	14.9	10.8	7.2
35-44	7.3	6.3	6.6	5.3
45-54	3.9	3.3	4.7	4.5
55-64	2.3	1.5	5.0	6.9
65+	1.6	2.0	5.2	10.4
Total	54.1	45.9	45.6	54.4
N	9,676	8,214	1,541	1,835

Table 7: Marital status of in-migrants and temporary migrants aged 15 years and over

Marital status	In-migrants 1977-1986		Temporary in-migrants 1985-1986	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Never married	31.9	19.0	13.8	16.3
Married	21.8	24.2	29.1	27.8
Widowed	0.6	2.0	2.4	10.0
Divorced	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.1
Not stated	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.1
Total	54.5	45.5	45.7	54.3
N	7,992	6,664	1,495	1,775

Source: CASS Migration Survey, 1986.

Notes: For in-migrants, marital status is as at the time of the most recent move. For temporary migrants, marital status is as at the time of the survey.

Temporary in-migrants contrasted with permanent movers in a much lower proportion of children, and an over representation of females, largely due to excess numbers at ages 15-24, who were mainly never married, and at 65 years and over, mainly widows (tables 6 and 7). More than 66 per cent of all the temporary migrants stated "visiting" as their reason for moving, but this motivation was less frequent among 15-24-year olds (51 per cent), for whom "engaging in private trade or business" (22 per cent) and "other" reasons (18 per cent) were correspondingly more important. While there is clearly much diversity within the temporary in-migrant population in terms of their characteristics and intentions, they may be grouped into four broad categories: people training for or commencing employment, persons of all ages visiting the city to transact business or obtain temporary work, older people genuinely visiting relatives, and the young and the old, especially women, at family transition points of marriage or widowhood. In the last instance, temporary migration could be a prelude to permanent residence with or near relatives. There is no corroborative survey evidence of this, however, nor about the role of pre-marriage migration, apart from the unexplained frequency of "other" reasons for moving among young women.

In all types of temporary migration, relatives were the main providers of accommodation. Only 15 per cent of male temporary in-migrants and 12 per cent of the females were staying with persons other than relatives. At the younger ages, the host relatives were often parents or siblings while at the older ages they were usually sons or daughters. Over half of the temporary movers (56 per cent) had stayed less than a month and only 18 per cent had stayed longer than six months (and less than one year), denoting that members of this floating population are highly transitory and that some acquire legal resident status because they are economically dependent on their relatives. Unfortunately there is no direct evidence in the survey of the extent to which temporary migration is a prelude to legal residence, or to illegal residence beyond one year's duration. Nor is there any information on the frequency of repeated temporary migrations which might serve as an alternative to permanent movement.

At ages 55 and over, the majority of female temporary migrants were illiterate, while among younger women and most men, primary school or junior secondary school were the typical levels of educational attainment. The dominance of these educational levels matches with other information on the origins and occupations of the temporary migrants: 48 per cent of males and 53 per cent of females had come from the countryside, rather than from an urban area, and 45 per cent of males and 39 per cent of females had been engaged in agriculture or factory work before moving. Another 27 per cent of the females, were either "retired" or specified "housework" as their occupation. Well-educated groups comprised only a small proportion of the temporary flow, which seems to have been more a response to everyday needs and widespread aspirations than to selective social forces. As a result, the family probably has special significance in temporary migration, partly because the presence of relatives, who are able to provide housing and support at the destination which makes most of this movement possible, and partly because temporary migration is one type of response to transitions in family life and the ever present need to provide for young and old dependents. Families are always changing, as children mature and parents age, and the many transitions they face call for varied means of rendering short-term and long-term assistance to relatives.

Conclusion

Despite many changes in family structures and functions, the family remains the basic unit of society in China and migration represents a means by which families can improve their living standards. The family also continues to be the principal source of support for vulnerable groups - children, the unemployed, the sick, the disabled and the frail elderly - and migration is one of the ways through which families fulfill their obligations. From the perspective of economic development, much internal migration is "economic migration" to help achieve national goals. From a family perspective, however, individuals participate in internal migration not only to serve their country or further occupational ambitions, but also to improve or maintain the living standards of their families. The family-related characteristics of internal migrants are merely partial indicators of what is probably the pervasive influence of the family considerations, partly in prompting movement and more particularly in seeking to benefit from it.

Family welfare is a latent factor in migration to cities in China. The only direct evidence of its importance comes from CASS survey data on living conditions, improvement in which was a widely perceived outcome of migration. Among the in-migrant population who moved in the 10 years before the survey, 73 per cent said their income was "better" than before the move, and only 5 per cent said it was "worse". The young were particularly likely to notice improvements in income, while a substantial minority of people aged 55 years and over (33 per cent) thought that their income had remained "the same". The majority of recent in-migrants also thought their housing was better than before the move, but 15 per cent said it was "worse". Positive and negative perceptions of housing varied little by age. Similarly, there were only minor age differences in opinions about the "living environment" before and after migration but, as in the case of income, the overwhelming majority thought it was "better" (77 per cent) or "the same" (17 per cent). Reasons for improvements in housing after migration are indicated in survey data for 1987, which show that 74 per cent of the elderly in cities in China had their own room compared with only 50 per cent in the countryside, where it was common for two or even three generations to live in one room (Wu Cangping, 1991, p. 60).

Besides reflecting the present needs and goals of families, migration to the cities is a significant process affecting their long-term prospects. Urbanization in China is expected to reduce national birth rates, because urban residents are more likely to delay child-bearing and to comply with the one-child policy. The resulting fall in population growth might reduce the national total by about 260 million in the year 2050 (Zeng Yi and Vaupel, 1989). Such developments will heighten differences between urban and rural areas in terms of the burden of old-age dependency within families. National projections show that "family support ratios" will deteriorate under all likely growth scenarios (Ogawa, 1988) and families in cities will have relatively large numbers of elderly relatives per potential care-giver. However, pension schemes and medical and social services for the elderly are better developed in the cities (Wu Yuanjin and Xu Qin, 1987), which will offset some of the difficulties that will confront urban families in the future.

Better recognition of family goals and responsibilities could improve the effectiveness of policies concerned with migration and population redistribution, reducing unsatisfactory outcomes and enhancing the family's role in supporting dependents. Successful outcomes of migration require, for instance, that elderly parents not be left abandoned at the place of origin, that husbands not face prolonged separation from wives and children, nor that families be obliged to live in unsuitable housing.

The implications for women of population redistribution policies require particular attention, partly because their opportunities for movement in the younger working ages have been more restricted than for men, and partly because migration is important in securing the welfare of older women. Young women in China have migrated mainly for family-related reasons, which indicates insufficient recognition of their potential contribution to the skilled labour force and lack of encouragement for them to pursue a vocation. At a time when population policies aim to reduce fertility, complementary policies are needed which provide women with alternatives to motherhood as their principal role in society. In later life, widowhood and the onset of ill health are crisis points in women's lives, to which migration is a frequent response. Recognition of this necessity to move could be incorporated into policy development, for instance by enabling stem families to move as a unit and by allowing an elderly person to occupy a dwelling near to the home of the supporting relatives.

Family welfare should remain an abiding concern in population redistribution policies, as well as in research on migration in China, because it is a theme which links the demographic process and its social consequences. Migration is integrally involved in changes in the family and its responsibilities. Future research will need to explore such issues as the role of the family in decisions concerning temporary movement, the effects of migration on family living standards, the role of the family in providing both short-term and long-term support to relatives and the extent to which "temporary"

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