Internal Migration and Living Apart in China

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Abstract: While there is a tendency that family members of migrants reunite at the place of destination, a good proportion of families lives apart in the process of large-scale internal migration in China. This paper, by focusing on nuclear families of married migrants, explores the latest status, patterns and associates of who moves and who is left behind by making reference to the constraints of public policies in receiving societies. Based on representative data from the 2013 China National Migrant Dynamic Monitoring Survey and drawing on a new typology distinguishing different types of living apart (e.g., only spouse, spouse and children, only children living apart), preliminary findings reveal that, *hukou* institution and structural barriers in receiving cities prevent migrants from being reunited. Exclusion is more salient among migrants crossing provincial boundary, moving to coastal and economically more advanced cities, suggesting that economic development does not necessarily bring about more inclusive public policies.

Introduction

Family research on living apart tends to focus on incarceration or marital disruption, while studies on the effect of migration largely attend to the economic consequences by treating the household as a single unit. To the extent that internal migration has substantially facilitated urban development and economic escalation, it has also reshaped family context by changing the coresidential patterns between couple, and between parents and children. Institutional demarcation (i.e., the *hukou* system, including both the types and locations of registration) and structural constraints (e.g., access to public schools for migratory children) in receiving societies present substantial barriers for migrants to achieve family reunion. Even among nuclear family members, some may live apart.

Hence, while in the west, family unification of international migrants has been regarded as a basic human right and is vitally important for migrants' life, life planning, family stability and thus cohesive societies, separation between couples and between parents and children has been a common phenomenon in the era of unprecedented scale of internal migration in China. Although migration of some family members may improve family economic condition, it may also incur undesirable consequences. In the summer of 2013, for example, numerous reports on the drowning of left-behind children due to parental migration have caught great

societal attention. Hot debates among scholars and among relevant government bureaus have been aroused, exploring how to remove barriers for family reunification at the place of destination.

In societies with a free labor market, who moves out and who stays at home is largely a function of family strategy to maximize household utility. In contexts with unequal access to local labor market, public schools and social security, such decision might be made beyond economic concerns. Although many migrants have stayed at the place of destination for years, public policies do not put them on a par with residents with a local *hukou*. Distinctions between migrants and local residents that are made clearly in access to public goods and services render migrants to leave some family members at the place of origin. However, the relationship between migration and living arrangements has gained little attention inside and outside of China. Research on the effects of migration on families in China has two shortcomings. In recent scholarship from migration studies, researches tend to treats families as homogeneous units ignoring differential impacts that migration can have on individual members. In family sociology studies, researches tend to treat family members as living in geographic proximity ignoring those living in different locations. An increasing number of families are living apart due to cross-boundary migration, facing unique challenges in maintaining family ties over great distances.

Who are more likely to achieve family reunion or live apart? What is the pattern of living apart? How may institutional barriers and structural discriminations in receiving societies affect the separation among nuclear family members? These are important issues to be addressed, since family unification does not simply reflect individual and family wellbeing, but also mirrors the exclusiveness or inclusiveness of local public policies.

This paper examines the way by which the family is split among migrants, and explores the potential reasons by highlighting the interplay and intersection of institutional and structural barriers for family unifications. We describe the current status and patterns of living apart of family members among migrants, and analyze the correlates of such living arrangements at the regional, household and individual levels. We focus on the possibilities of including a broader array of effects of migration on development by focusing on the effects of migration on ‘the family’ and in particular on the different actors involved in living arrangements. In particularly, we attend to spouse separation, parent-children separation, and spouse and children separation. Increasing families are living apart-together. On one hand, rapid pace of urbanization and convenient transportation make migrating in search for higher paying jobs attractive and accessible for many more people than was previously the case 20 years ago. On the other hand, the remaining barriers in the availability of public resources have led to families ‘splitting’ with some core family members stay behind. This generates families living apart together with spouse and/or parents and children living in different locations facing the challenges of family stability and development.

While the large-scale population movement is not a new phenomenon, and multidisciplinary research has been done to explore the consequences of migration on the wellbeing of left-behind family member in China, this paper shed light on the relevant literature in several ways. For example, by exploring the associates of the pattern of living apart, this paper goes beyond the scope of descriptive statistics that characterize the current relevant literature in China. Existing studies tend to describe the size, patterns and characteristics of left-behind children and left-behind wives. Little effort has been made to explore the determinants behind this pattern; it is mostly based on descriptive outcomes or theoretical thinking in the Chinese literature. Also, by utilizing the most recent, large-scale and representative survey data, we are able to generalize the analytical findings of split family to the entire migratory population. Data limitations render most existing studies to rely on regional data, small-scale specialized samples or qualitative data. Through the use of the nationally representative data, we are able to strengthen our ability to make inferences.

By these approaches, we expect that the analytical results of this study will further our understanding of living apart among family members of migrant and its potential determinants. We also expect that our findings will inform policy makers in the reformulation of public policies favorable for the enhancement of family reunion of migrant family, particularly those mostly disadvantaged. Since these issues are not unique to China, but shared by countries undergoing dramatic population redistribution, the challenge is global even when the particular circumstances are local. Hence, this analysis is an important response to understand the linkage between migration and family wellbeing.

Background

In the process of China's economic reform, numerous peasants migrate to cities for better economic opportunities since the mid-1980s. On one hand, land reform in the countryside initiated in 1978 has improved the efficiency of productive activities, and, together with the limited size of land, liberated many laborers from the land who search for non-farming work. On the other hand, the market-oriented reform in urban areas and opening to the outside policy have fueled economic development, brought in foreign or joint enterprises, particularly in coastal areas and large cities, and created numerous job vacancies in the low end that urbanites are unwilling to undertake, but are profitable and attractive to rural surplus laborers. The tremendous disparities between urban and rural areas, and across regions have motivated people in rural areas, less developed regions, and the Midwest to move to urban areas, more advanced regions, and the East. The size of migrants has increased rapidly. In 1982, migrants enumerated less than seven millions, and it was over 20 million, 100 million, and 221 million in 1990, 2000, and 2010, accounting for 0.7 percent, 1.9 percent, 7.7 percent and 16.5 percent in each census year, respectively. The rise of migrants is substantial in both absolute and relative terms: the number of migrants has increased by approximately 33 times between 1982 and 2010 (see Figure 1), while China's total

population has increased by only about 0.3 times.

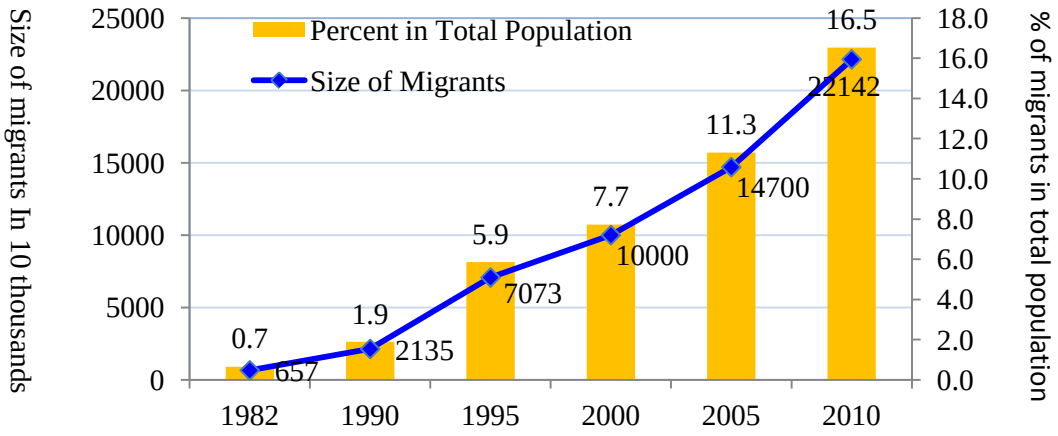

Figure 1. Trend of Number and Share of Migrants: China 1982-2010

Sources: 1982, 1990, 2000, and 2010 Population Censuses and 1995 and 2005 National One Percent Population Survey.

Large-scale migration has been both a consequence and facilitator of socioeconomic development, and the compositional change of migrants has also reshaped household context at both the receiving and sending societies. The composition of migrants today is more complicated than that in the past. In the 1980s and 1990s, migrants tended to be young and single, but more and more married people with children have joined the tidal wave of migration in the past two decades. Various institutional and structural constraints render them, particularly rural-to-urban migrants, to leave spouse, children and parents at the place of origin, generating left-behind children (liu shou er tong，流守儿童), left-behind spouse (mostly the wife) (liu shou fu nu，流守妇女) and left-behind parents (liu shou fu mu，流守父母). Consequently, many intact families at both the place of destination and origin become incomplete, and migration has brought about unprecedented changes to living arrangements among core family members, and the share of incomplete intact families has remained high.

Data

This paper draws on data from the 2013 Migrant Dynamic Surveillance Survey (MDSS), conducted by National Health and Family Planning Commission in May and June, 2013. This is a nationally representative survey that covers approximately 200,000 respondents who have resided at current place for over one month and with their locations of *hukou* outside of currently residing county. The sample includes both rural-urban migrants (i.e., migrants from the countryside with a rural *hukou*) and urban-urban migrants (i.e., migrants from other urban areas with an urban *hukou*), accounting for 84.8 percent and 15.2 percent of the total sample, respectively. For the purpose of this paper, we only consider nuclear family members, including couples without children and couples with only unmarried children.

As the most recent, large-scale questionnaire survey data, the MDSS contains rich information, including household context, migration characteristics of nuclear family members, individual demographic and socioeconomic profiles, as well as information in hometowns. This allows us to examine living apart among various family actors, and explore the roles that institutional exclusion and structural barriers play in family reunion of migrants.

We attend to the decision making regarding who moves and who stays at home of nuclear family members among married migrants, and we thus limit the sample to married respondents. This leaves a sample of 135493 respondents.

Dependent variables

Based on the current location of residence of spouse, number of children, as well as children's marital status and location of residence, we first code a variable with eight categories that reflects the living arrangements of migrants, including two categories of migrants without children and six categories of migrants with children (see Table 1): (1) the husband without children is left behind; (2) the wife without children is left behind; (3) only husband is left behind; (4) only wife is left behind; (5) husband and at least one child is left behind; (6) wife and at least one child is left behind; (7) only children is left behind; (8) all nuclear family members live together at receiving society. As Table 1 shows, for migrants without children, wives have a higher proportion to be left behind than husbands. However, among couples with children, only husbands, only wives or only husband (or wife) with children accounts for a very low proportion in the sample, suggesting that married couples with children are very likely to move together. Conversely, there is a high proportion of children who live separately from parents.

Table 1 Living apart among migrants with or without children

	Frequence	Percent
Only couple family		
Husband left behind	1,126	0.83
Wife left behind	1,574	1.16
Family with unmarried children		
Only husband left behind	199	0.15
Only wife left behind	110	0.08
Husband and at least one child left behind	112	0.08
Wife and at least one child left behind	121	0.09
Only children left behind	47,407	34.99
Family unification	84,844	62.62
N	135,493	

Source: 2013 MDSS.

To reduce the complexity of living arrangements and increase the frequencies of some categories, we further collapse the above variable into four categories: spouses living

apart, both spouse and at least one child living apart, only children living apart and family unification. We use this variable in the following data analysis.

Table 2 Living apart among nuclear family members of migrants

	Frequency	Percent
Only spouse living apart	3,009	2.22
Both spouse and at least one child living apart	233	0.17
Only children living apart	47,407	34.99
Family unificaton	84,844	62.62
N	135,493	

Independent variables

This work features the effects of institutional and structural factors on living apart of migrants. The key is to identify appropriate indicators to measure these concepts. Several variables are used. The institutional effect is gauged by three variables: (1) *hukou* types by differentiating migrants into rural-urban migrants (coded as 1) and urban-urban migrants (coded as 0); (2) public old-age insurance where 1 indicates having it and 0 otherwise; (3) housing source, which has six categories: rent private apartment, rent employers' apartment, free apartment provided by employers, own private house, public housing and other.

To capture structural effect on the response variable, we utilize three variables. The first variable pertains to migration boundary crossing, coded as intra- prefecture (e.g., the administrative unit between province and county), inter-prefecture, and inter-province. It is assumed that migration of intra-prefecture may face less social exclusions in the labor market and access to public resources since many public resources are allocated based on prefectures, while migration of inter-province would face the greatest exclusions since they cross the administrative boundary of province and thus many kinds of resources are not applicable to such outsiders.

The second variable is geographic region of receiving societies, which is classified as four categories: (1) East, including Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai municipalities, Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong provinces; (2) Center, including Hubei and Hunan province, among other provinces; (3) West, including Shanxi, Sichuan provinces, among other provinces, and (4) Northeast, including Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning provinces. The eastern area has good employment opportunity, but also has strong local culture and local protection.

The third relates to economic zones. We code them as four categories: (1) the Zhu River Delta in Guangdong province located in the southeast; (2) the Yangzti River Delta in the east, largely including Shanghai, northern part of Zhejiang province and southern part of Jiangsu province; (3) Bo Sea Area, including Beijing and Tianjin municipalities and several cities in Hebei province, and (4) other areas, include the rest areas. Since this variable is closely correlated to the variable of "region," in model analysis, only one of them will be included.

In addition, we control for respondents' age, sex, ethnicity, education, economic integration index, weekly work hours, duration in receiving society, and reasons of migration. In addition to possibly affecting migrants' living arrangements, these

variables may confound the relationship between the key predictors and response variable. Table 3 presents the definitions of variables used in this analysis and their distributions.

Table 3 Definition of variables used in this analysis and univariate analysis

Variables	Definition	Mean/Prop.
Sociodemographic characteristics		
Age	Age of respondents, numerically measured	35.82
Female	1=female; 0=otherwise	48.40
Hanzu	1=Han Ethnicity (i.e., the majority); 0=otherwise	93.17
Education		
<=Primary school	1=primary or lower education; 0=otherwise	17.27
Middle school	1=middel school education; 0=otherwise	58.08
High school	1=high school or equivalent education; 0=otherwise	18.16
College or above	1=college or above education; 0=otherwise	6.49
Economic integration index	Composed of occupation, income and work stability	32.87
Migration characteristics		
Weekly work hours	Weekly work hours for paid job	61.83
Duration at destination		
<=2 years	1=less than or equal to two years; 0=otherwise	40.73
3-4 years	1=3-4 years; 1=otherwise	20.01
5-7 years	1=5-7 years; 2=otherwise	16.77
8-10 years	1=8-10 years; 3=otherwise	9.87
10+ years	1=10 years or longer; 4=otherwise	12.61
Move for work	1=move for job; 0=otherwise	89.48
Institutional factors		
Rural *hukou*	1=rural *hukou* ; 0=otherwise	86.90
Have public old-age insurance	1=have at least 1 social insurance; 0=otherwise	22.57
Housing source		
Rent private apartment	1=rent private apartment; 0=otherwise	67.19
Rent employer's apartment	1=rent employers' apartment; 0=otherwise	6.11
Free apartment by employer	1=free apartment provided by employers; 0=otherwis	5.46
Self house	1=own house; 0=otherwise	15.53
Public housing	1=public housing; 0=otherwise	0.88
Other	1=temporary housing; 0=otherwise	4.83
Structural factors		
Migration boundary crossing		
Inter-province	1=move across provincial boundary; 0=otherwise	52.32
Inter-city	1=move across city boundary; 0=otherwise	28.66
Inter-county	1=move across county boundary; 0=otherwise	19.02
Region		
East	1=East region; 0=otherwise	43.65
Center	1=Central region; 0=otherwise	18.20
West	1=West region; 0=otherwise	32.33
Northeast	1=Northwest region; 0=otherwise	5.82
Economic zones		
Zhu River Delta	1=Zhujang Delta (southeast); 0=otherwise	5.84
Yangzti River Delta	1=Changjiang Delta (East); 0=otherwise	17.33
Bo Sea Area	1=Beijing, Tianjin area; 0=otherwise	15.98
Other	1=other places; 0=otherwise	60.84

Method

Data analysis proceeds in two steps: first, the current status, patterns and characteristics of the living arrangements of migrant families are described, and then models will be applied to the data to explore the linkage of the response variable to institutional discrimination reflected by the types of *hukou* and structural exclusion mirrored by migration boundary crossing, and destination (e.g., region or economic zones), as well as other factors. Because the dependent variable contains four categories, multinomial regression modeling technique is applicable.

Since the survey adopted a random yet multi-stage, clustering framework, the data has a hierarchical nature where individual respondents are nested within the receiving prefectures. Migrants in the same prefecture may share similar characteristics, which may violate one of the basic assumptions of classic regression models (i.e., independence of the sample), and thereby downwardly biasing the analytical results. Multilevel modeling technique designed to solve the clustering problems is appropriate for data of this property. However, since the dependent variable has multiple categories, running multilevel multinomial model is difficult. To compensate for this, we use robust standard errors to correct the clustering problems.

Preliminary findings

Bivariate associations of living apart with key predictors

Table 4 presents the bivariate analytical results between the dependent variable and categorical key predictors. Except for the relationship of living apart with old-age insurance, the dependent variable is highly significantly related to all independent variables. With regard to the types of *hukou*, migrants from another city with an urban *hukou* have a higher percent of family reunion, compared to those with a rural *hukou*, and the share of all children living apart from parents is also lower. Over 80 percent of migrants with their own house at the place of destination and approximately 70 percent of migrants who have access to public housing live together with all nuclear family members, much higher than migrants living in other sources of apartment.

Living apart also varies by migration boundary crossing, region and economic zones. For example, inter-provincial migration is associated with the lowest proportion of family reunion, but the highest proportion of all kinds of living apart. In particularly, more children are left behind among inter-provincial migrants. Migrants in eastern areas and Yangzti River Delta both have the lowest proportion of family reunion, but the highest percent of children left behind.

We have also explored the bivariate relationships between living apart and control variables, and found that the dependent variable is significantly correlated to age, gender, ethnicity, education, economic integration index, weekly work hours, reasons of migration, as well as the duration at the place of destination. Such findings suggest that it is necessary to explore the net effect of key predictors on the response variable using model analysis.

Table 4 Bivariate analytical results of dependent variable and key predictors

	Only spouse living apart	Both spouse and at least one child living apart	Only children living apart	Family unificaton
Institutional factors				
Hukou type				
Urban *hukou*	2.87	0.23	29.73	67.16
Rural *hukou*	2.12	0.16	35.78	61.93
Have public old-age insurance				
No	2.23	0.18	35.10	62.50
Yes	2.14	0.15	34.36	63.34
Housing source				
Rent private apartment	2.12	0.15	34.30	63.42
Rent employer's apartment	3.24	0.35	49.41	47.00
Free apartment by employer	3.27	0.24	75.57	20.91
Self house	1.69	0.10	16.28	81.93
Public housing	5.28	0.25	24.96	69.51
Other	2.24	0.31	42.49	54.96
Structural factors				
Migration boundary crossing				
Inter-province	2.41	0.20	42.06	55.34
Inter-city	1.97	0.11	27.63	70.29
Inter-county	2.08	0.19	26.64	71.09
Region				
East	1.12	0.07	41.11	57.70
Center	1.14	0.07	30.69	68.09
West	4.52	0.39	31.53	63.56
Northeast	1.12	0.01	21.73	77.15
Economic zones				
Zhu River Delta	0.88	0.11	41.21	57.79
Yangzti River Delta	0.54	0.04	49.68	49.74
Bo Sea Area	1.83	0.10	31.82	66.25
Other	2.93	0.24	31.04	65.80
N	3009	47407	233	84844

Multinomial model results of living apart

Table 5 lists the multinomial regression findings of living apart among migrants. The base category is family reunion. To interpret the coefficients of the variables, we should draw two comparisons: the first is to compare the three categories listed in the table – only spouse living apart, both spouse and at least one child living apart, and only children living apart – with the base category, respectively. The second is to draw reference of each variable. For example, rural-urban migrants, compared to urban-urban migrants, are more likely to leave children at original home, but less likely to achieve family reunion in receiving societies. Similarly, compared with intra-provincial or intra-city migrants, those who crossed the provincial boundary are more likely to have nuclear family members to live apart.

Table 5 Multinomial analytic results of living apart of migrants

	Only spouse living apart			Both spouse and at least one child living apart			Only children living apart		
	Coef.	RSE		Coef.	RSE		Coef.	RSE	
Age	0.05	0.00	***	0.08	0.01	***	0.07	0.00	***
Female	-0.03	0.05		0.42	0.15	**	0.12	0.01	***
Hanzu	-0.53	0.07	***	-0.40	0.24		0.26	0.03	***
Education									
<=Primary school(=ref)									
Middle school	-0.16	0.06	**	-0.37	0.17	*	-0.07	0.02	***
High school	0.03	0.07		-0.49	0.24	*	-0.05	0.02	*
College or above	-0.20	0.11		-0.61	0.39		-0.33	0.04	***
Economic integration index	-0.01	0.00	**	0.01	0.01		0.00	0.00	***
Migration characteristics									
Weekly work hours	-0.01	0.00	***	0.00	0.00		0.00	0.00	***
Duration at destination									
<=2 years(=ref)									
3-4 years	-0.38	0.06	***	-0.78	0.21	***	-0.42	0.02	***
5-7 years	-0.48	0.06	***	-0.93	0.23	***	-0.56	0.02	***
8-10 years	-0.72	0.09	***	-0.79	0.26	**	-0.68	0.02	***
10+ years	-0.76	0.08	***	-0.66	0.22	**	-0.66	0.02	***
Move for work	-0.81	0.08	***	-0.09	0.35		0.35	0.04	***
Institutional factors									
Rural *hukou*	-0.23	0.06	***	-0.37	0.21		0.09	0.02	***
Have public old-age insurance	0.17	0.05	**	0.21	0.18		0.20	0.02	***
Housing source									
Rent private apartment(=ref)									
Rent employer's apartmer	0.73	0.07	***	0.95	0.22	***	0.61	0.03	***
Other	0.42	0.17	**	-13.59	57.10		-0.37	0.08	***
Free apartment by employ	0.15	0.10		0.68	0.25	**	0.32	0.03	***
Self house	1.37	0.08	***	1.31	0.27	***	1.74	0.03	***
Public housing	-0.56	0.07	***	-0.95	0.27	***	-0.88	0.02	***
Structural factors									
Migration boundary crossing									
Inter-province(=ref)									
Inter-city	-0.76	0.05	***	-1.04	0.18	***	-0.46	0.02	***
Inter-county	-0.67	0.06	***	-0.79	0.19	***	-0.46	0.02	***
Region									
East (=ref)									
Center	-0.47	0.16	**	-0.78	0.51		0.32	0.03	***
West	0.50	0.14	***	-0.01	0.44		-0.37	0.03	***
Northeast	1.01	0.13	***	0.93	0.39		-0.31	0.03	***
Constant	-3.12	0.23	***	-8.03	0.79	***	-3.02	0.08	***
N	113037								
LR	19797.99								
Pseudo R2	0.11								

Further analysis of this work is still ongoing.