

The Elders' Socioeconomic Status and Children's Migration in Urban China

The dramatically increasing migration and the rapid aging of populations underway in much of the world has spawned extensive research on these two important demographic issues. Among the existing studies, the causes, patterns, and consequences of either migration or population aging are discussed broadly and intensely. However, there remains much to be known about this relationship. The conventional framework of migration assumes individuals as the unit of migration and focus on the characteristics and selectivity of migrants. However, the performance of individual migrants can largely be accounted for not only by migrants' characteristics but also by the preferences and constraints of their families who stay behind (Stark, 1991). Migration is not only a matter of isolated migrants, but also of their families, including their spouses, children, and other family members. Migration has effect on migrants and their families or households, as well as the communities. The traditional migrants are represented by young males. Over time more and more young women have joined in migrant group. As a result, most of their parents are left at the source places. Therefore, theoretically we can suppose that migration may have influence on the elders' life, including economic status, caregiving, psychological health, and so on.

The topic about the impact of migration on the elderly is much more interesting in the context of China. Over the course of the last several decades, along with the fundamental social and economic changes in China, two major demographic transformations are simultaneously in rapid progress, i.e., population aging and migration. This paper is to study the interaction of the elders' socioeconomic status and

their children's migration in urban China. The research will contribute to the literature on both migration and aging.

The data set for analysis is 10% sample of the 2000 Sampling Survey of the Aged Population in Rural/Urban China. This national survey was conducted by China National Aging Committee and China Center for Scientific Study of Aging in 160 cities (counties) within 20 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipal cities. The respondents were the persons aged 60 and older. The questionnaires were respectively designed for the rural and the urban. Both covered a lot of questions on demographic information, working experience, income and insurance, family and offspring, health, and so on. Quota sampling was used on the provincial level. The sampling quota for each province, autonomous region, or municipal city was 1,000, with 500 for the rural and 500 for the urban. A set of PPS (Probability Proportionate to Size) was adopted within each province, autonomous region, or municipal city. The total initial sample size was 20,700 and the final number of persons interviewed was 20,548. The size of the valid cases was 20,255, including 10,171 urban cases and 10,084 rural cases. 994 urban cases (10% sample) are analyzed in this paper.

In my another paper (Presented at PAA 2006, with Zai Liang) on rural elderly, it is found that children's migration has significant impact on the elders' financial well-being and housing conditions. However, it is not the case for urban area.

More than one third of the urban elderly has migrant children. The intergenerational economic exchange is stronger for urban families with migrant children than for those without migrant children. Differently, the net flow from children to parents for families with migrant children is slightly less than that for families without migrant

children. The urban elderly with subjectively economic security share a larger proportion in the group with migrant children than that without migrant children. Obviously, the stronger economic risk-free sense is not due to stronger economic support from children. By examining the income and social class of the urban elderly, we can find the reasonable explanation. The urban elderly aged 60 and above are largely retired. Because the amount of the retirement pension is always positively related to the previous job income, so it can be considered as income indicator of the urban elderly. The urban elderly with migrant children are richer than those without migrant children. A tentative explanation is that well-off urban families tend to send children to nice and more attractive places. It is that the better economic status of parents leads to the migration of children, while not the migration of children affects the economic well-being of the urban elderly. This is a different story from rural China. Moreover, it is found that the urban elderly with migrant children have more political capital than those without migrant children. The role of political capital is important in urban China. Expansion of preferential pension benefits and government subsidies, as a byproduct of economic reforms, has provided substantial rewards to perform hierarchical position. Specifically, it has resulted in large economic rewards to elderly party cadres who once played a central role in the party-state. As to the migration of children, on the one hand, the political capital results in economic benefits, which is helpful for the children to move to better locations; on the other hand, the political capital is a direct resource to facilitate migration.

In short, although children's migration has great impact on the well-being of the rural elderly, the economic and political status of the elderly significantly influences the children's migration in urban China.