

Can 'Distant Water ... Quench the Instant Thirst'? The Renegotiation of Familial Support in Rural China in the Face of Extensive Out Migration

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Abstract

This article addresses debates on modernisation, ageing and intergenerational support in developing/emerging economies. By examining the impact of rural to urban migration on elder support in Chinese rural families, it examines how support is being renegotiated and the implications this holds for experiences of growing older. It is positioned critically within the Chinese rural families literature, both drawing on research that reveals the continued influence of familial culture (Silverstein 2009; Lin and Yi 2011, 2013; Guo, Chi and Silverstein 2011) while arguing that this research has under-examined the strain this places on rural families, emerging conflicts and the potentially negative implications for gender and ageing. A gendered intergenerational lens is adopted to examine how generations experience and interpret these changes in the form and delivery of intergenerational support. The article focuses on the experiences and lives of the older parents, and older women in particular, to address some of the oversights in existing literature.

Key words

Rural ageing, rural China, intergenerational relations, familial support, gender, migration and modernisation

Introduction

The pace and volume of rural to urban migration in China is bringing about profound changes for rural families and their systems of filial support (Xu 2001; Silverstein and Cong 2013). Chinese society has simultaneously undergone rapid economic development and entered into a period that many have called 'super-ageing' (Joseph and Phillips 1999). This rapid demographic change has led some

scholars to question the role of adult children in the support systems of older parents (e.g. Lee, Parish and Willis 1994; Saunders and Sun 2006). Indeed processes of modernisation and migration in rapidly developing and emerging economies have led social gerontologists to debate the 'pending crisis in elder care' (Aboderin 2004; Lin and Yi 2013). In the Chinese context, Du argues that families and the state will increasingly come under pressure as by 2050 the population aged 60 and over will exceed 450 million (2013: 46). These changes pose particular challenges for rural families; where more than two-thirds of older people reside and where welfare provision is largely absent (Silverstein 2009: 25). For example only 4.8 per cent of rural elders receive pensions compared with 78 percent of those in cities (Huang 2012: 23).

This article contributes to existing research by examining the adaptation and renegotiation of familial intergenerational support in rural China in the face of rapid waves of outward migration¹. It is positioned critically within the Chinese rural families literature, both drawing on research that reveals the continued influence of familial culture (Silverstein 2009; Lin and Yi 2011, 2013; Guo, Chi and Silverstein 2011) while arguing that this research has under-examined the strain this places on rural families, emerging conflicts and the potentially negative implications this holds for gender and ageing. While there is a growing body of literature which emphasises the active role of Chinese older people in supporting their children's migration through the provision of essential childcare, domestic and farming support (Chen, Lui and Mair 2011; Lin and Yi 2013), the potentially negative and divisive implications of these changes are underexplored. Therefore the article combines the insights of migrant families research with anthropological studies of Chinese rural families to develop a gendered intergenerational lens to illuminate the importance of examining both conflict and negotiation in intergenerational relations post-migration (Miller 2004, Zhang 2004; Foner and Dreby 2011; Creese 2011; Lora-Wainwright 2013; authors forthcoming).

Further the methodology of this article addresses gaps in the substantial literature on Chinese families. Since existing research is almost entirely based on quantitative data sets with a dominance of urban research (see Silverstein and Cong 2013), this article brings new insights derived from biographical interviews around the lived experiences of rural families and their interpretations of the renegotiation of intergenerational support. While the scale is inevitably narrow only covering two villages (in two regions), it constitutes one of only a few qualitative studies of how families negotiate, perceive and experience these changes.

This article first critically reviews modernisation theories application to China, contrasting this with the emerging body of familial research around the endurance of familial culture. It then draws upon more nuanced analyses provided by the research on migrant families and anthropologies of Chinese rural families which examine intergenerational support as bilateral, fluid and contested. The research approach and methods are then discussed to contextualise the families examined in this study. The second part of the paper presents the findings and focuses on how rural families, and older people in particular, perceive and experience the renegotiation of familial support brought about by migration.

Perspectives on Modernisation and Familial Support

Modernisation theory argues that as societies develop they move away from traditional informal relations of support within extended families towards an individualisation of family members, the rise of the nuclear family and a decline in financial and social support transfers from younger to older generations (Cowgill and Holmes 1972 cited in Childs, Goldstein and Wangdu 2011). This theory assumes an almost linear transition from traditional to modern structures of elder support in any given socio-cultural setting (Portes and Rumbaut 2005). These changes are assumed to bring about the decline of the extended family through fractures in intergenerational relations. Arguments around modernisation are not new to ageing research. Despite plenty of evidence refuting the

'abandonment' thesis, modernisation theory has continued to shape research and has witnessed a revival in recent years through its application to developing and emerging economies (Aboderin 2004). Evidence supporting the abandonment thesis is patchy at best and Modernisation theory has failed to account for endurance of familial in shaping intergenerational support (Kabir, Szebehely and Tishelman 2002; Aboderin 2004; Palloni 2009).

Perspectives on the resilience of filial piety in China

Research on the impact of modernisation on Chinese familial culture has provided evidence both supporting and refuting its effects. Several studies argue that modernisation is impacting detrimentally on intergenerational support (Saunders and Sun 2006; Cheung and Kwan 2009; Huang 2012). For example Du (2013: 49) argues young adults are increasingly;

...redefining the concept and practice of filial piety by shifting part of their filial responsibilities to the state for the provision of social security, a medical insurance system and the development of a community service system for the older people.

In rural areas the income gap between those of working age and older people is increasing, and intergenerational solidarity is under strain as younger people find it difficult to meet their filial obligations (Cong and Silverstein 2008). The assumed result is a fundamental change in the system of filial support whereby *'It is no longer the young who depend on the old, but rather the old who rely on the young for sources of living'* (Xu 2001: 309) yet *'the older ... generation cannot depend on their children for support in their old age in the traditional way'* (Du 2013: 54).

By contrast, there is mounting evidence disputing the demise of filial piety which reveals the continued moderating effects of Chinese familial culture (Mao and Chi 2011; Silverstein 2009; Lin and Yi 2011,2013; Guo, Chi and Silverstein 2011; Cong and Silverstein 2012a, 2012b; Hu and Scott 2014). These studies argue that changes in intergenerational support are more accurately understood as transformations in the delivery of filial piety through a reinterpreted

'intergenerational contract' (Chen, Lui and Mair 2011). While this research evidences the endurance of intergenerational support, key challenges to traditional expectations and the operation of familial support are identified. Challenges include physical distance impeding daily support, the redistribution of responsibility between siblings, adapting to a greater role for daughters and slow adjustments in filial expectations of sons (Guo, Chi and Silverstein 2011; Cong and Silverstein 2012a, 2012b; Mao and Chi 2011). All these studies argue that cultural norms, and local variations (Hu and Scott 2014; Zhang 2004; 2009), are paramount in mediating how families adapt to the structural factors that enable or hinder intergenerational support.

Lin and Yi's (2011, 2013) analysis of the East Asian Social Survey (China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan), found a strong endurance of filial piety across all four countries. Importantly the Chinese data illustrated that

...even when facing changing social conditions, Chinese families may continue to conform to the culturally expected pattern of sons taking the major responsibility for parental support (Lin and Yi 2011:109).

As women engage more in paid work, they play an increased role in supporting their parents but identifiable gender divisions remain with sons providing financial resources and daughters providing domestic and emotional support (Lin 2012, Lin and Yi 2013). Cong and Silverstein's (2012a & b) research on rural families found that migration has resulted in daughters stepping up their role, close to that traditionally provided by sons. Daughters are becoming a valued resource (Childs, Goldstein and Wangdui 2011) with younger parents more likely to invest in daughters, although not on an equal par with sons. Indeed some rural areas are witnessing a growth in uxorilocal marriage to facilitate support from daughters and son-in-laws (Zhang 2004)ⁱⁱ. Filial obligations are still apply more to sons whereas support from daughters continues to be seen as voluntary. These gender differences are equated to both structural lag and the temporary nature of migration, which Cong and Silverstein (2012b) argue results in most sons eventually returning to the village.

While these studies offer significant insight into the restructuring of intergenerational support, in particular evidencing the endurance of the extended family in the face of migration and the changing role of daughters. This article argues that they suffer from two key limitations. First they fail to examine the role of conflict in the renegotiation of support. Second, this tendency is directly linked to the overreliance of the majority of studies on large scale surveys – which are effective in mapping patterns of change and demographic differences but less able to examine lived experiences and personal interpretations of changes in supportⁱⁱⁱ. Consequently, while quantitative research acknowledges the renegotiation of familial support with women carrying much of the burden, it assumes familial consensus and overplays the positive impacts of migration on the welfare of the family unit as a whole. Thus, they tend to miss the potentially negative implications of migration for rural ageing and in particular for the lives of older women. The article now turns to literature that illustrates the importance of analysing intergenerational relationships as being subject to both negotiation and conflict.

Developing a Gendered Intergenerational Lens

Given these gaps in the Chinese familial research and the dominance of quantitative studies, significant insights can be derived from other literatures both within and outside social gerontology. This section draws on ageing research that understands the bilateral operation of intergenerational support, and from the growing body of research on migrant families and anthropologies of Chinese rural families.

Older people as key providers of support

One of the key conceptual problems in existing studies on Chinese families is the assumption of older people's 'dependency' and the positioning of older people as passive recipients of support

(Joseph and Phillips 1999; Xu 2001; Zeng et al. 2003; Du 2013). Very few studies examine intergenerational support as bilateral, replicating assumptions in the broader literature around older people's dependency. Lin and Yi (2013) argue that this is partly explained by the traditional flow of filial piety from children to parents, consequently grandparenting in skipped generation households remains an under researched yet growing phenomena in rural China (Chen, Lui and Mair 2011). This article contributes to the small number of Chinese studies that examine the role of grandparents as important providers of support and enablers of their children's migration. A handful of studies point to the resilience of older parents, in the face of external migration; both in terms of adapting their strategies for intergenerational support by looking towards their daughters (Zhang 2004; Childs, Goldstein and Wangdui 2011) and playing a pivotal role in supporting their migrating children by caring for their grandchildren in skipped generation or co-resident households (Chen, Lui and Mair 2011; Silverstein and Cong 2013).

Complementing these approaches, migrant families research argues that migration is most usefully viewed as a family based project, driven by a consideration of the welfare of the family as a whole (Ganga 2006; Attias-Donfut et al 2012) and often portrayed as a family survival strategy (Vullnetari and King 2008). Thus migration would not be possible without the support of extended family members who remain behind. For example, in China and other rapidly developing countries, grandparents crucially act as 'kin keepers' and 'family maximisers' caring for their grandchildren when their children migrate so the whole family benefits from these economic opportunities (Clarke and Cairns 2001; Risseuw 2001; Silverstein and Cong 2013)^{iv}. In turn, researchers discuss how caring for grandchildren is reciprocated by remittances to the older generation (Cong and Silverstein 2012a). Crucially these studies argue that even if migration has changed the direction and delivery of intergenerational support, this will not necessarily lead to reduced support for older parents as long as it is reciprocated with remittances, improved quality of life and care in frail old age (Chen, Lui and

Mair 2011; Silverstein and Cong 2013). This research examines these claims through the experiences of rural families many of whom are living in skipped generation households.

Examining familial support as fluid and shaped by gender and generational hierarchies

The migrant families literature has analysed intergenerational relationships as *'fluid and as constantly being reconstituted and negotiated, adapting across spaces and through time'* (Koffman 2004: 249). This literature examines the influence of the socio-economic context alongside ties of tradition, culture and reciprocity within extended (transnational) families (Creese, Dyck and McLaren 1999; Creese 2011). Rather than engaging in linear paths from 'traditional' to 'modern' family structures, migrant families are conceptualised as sites of contestation where roles and values are under negotiation (Foner 1997; 2009; Zontini 2007). These more fluid approaches to the renegotiation of support and intergenerational reciprocity are useful; not least because they remind us that familial relationships are rarely fixed. They also emphasise the importance of examining the qualitative details of family transitions; situating migrant families as heterogeneous and evolving (Creese, Dyck and McLaren 1999; Saraceno, 2008; Foner and Dreby 2011). In doing so this literature reveals that neither generation are fixed in their paths to settlement but actually engage in adaptations which are shaped by both conflict and negotiation; albeit not always with amicable outcomes (authors forthcoming).

Unpacking conflict and renegotiation is further developed by a small number of anthropological studies examining intergenerational relations in rural China (Miller 2004; Zhang 2004; 2009; and Lora-Wainwright 2013). Like the migrant families literature, these studies conceptualise intergenerational relations as *'always in process, renewed or challenged through social practices'* and constantly undergoing renegotiation as family members redefine the form and delivery of intergenerational support in the face of socio-economic change (Lora-Wainwright 2013: 199). Miller (2004) and Zhang's (2004) ethnographies of Chinese rural villages, illuminate the strategies adopted

by the older generation to ensure the support of their children. They highlight the relatively disempowered position of older people as their economic independence diminishes and examine the ways in which older people strategically reposition their claims for support within their families, while utilising the limited means at their disposal. Some key insights emerge around the way older parents strategically use the limited negotiating power they possess. For example, their preferences to live separately from their adult children are explained as a way of gaining autonomy over their everyday lives. Zhang, argues that “‘living alone” or “living separately” has potential to become a form of bargaining power for parents...’ (2004: 76). Similarly, the older generation in Miller’s (2004) research, talked of how they strategically deferred support for as long as possible as a means of guaranteeing support when they really need it. While Miller and Zhang’s studies were focused on the strategies used by older people to renegotiate intergenerational support, Lora-Wainwright’s (2013) study of families facing cancer found that what constitutes care, or indeed intergenerational support, is open to dispute within and across generations. She argues that the negotiation of care is often characterised by disagreements and resentment whereby ‘different moral economies’ are used to claim authority over defining the meaning of care and who is caring. As a result the child generation tended to offer different kinds of care while simultaneously disputing the appropriateness of the contributions of other family members.

In applying these perspectives on the fluidity and contested nature of intergenerational relationships, gender theory reminds us that these negotiations remain shaped by both gender and generational hierarchies which create differentiated opportunities and constraints across the life course for women and men (Bernard and Meade 1993; Gilhooly et al. 2003; Maynard et al. 2008). Further the gendering of roles can result in a structuring of informal relationships to family, social networks and community (Orloff 1993; Lewis 1997; Lister 1997). In the Chinese context, while traditional family structures around male lineage and the duty of sons remain influential migration has inevitably shifted these responsibilities as increasing numbers of men and women migrate.

Consequently, new strategies for familial support are emerging bringing about shifts in the responsibilities of daughter-in-laws (DIL), an increased role for daughters (Childs, Goldstein and Wangdui 2011; Cong and Silverstein 2012b), and leaving older women carrying the 'double burden' of farm and family. As a consequence *'households are now very fluid, and structured in complex ways'* in rural China (Judd 2009: 448), which may hold significant consequences for the lives of older women.

In summary the article combines the insights offered by migrant families and anthropological approaches to examine intergenerational relations as fluid and contested, and to uncover how generations strategically engage in the renegotiation of support. In doing so this article applies a gendered intergenerational lens, to argue that research needs to better understand the impact of migration on intergenerational support and growing older by exploring who provides this support, its reciprocity, and the impact of these changes on intergenerational expectations and on lived experiences of growing older in rural villages.

The Study and Methodology

The research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK), to examine the renegotiation of intergenerational relationships in rural China resulting from child generation migration. The project examined how different generations experienced, interpreted and negotiated these changes. In particular it examined the impact of shifts intergenerational support on growing older and gender relations. It utilised biographical methods and overt observation to examine lived experiences and to address the gaps in qualitative data on Chinese rural families. These methods were adopted because of the value of biography in capturing lived experiences and personal accounts of human agency (Chamberline et al. 2000; Wengraf et al. 2002). Utilising a biographical approach enabled participants to define their own needs and experiences (Kohli 1981; Gearing and Dant 1990; Bornat 2001) and reflect the different voices and interpretations of rural

families. The fieldwork was conducted by the project's Principal Investigator who is of Chinese origin and speaks native Mandarin. By residing with local families for 4 months in 2011, she was able to build trust and encourage participants to share their interpretations of change.

The key selection criteria for the two villages was duration of outmigration; one each in Shandong and Hunan provinces^v. Migration has taken place in the Hunan village since the 1980s and the Shandong village since the late 1990s. The Hunan village was also selected for the state pension pilot; the pension is relatively low (in 2011 was 55 yuan per month, i.e. £5). These factors enabled us to compare the impact of migration over different periods alongside the effect of state welfare, since the Shandong village did not have access to this pension.

The representativeness of small scale in-depth studies in two villages is inevitably limited, doubly so in a country the scale and diversity of China (Hu and Scott 2014). The transferability of the findings is however, strengthened by two factors. First, we found similar processes of intergenerational change to those identified by large scale quantitative studies (Lin, Chin-Chun and Yi 2011; Cong and Silverstein 2012b; Yunong 2012) which reflects the commonalities of the villages with other rural areas. Second, the pace and benefits of socio-economic development in China is highly uneven with some rural areas near to large cities benefitting substantially from economic growth, while many rural areas remaining outside of growth - leaving their families no choice but to migrate long distances to find work. The findings are more akin to those of poorer less developed villages and the challenges facing these communities, which arguably are fairly common in rural China. Official data comparing poverty levels in rural China within and across regions is not available so it is impossible to claim that the villages studied are typical or exceptional. Therefore caution has to be exercised around the transferability of findings to rural families per se. Nevertheless this research reveals some of the significant issues facing the restructuring of intergenerational support in many villages.

Purposive non-random sampling techniques were used to recruit the families (Mason 2002; Ritchie and Spencer 2003); ensuring a broadly representative spread of age, gender, social hierarchies and family sizes^{vi}. 17 families took part in the project, nine in Shandong and eight in Hunan. 60 individual interviews were conducted across at least two (and sometimes three) generations in each family with both male and female members^{vii}. The generations, parent and child, were made up of different age cohorts between and within generations. The parent generation in particular comprised of two cohorts; younger parents aged 50s and 60s and the older parents in their 70s and 80s^{viii}. Some differences emerged particularly around work and resources which are discussed in the findings.

Parents were interviewed in the village, as were some adult children, other child and grandchild generation interviews were conducted during the Spring Festival and the remaining took place in the cities where they worked^{ix}. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English by professional translators under the guidance of the Chinese researcher; analysis combined Mandarin and English translation to retain original meanings (Birbili 2000; Temple and Moran 2006). The interviews were analysed using two established methods: i) thematic coding of emerging themes (Ritchie and Spencer 2003, Mason 2002). ii) Intergenerational family based synopses (Attias-Donfut and Segalen 1998) examining generational and gendered experiences as well as consistencies and incongruence in interviews - revealing the presence of negotiation and conflicting interpretations.

INSERT TABLES 1-3 HERE

It is important to contextualise that most rural areas rely on agricultural subsistence farming, leaving many families living off impoverished low incomes. Serious inequalities exist between urban and rural Hukou^x and historical changes to the rural socio-economic system have weakened the economic status of older people. Consequently rural ageing has become synonymous with *'poverty, subordination within the family and with many other social and economic disadvantages'* (Xu 2001: 309). In the two villages studied, the harsh living conditions are at their most stark in the freezing

winter months (when the study took place); with no insulation and outside facilities [no toilet, just a soil pit] in most residences. All of the female parents studied were illiterate due to the prioritising of sons in the face of scarce family resources. Older men received marginally more education; with around 20% having sustained periods of education. Migration has brought small but significant improvements in the quality of these families, older generations are reaching longevity in improved health (Silverstein and Cong 2013), education is widely available in rural schools, although we found a continued preference for educating sons in most of the 17 families.

Under these circumstances, the opportunities offered by migration are extremely attractive as a means of lifting families out of extreme poverty^{xi}. Consequently large scale flows of 'temporary' migration have emerged. Due to the more flexible implementation of the One Child Policy, there are often siblings who remain behind in the village for periods of time^{xii}, with daughters sometimes married into the same village. The child generation increasingly engaged in paid work in cities, often at significant distances, leaving the grandchildren behind in skipped generation households. While migration is classified as temporary, due to the Hukou system, the child generation often migrate for long periods (sometimes decades) returning for only once a year (for the Spring festival). In the Hunan village some adult children were planning to settle permanently in the cities. Across both villages migrants planned to spend the whole of their working lives in the city, returning home when they wish to slow down and when their parents need care.

The findings prioritise the experiences and voices of the older generation. This is for two key reasons; first the voices and role of rural older people, in providing support to their families, are too often absent from existing research. Second, research has under-examined the impact of migration on growing older in rural China, especially for older women. So the primary focus here is to illuminate how older people negotiate, experience and interpret changes in the direction and delivery of familial support and its particular impact on the lives of older women. The remaining

sections first, examine the renegotiation of support; then discuss how generations interpret the changes particularly in relation to remittances in skipped generation households. Lastly, the facilitating role of older parents in their children's migration is examined as holding underexplored implications for gender and growing older in rural China.

Renegotiating Support in Later Life

Similar to other studies on Chinese families, this research found that intergenerational support remained strong despite migration (Lin and Yi 2011,2013; Guo, Chi and Silverstein 2011; Cong and Silverstein 2012a, 2012b). However, closer examination reveals a complex restructuring of intergenerational support as rural families strategically adapted to the practicalities of migration. While previous research has identified changes in intergenerational relations it has been less effective at examining the potential contestations and negotiations that underpin these changes. Importantly, these sections explore some of the ways in which intergenerational support is being renegotiated and the insights offered by analysing intergenerational relations as fluid and subject to conflict (Zhang 2004; Miller 2004; Foner 2009; Foner and Dreby 2011; Creese 2011 and Lora-Wainwright 2013).

Migration has presented new challenges for rural families and necessitated a renegotiation of intergenerational support. One area where this was most visible is how parents repositioned their expectations around care to take account of the changing pressures on their families and their reduced autonomy. Interestingly, parents used the limited resources at their disposal to influence how these expectations were perceived and received. Two key issues emerged; first, the huge importance parents attached to deferring support and working for as long as possible and second, the prioritisation of investment in their children (and grandchildren) as an investment in intergenerational reciprocity.

Within this data there are notable differences between the age cohorts that make up the parent generation: with the younger generation (aged 50/60s) being in a stronger position financially and generally in good health compared to the older cohort (aged 70s/80s); which experienced reduced income, higher rates of dependence and frailer health. However it is important to emphasise that although these are important differences in the power and resources available to parents - the centrality of narratives around independence, deferring support and investing in their children run across the cohorts in both villages.

Deferring the need for support

All of the parent generation expressed a preference for remaining active and working for as long as possible to save money for their old age, to retain autonomy over their daily lives and to defer the need for support. Overwhelmingly all age cohorts discussed the negatives of ageing. Ageing was associated with uselessness and dependency and they feared becoming a burden on their children. For many of the older cohort; old age and poor health had resulted in lost autonomy and voice within their families. These quotes from male and female parents summarise their experiences,

Being unable to do any work; having no right to speak out. I am unable to do any work, so I have no right... When I was young and able-minded, I was the head of the family, and I did what I wanted' (male parent, aged 80, F1, V1).

This female older parent reflects the genuine desire shared by all the parents to reduce the burden on their children

When one feels too weak to work, one becomes an old person. Now, I can eat and sleep, but I cannot work anymore. I think young people are carrying too much burden; they have old and young generation to support (Female parent, aged 73, F8, V2).

The migration of their children and the cultural shifts in the power of older people (Zhang 2004) combined with the relative improvements in their own incomes meant that many parents prioritised

remaining active for as long as possible, deferring retirement and saving for their old age. Despite reaching 76 and being in poor health this father (widowed) still undertook manual paid work, clearing pig manure. The previous year he worked in local restaurant and ate his meals there.

I will work if I can. I can do this work, so I will do it for a year to reduce my children's burden. If I can earn some money, I don't need to trouble my children when I am ill (Male parent, aged 76, F2, V1).

Similarly this female parent explains why she migrates for seasonal work in Hebei province

'I can take care of myself and I can afford my own living costs... I have no other choice, do I? Now I can work, so I go to work and I can earn some money... My idea is simple, ... I work for earning more money so that my husband and I may feel a little easier in our later life (female parent aged 57, F3, V1).

In younger cohorts (in their 50s/60s) in good health this included the male parent seeking paid work often outside of the village. For older cohorts this was typically small local paid work or continuing to raise animals and farm land. The preference to remain productive is embedded in the desire to retain autonomy over their lives. Importantly in some cases this involved older parents continuing to do heavy manual work well into their 70s, giving them very little time for rest and leisure before the onset of frailty and ill health.

These findings reveal how parents carry the burden of hard work well beyond retirement in order to both lighten the strain on their children but also to ensure that when they eventually do need this support their children will look on it kindly - as they have asked for so little until now. These findings are akin to those of Zhang (2004) and Miller's (2004) on older people's preference to live in separate dwellings in order to regain autonomy over their daily lives and improve relations with their children so they provide filial support.

Investing in their children as a corner stone of intergenerational reciprocity

The second narrative expressed by parents was around the importance of investing in their children and grandchildren (more often in relation to their son's lineage). Again younger and older cohorts in the parent generation articulated these commitments but the younger age cohort was more often in a position to defer filial support. The below quote reflects parents' preferences to continue working and the way they experienced and interpreted the renegotiation of intergenerational support post migration. Despite reaching 65, this parent continued to work building houses - his reference to intergenerational reciprocity is particularly striking;

I want to do as much work as I can do when I can do now; I will only ask my children for money when I cannot make any money any longer... I had offered a great help to my two sons; otherwise they would not be so satisfied with me (Male parent, aged 65, F6, V1).

In their interviews parents would often reflect on the expectations of support they had of their children and of how they were confident that this would be honoured not only because their children were filial but because they had 'treated them so well'; investing in their education, often building them a house when they married, bringing up their grandchildren and asking for very little in return until they reach frailty. Others stated how '*They will surely look after us. We do all the things for him now*' (male parent, aged 63, F4, V1). Similar reflections on the reciprocity of a lifetime investment in their families and how these bonds were strengthened by only asking for support when they really needed it, was identified in over half of interviews with the parent generation (across the two villages and age cohorts).

The way in which the parents expressed these intergenerational commitments evidences not only the endurance of informal systems of intergenerational support in poor rural families, it is also reveals how parents sought to strategically position claims for intergenerational reciprocity in later life. At the same time though, this data also points to how some felt relatively powerless in these negotiations and their sense of ambiguity. For example, parents frequently explained how they

could not determine whether and how their children would fulfil their filial obligations. The decision is their children's hands;

All arrangements depend on them. As parents, if we eat what we grow, we'll think it is delicious. If we force them to give us a certain amount of money and a certain quantity of articles, it is undesirable. They can make arrangements at discretion'(male parent, aged 81, F1, V2).

Examining intergenerational relations in rural families as constantly evolving has revealed the limited resources available to parents in shaping the form and delivery of support, and their creativity in repositioning how they negotiate support. It has also highlighted some of the strains facing rural families and the impact of these changes on the lives and autonomy of older generation. Some of the effects of this renegotiated intergenerational support are now explored.

Lived Experiences of the Changes in Intergenerational Support

Migration results in the separation of generations across large distances, in most cases for yearly intervals (for Spring Festival), some children don't return for 3-5 years^{xiii}. This is a significant change in the living arrangements of rural families but all 17 families viewed it as necessary for the welfare of the family (Ganga 2006; Bolzmann, Fibbi and Vial 2006); to raise funds for elder care, education, housing etc. Importantly, the separation of the extended family is made possible by the increased role of older parents in providing support (farm and care). This support can take multiple forms; with the older generation working later in life to manage the family plot, and/or caring for grandchildren full-time in skipped generation households. How these changes are experienced and interpreted and the differences in interpretations and impact between generations and genders is now explored.

Attitudes to remittances

While only a handful of Chinese studies have discussed the increased child care role of grandparents, they have emphasised the reciprocal nature of remittances from children to their parents. Arguing that migration will not have a detrimental effect on elder support as long as it is reciprocated with remittances, improved quality of life and care in frail old age (Cong and Silverstein 2008; 2012a; Chen, Lui and Mair 2011; Silverstein and Cong 2013). In contrast, we found that very few families accepted remittances, and those that did only accepted the basic living costs for their grandchildren. For the majority of older parents, bringing up their grandchildren was articulated as their *'duty'* or contribution and the basis for reciprocal care when they needed it later.

The majority of the parent generation, especially in the Shandong village, shared this perspective which is summarised in these quotes from one family. These parents brought up their eleven year old grandson while their son and DIL were away. In his interview, the father interprets the family income as being shared, and argues that his children are free to keep their money to invest in the future. He does not ask for money from his son because he earns enough money himself *'so why ask for theirs'* (Male parent, aged 63, F4, V1). The mother supports this view *'Ah, no, never, we never asked for it. It's OK for us, they are our children'* (female parent, aged 58, F4, V1). This reluctance to ask for remittances from their children was found in over half of the families in the Shandong village. The overarching emphasis was upon *'duty'*, reciprocity and investing in future generations all of which are expressed as being part of familial culture and ensuring reciprocity of care in older age.

Skipped generation households were also common in the Hunan village, where the majority of children also resided with grandparents. However, acceptance of remittances was more common in this second village. For example, we found some cases of sons paying into their parent's (state) pension and health insurances. However, remittances still rarely exceeded the living expenses for grandchildren and the parents continued to defer financial support until they really needed it.

Nevertheless, remittances were perceived to be important. One eldest son explained how if his son

did not send money *'life will be a little tougher at home... If we need money, we'll call him and he'll send money back'* (Eldest son aged 56, F1, V2). Because the samples are relatively small only 17 families, we can only speculate that changes in the separation of family income in the Hunan village relate to the longer-term impact of migration and the introduction of pension insurance.

While income for grandparenting undoubtedly improves the quality of life of the parent generation findings indicates that it may also be a source of intergenerational tension, differentiated interpretations and fractures in familial support (Vullnetari and King 2008; Foner and Dreby 2011). We found some dissonance between expectations and the actual support received in a minority of families in the Hunan village. These experiences may point to some of the strains that long-term migration places on familial support and the limited power that some parents felt in negotiating remittances.

For example, in one family both parents spoke of how remittances did not cover their financial needs. 300 yuan per month were given to cover the grandchildren's living expenses^{xiv}. The parents in family 5 (Village 2) were caring for their 5 grandchildren, yet the flow of remittances were uncertain. These interviews revealed intergenerational disjunctures around remitting; both of the parents explained how their children ask them to remain healthy and reduce their farm labour yet they offer no financial support to enable them to do so;

The children ask me to eat better yet they only send money for children's living costs so nothing for us to improve our life (female parent aged 60, F5, V2).

Their narratives also reflected uncertainly around financial support from their children in the future.

They just say that if I cannot work anymore, my wife and I will eat exactly the same as they eat. It is what they say, it's hard to know if they'll really do that in the future (male parent aged 67, F5, V2).

In his interview their son explained that he is happy to provide support when it is needed and explains how he told his father;

if you need anything, just ask me. If nothing happens, leave me alone as I am busy. If you have anything, you call me and I will be home (youngest son aged 37, F5, V2)

There are inconsistencies in the narratives of parents and children in several of the families. Child generation perspectives on remittances for grandchild care are mixed and in some cases differentiated but the following example summarises the dilemmas the child generation face. In family 6 the DIL expressed how she felt that her parents-in-law expected them to send money home when they were themselves earning relatively little. They didn't send money for living expenses for their son on the assumption that their parents were young, in their 50s, and are financially coping:

If they are in their 60s or 70s, it will be bad not to send money home. But they are so young and don't have much burden. Although we leave our son to them, we always buy clothes for him when we get home. .. they are healthy and young so we don't plan to send money home' (DIL aged 24 , F6, V2).

Differences in perspectives were evident in many of the families - not just in terms of the barriers posed to receiving support due to the children's reluctance to offer and their parent's reluctance to ask - but also differences around actual amounts remitted and what constituted care (Lora-Wainwright 2013). These inconsistencies and internal family tensions are difficult to disentangle, however as migration spans generations we can see some evidence of contestation and conflict over changes in familial support. By exploring these qualitatively this research reveals the nuances around how generations perceive these changes and their subsequent disagreements. Worryingly, we did not find much evidence to substantiate claims that changes in elder support are compensated by remittances and improved quality of life for older parents. This can be explained by multiple factors, first the desire of the older generation to defer support from their children until absolutely needed.

Second, the low levels of state welfare, and complete absence in most rural areas, leaves too high a burden on the child generation when we consider they are simultaneously supporting parents and children and covering the living costs of their families across two locations.

Changes in the direction of intergenerational support - implications for gender and ageing

As discussed earlier the majority of Chinese studies assume that support is predominantly uni-directional, from adult children to ageing parents (Lin and Yi 2013). While a small number of studies examine grandparenting in skipped generation households (Chen, Lui and Mair 2011; Silverstein and Cong 2013), they do not focus on how changes in the direction of intergenerational support impact on the lives of older women who carry most of this burden. This study confirms that rather than a reduction in familial support (predicted by modernisation), migration has resulted in an increased flow of support from older parents to adult children in the form of domestic, agricultural and child care work. Historically, the older generation have always played a significant child care role, freeing parents to earn work points in the commune and later to work the family plots or seek local employment. With the Hukou system making it expensive for migrant workers to educate their children in the cities, older parents have become the full-time carers of their sons and sometimes their daughter's children; a significant stepping up of traditional roles. Overall bringing up grandchildren was more often a commitment to sons with only a few examples of parents looking after their daughter's children.

While in some families domestic, farming and care work were shared by parents (especially those experiencing frail health), in reality it was overwhelmingly the responsibility of older women. The gendered intergenerational lens of this study reveals the importance of examining how generations and genders experience and interpret these changes (Lister 1997; Gilhooly et al. 2003). Since the disbanding of communes, older women have been entirely productively engaged in the private sphere of the family farm. Only a very small minority of female parents migrated for work (2 across

the entire sample) and very few had engaged in paid work outside. In contrast, almost half the male parents were still engaged in paid work either locally or in nearby cities, resulting in their partners carrying the responsibilities at home. Across their working lives it is the women that return for periods while their children are young and in the vast majority of cases it is grandmothers who remain in the village to tend the land and bring up grandchildren (Judd 2009).

While some parents shared farm work and childcare, the majority of this double burden was carried by older women with their spouses playing a supporting role. The extent to which this familial support is gendered and its impact on the lives of older women is reflected in the examples of families below. The female parent aged 67, had looked after her sons' children and helped her daughters with farming. As she aged her responsibilities increased. Her son and DIL were working away but her three daughters were married into the same village so she cared for their children so they could work. She wanted to migrate for work herself but felt unable to do so because of her care responsibilities. At the same time she was looking after her son's land. Things were getting harder;

I didn't worry about such easy work as farming in the past. As I grow older, I find it easy to be tired, besides I haven't done farming for 20 years' (female parent aged 60, F5, V1).

These experiences reflect the traditional hierarchies around care in rural families which render women more often the sole providers of child care, domestic and agricultural labour. Older women were rarely educated and have spent most of their formative years in the homestead. These constraints shape younger women's lives also, child generation women are expected to give up work to take care of their young children and then this role is handed over to the paternal grandmother when they migrate to work with their husbands.

These findings reveal the negative implications of changes in intergenerational support and the heavy burden it places on the lives of older women. The potentially detrimental effects are under-examined in existing research on rural China and the renegotiated intergenerational contract is assumed to be based on intergenerational consensus. Further a minority of female parents

discussed how they resented the limitations that grandchild care and farming placed on them and how it caused tensions in their families. Several parent generation women talked of how they wanted to migrate for work and others expressed the strain of carrying domestic work alone. For example, as sole carer for her grandchildren (both son and daughter's), receiving no help from her husband, this mother talked of feeling frustrated that all her life has been spent looking after others.

I have been working hard all my life. After building this house successfully, ..., I helped my eldest son to marry a wife. After that, I repaired the house below in which the brother of my husband lives (who is a person enjoying five government [welfare] guarantees). ...I had thought that I could have a rest after working hard for so many years, but I had to look after their children. Therefore, I do not have time to rest all my life (female parent aged 61, F4, V2).

There is a real sense in which the older women carry a huge burden for their families but not all of them passively accept these conditions. Another female parent explained how she took a very different approach; choosing to live at distance from her adult children so she would not have to bring up her grandchildren. She explained how all her children told her

...to give up doing work and the land....They all asked me to live in their homes in rotation when I become too old to move. But now grandchildren are so young, I have to take care of them if I live in their homes (female parent aged 68, F8, V1).

This is an example of how some parents use the limited resources at their disposal in order to avoid having to provide childcare in older age and retain autonomy.

One of the key implications of the gendering of care is how it restricts women's choices across generations, to differing degrees. The more extreme gendered affects of outward migration are evident among older women who carry the largest burden of care but some of these restrictions equally applied to daughters as they are increasingly seen as important sources of support (Childs, Goldstein and Wangdui 2011; Cong and Silverstein 2012b), thus their migration is often

intermittently structured around the provision of child and elder care. The clear separation between the public world of work in the city and the private world of care and subsistence farming in the village, structure the lives of women across the generations - but the limitations are felt more by older women. There is some evidence that over time as more women migrate, these inequalities may ease (Judd 2009). However, while the Hukou system makes city education expensive the opportunities for women's migration will continue to be based on the unpaid care of older women, or in some cases the willingness of younger women to remain behind.

Summary

This article examined the renegotiation of intergenerational support resulting from the migration of adult children in Chinese rural families. In doing so it has drawn from Chinese familial research that has evidenced the endurance of filial culture despite processes of modernisation (Silverstein 2009; Lin and Yi 2011, 2013), and combined these insights with intergenerational and gendered research on migration and ageing which emphasises the bilateral, fluid and at times conflictual nature of renegotiations in familial support (Foner and Dreby 2011; Creese 2011; Zhang 2004). The resulting gendered intergenerational lens has examined who provides this support, its reciprocity, and the impact of these changes on intergenerational expectations and the lives of older parents. By exploring these questions qualitatively the research has generated new insights into the contested, negotiated and sometimes conflicting perspectives on the restructuring of support, as well as its highly gendered implications.

As the families in our study have adapted to changes in intergenerational support we found evidence of consensus and conflict, the strategic repositioning of the older generations claims for care and some examples of dissonance between expectations and the actual support received. Importantly the research found that parents strategically repositioned their claims for support, using the limited resources at their disposal. In these negotiations they sought to both lighten the burden

on their children and strategically defer their claims for support to ensure reciprocity when they really need it. The findings also evidence limited reciprocity through remittances and some dissatisfaction with the limited flow of financial support. Worryingly, little evidence was found to substantiate claims that changes in elder support are compensated by remittances and improved quality of life for older parents. While this can be explained in part by the desire of parents to defer support until they absolutely need it, the data also points to a difference in expectations between the generations around migration income and evidence that the absence of state support places too much pressure on the child generation. Further, differences between the two villages, relating to longevity of migration, indicate that more substantive changes in intergenerational support may emerge over time which may increase conflict in intergenerational support if both generations do not adapt at a similar pace (Foner 2009).

Another key insight of the research is the gendered implications of the stepping-up of grandparenting for the lives of older women. In common with research on grandparenting in rural areas in developing/emerging countries, the 'double burden' of farm and domestic/care work largely falls to older women (Casale 2011, Aboderin and Hoffman 2012). Existing studies of Chinese rural families, under-examine the additional burden that changes in intergenerational support bring for older women. This study points to the importance of analysing the impact of grandparenting in skipped generation households, in terms of its effects on the lives and opportunities of older women. These changes do not have to inevitably result in detrimental effects. However, one of the key implications of the gendering of care is how it restricts the choices open to women of all generations. While the opportunities for younger women may improve over time, the cost of outward migration is more acutely felt by older women whereby their working lives continue to be almost entirely located in the private sphere of the homestead. Currently the freedom of younger women is premised on the child care and farming labour of paternal grandmothers. The findings therefore illuminate the need for future research to examine not only the endurance of familial

support in rural China but also the strain and conflict this can bring to intergenerational relations; alongside a closer examination of the implications this holds for the lives of rural older women.

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ⁱ Following Finch(1989), we understand familial support as multi-dimensional, incorporating: financial support (including cash remittances or goods); instrumental support (assisting with tasks); emotional support (improving psychological wellbeing) and personal care (feeding, bathing etc).

ⁱⁱ Uxorilocal marriage is a process whereby families who have only daughters, their daughters agree to marry locally and support is given by the daughter and son-in-law (Zhang 2004).

ⁱⁱⁱ The vast majority of Chinese familial research is quantitative. Within this, only a small number of studies examined bidirectional intergenerational support (Silverstein and Cong 2013; Chen, Lui and Mair 2011), and a small anthropology literature on rural families (Miller 2004; Zhang 2004; Childs, Goldstein and Wangdu 2011; Lora-Wainwright 2013).

^{iv} Grandchildren remain in the villages due to the complex Hukou household registration system (which restricts permanent relocation to the cities) and the high costs of child care and education in the cities.

^v Villages have been anonymised to protect the identity of the families.

^{vi} The sample also included two families who only had daughters, no sons.

^{vii} The age of the parent generation spanned from 57-83 years, adult children ranged from 21- 56.

^{viii} Out of 28 parent generation interviewed, 3 were in their 80s, 10 in their 70s, 11 in their 60s and 4 in their 50s. Consequently interviews were spread fairly evenly across the two age cohorts 70/80s N= 13 and 50s/60s N=15.

^{ix} At least two interviews took place in each family with some families involving up to 6 interviews.

^x The Hukou system defines the status of Chinese people based on two categories rural and urban; despite being dissolved in the 1980s it still determines socio-economic eligibility (Huang 2012).

^{xi} Migrants tend to be in low-paid manual jobs in the migrating cities. The education level is mostly around middle school level. Their income ranges from 1,000 to 3,000 yuan per month on average. Parents are in farm work. Many of the older parents are illiterate. Cash come from agricultural output is roughly 5,000 yuan a year.

^{xii} In rural China, one-child policy was not strictly implemented; since the 1980s the state has allowed a rural family to have a second child if their first child is female. The majority of families in our sample had more than one child, although statistics on number of children in rural families do not exist, many families have more than one child.

^{xiii} While rural families have for some time chosen to live in separate dwellings within courtyards, they have lived in close proximity on family plots since the 1950s.

^{xiv} The annual living costs for two adults and 5 children would be in the region of 5000 yuan.

Table 1

| Name | Percentage of migration | Annual cash income from agricultural output | Migrants' wages per year |
|-----------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Village 1 | 70 | 3000-4000 | 12000-36000 |
| Village 2 | 80 | 3000-4000 | 12000-48000 |

Table 2

| | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Village 1 Shandong Province | Family members interviewed |
| Family 1 | Father (aged 80), mother (79) and daughter (46) |
| Family 2 | Father (76), 2 sons (47 & 41), DIL (50), granddaughter-in-law (30s) |
| Family 3 | Father (60) and mother (57) |
| Family 4 | Father (63), mother (58), son (34) and DIL (34) |
| Family 5 | Father (70), mother (67), son (41), daughter (42) |
| Family 6 | Father (65), mother (57), son (37) and DIL (40) |
| Family 7 | Mother (72), son (49) and DIL (49) |
| Family 8 | Father (67), mother (68), daughter (38), |
| Family 9 | Mother (79) DIL(57) 1 grandson (22), granddaughter-in-law (25) |

Table 3

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Village 2 Hunan province | Family members interviewed |
| Family 1 | Father (aged 81), mother (77), son (56), DIL (54), grandson (31), granddaughter-in-law (29) |
| Family 2 | Farther (78), Mother (75), 1 son (56), DIL (52) |
| Family 3 | Mother (78) 2 sons (47 and 45) |
| Family 4 | Mother (61) and son (39) |
| Family 5 | Father (67), mother (60) and son (37) |
| Family 6 | Father (60), mother (55), son (21) and daughter (24) |
| Family 7 | Mother (65) and son (35) |
| Family 8 | Father (80), mother (73), son (46), granddaughter (26) |