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## A Better Life? Migration, Reproduction and Wellbeing in Transition

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### *Abstract*

Mainstream theoretical approaches to migration and reproduction in Asia and elsewhere separate questions relating to reproduction from exploration of economic migration, leading to limitations in current understandings. The tendency to see migratory livelihoods in largely productive terms and to conceptualise the reproductive in terms of consequence or constraint neglects the complex inter-linkages between migration and reproduction in the search for a 'better life'. Addressing these 'missing links' involves taking a broader approach to reproductive behaviour that factors in not only sexual relations and reproductive management but also social reproduction, gender relations between men and women and wider well-being. The transitional economies of Vietnam and China have experienced rapid growth in new forms of migration, in particular rural-urban migration that challenge existing presumptions about migration and reproduction. Not only does marriage migration in this context have strong economic dimensions, economic migration also has clear reproductive dimensions. Prevailing policy and popular stereotypes about how migration intersects with reproduction are being undermined by an increasing diversity of migrant strategies for building and sustaining their own families. Moreover existing institutional and policy constraints mean that these strategies often involve difficult and unpalatable trade-offs for individual and family well-being. In both countries the remaining household registration system and the related structuring of social entitlements lead to social exclusion of migrants and their families in urban areas, and perpetuate rural-urban inequalities, with outcomes detrimental to the well-being of current and future generations of the migrants who are trying to build livelihoods and meaningful lives.

*Keywords:* Rural-urban migration; Reproduction; Gender; Social entitlements; Well-being; Vietnam; China

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## *Introduction*

Prevailing analytical approaches to the intersections between migration and reproduction in Asia have focused relatively narrowly on productive labour and fertility. As a result, we argue, these approaches neglect important linkages between migration and reproduction. The first part of our paper reviews theoretical concerns about the way prevailing analytical approaches to migration and reproduction in Asia are framed. The second part proposes a different conceptual approach that offers more scope for inter-linking migration, reproduction and well-being. The third part illustrates the significance of these interactions with reference to Vietnam and China. Our intention is to make a strong theoretical and empirical case for improving understandings of how migration, reproduction and well-being are linked.

We focus on Vietnam and China where the process of economic transition<sup>1</sup> has been accompanied by new kinds of migration, in particular rural-urban migration, which have rapidly gained in momentum. In both contexts, popular opinion and public policy have often been informed by unquestioned assumptions about the nature and meaning of rapidly increasing mobility and its implications for reproductive behaviours and risks to health. For instance, rural migrants have been depicted as evading fertility regulations<sup>2</sup>, as carrying infectious diseases, or as swelling the numbers of sex workers (Tan 2005). Early policy responses to migration, fertility and reproductive and sexual health suggest that migrants and their reproductive behaviours are in some senses trespassing beyond official sanctions. Consequently, Vietnam and China offer strong potential for exploring the linkages between reproduction and migration, and their implications for social policy and well-being.

### *Analytical Approaches to Migration and Reproduction*

It is taken-for-granted in much of the existing literature on rural-urban migration in Asia that '[rural] populations migrate to seek a better life' (Dang et

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<sup>1</sup> 'Transition' refers to the multi-dimensional changes that accompany the dismantling of centrally-planned economies in favour of market-oriented economies. In the case of China and Vietnam transition there have seen limited formal political changes, but included the reorganisation of agricultural production, land use rights and inheritance practice, the reform of state-owned enterprises, the restructuring of the social sector, the emphasis on the 'rule of law', important shifts in state-citizen relations, as well as increasing space for the practice of religion and civic activities. Associated with this process are other unintentional developments, such as the growing cultural influence of globalization, that play a significant role in transition.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in China the 'above-quota birth guerrilla' was a popular comic expression adopted to ridicule rural migrant couples, who were seen as trying to take advantage of an administrative loophole by having 'above-quota' children through migration.

al. 1997:322, emphasis ours) and for the most part this has been interpreted in terms of the search for productive livelihood. The dichotomy widely drawn between migration for survival or accumulation (Waddington 2003) betrays the overwhelming concern with material and economic well-being. Indeed, Saith's (1999) review of migration processes and policies in Asia focuses on 'migration which is more immediately related to economic factors and motivations' whilst at the same time recognising that there are other forms of migration broadly defined that are immensely significant in Asia, including marriage-related migration, political migration and the illegal trafficking of women.

These forms of migration are commonly bracketed off as being about something different (customary kinship arrangements, illegality or globalisation) and therefore are dealt with in separate analytical spheres. Marriage and marriage migration are downplayed in the migration literature, because of 'the general lack of attention on gender, the assumption that marriage is no more than a life event that triggers migration, and the notion that marriage is an end to migration rather than a means to an end' (Fan and Li 2002: 619; see also Davin 2007; Palriwala and Uberoi 2008).

In contrast, the large body of demographic work that deals with rural-urban migration has tended to focus on its impact on fertility because of the consequences for population growth and associated concerns such as environmental sustainability and urban development. In particular, this work has been concerned with how different migratory processes (temporary, permanent, circular) lead to the 'adaptation' or 'disruption' of fertility behaviour to varying extents. However, the emphasis on the 'cumbersome biological acts of fertility' (Bledsoe 1990:98 cited in Greenhalgh 1995:15) tends to obscure broader reproductive strategies, interests and experiences. Consequently, this literature has not paid much attention to the way that reproductive aspirations may shape migration processes, or how migrants actively negotiate marriage, marital relations, the timing of childbearing and spousal separation, ways of childrearing and children's education or the implication of these strategies for reproductive well-being and the welfare of individuals and families involved (but see Hoy 1999 and Hoy 2009 for important exceptions).

More recently, the analysis of gender-selective migration has highlighted the importance of linkages to sexuality and reproduction. As migrants, both men and women are often excluded from sexual and reproductive health services at the same time as they are seen as adopting risky non-traditional behaviours (Iredale et al. 2005; Qian et al. 2005; Yang et al. 2005). Male migration has long been associated with the growth of the female commercial sex industry, and the unabated HIV/AIDS pandemic has focused policy attention on migrants' sexual

behaviours and risks (IOM and UNAIDS 2005; Yang 2004). Where men migrate leaving behind wives and families, they may bring infection back home with them, and unprecedented levels of unmarried female migration have raised concerns about the sexual exploitation and abuse of women, particularly young girls driven into the sex industry by poverty, social exclusion and marginalisation in urban settings, including the urban labour market (Skeldon 2000). In these analyses, reproduction and reproductive 'ill-being' are seen in terms of consequences or risks entailed through migration.

In addition, the gendered dimension of migration has largely addressed two themes: firstly, the implications of classic male rural-urban migration for gender relations in rural agrarian production; and, secondly, the consequences of female migration for women's empowerment since the 1980s as increasing numbers of younger women are leaving for urban areas to work as cheap labour for global capital. This latter research has drawn attention to these workers' lack of maternity rights, as well as practices of compulsory pregnancy testing, restricted toilet breaks, and sexual harassment that can jeopardise their reproductive health, as well as women's resistance (Pearson and Seyfang 2001; Pun 2005). Whilst contributing significantly to our understanding of gendered migration, the central concerns have been the relations of production whilst the linkages and intersections between migration and sexuality and reproduction have not been given primary considerations (but see Kabeer 2007 for an important exception addressing social reproduction).

Similarly, livelihoods research on migration has provided valuable insights in understanding the motivations, processes and outcomes of migration, which point to the need for longitudinal perspectives and the recognition of intra-household as well as wider community relations. In the main, however, livelihoods approaches have been insufficiently gendered and also remain concerned mainly with productive issues. For example, studies on household livelihoods in Vietnam tend to overlook gender, and where gender is taken into account, the emphasis tends to be placed on the institutional constraints for women to participate in economic activities. These constraints include cultural norms, gendered roles, expectations and divisions of labour including those around reproductive roles (Kabeer and Thi Van Anh 2002). Thus, reproduction is either downplayed or conceptualised as one of a number of constraints that disadvantage women and this emphasis sits well with that found in the literature on the gendered selectivity of migration.

In short, we have, in this section, drawn attention to the normal demarcation of migration related to reproduction as somehow different from economic migration, to the overwhelmingly productive interpretation of migration as a

material livelihood strategy, and to the focus on the reproductive in terms of consequences and constraints. Against this backdrop, we turn to examine the largely overlooked intersections between migration, reproduction, and well-being and argue for the value of looking in a more interactive way at their inter-linkages.

*Reconceptualising the Links between Migration and Reproduction*

Making a life is not merely about making a productive living but involves, amongst other things, the creation and maintenance of meaningful familial and social relationships that bring a sense of belonging, achievement and emotional satisfaction. Amongst these relationships, childhood, wifhood and motherhood are central. In addition, access to a productive living (or the fruits of it) is at many points across the life cycle for women achieved through their performance of reproductive roles. Broader understandings of livelihoods such as that offered by Whitehead (2002: 577, cited in Waddington 2003: 5) as ‘the diverse ways in which people make a living and build their worlds’, lend themselves to better situating productive activities as key elements in a larger strategy of living a life. Reconceptualising livelihoods in this way enables us to factor in reproductive dynamics and a broader understanding of well-being in examining migration.

Overcoming the problematic analytical divisions between spheres of production and reproduction and their presumed associations with the male and the female respectively is integral to this task. This will involve going beyond the view that motherhood and the related caring roles of women can be regarded as a ‘reproductive tax’ (Kabeer and Thi Van Anh 2002) to acknowledge the economic components of reproductive strategies and the intrinsic value of reproductive well-being to mobile livelihoods. Chant confirms that for women particularly ‘migration for, or within the context of marriage, is an important factor, notwithstanding that migration for marriage is often associated with economic and social mobility’ (1992: 3). Indeed, the emerging literature on transnational motherhood, such as Parrenas (2001) and Piper and Roces (2003), makes important progress in exploring these tensions for women undertaking care work across international boundaries. We propose a different way forward offered by the growing literature on the social relations of reproduction which draws heavily on anthropology, sociology, politics and gender studies. It engages closely with the way reproductive strategies are embedded in wider social relations and processes, exploring both the ambiguity of lived experiences and the iterative ways that reproductive outcomes are shaped and given meaning as women and, importantly, men attempt to ‘manage’ their reproductive lives (Bledsoe 1994; Greenhalgh 1995; Tremayne 2001).

The social importance of paternity for men, especially of sons, in many settings is well recognised, but there has been little exploration of how this cultural imperative is linked to the everyday reality of reproductive relations or to male ‘reproductive agency’ (Unnithan-Kumar 2001: 31). Men are frequently absent from discussions of fertility and appear only ‘as shadows: as partners by implication of those engaged in childbearing’ (Bledsoe et al. 2000: 1). However, Ali’s work on Egyptian men shows that the ‘caring and affection that these men felt for their wives and children’ was ‘intrinsically linked... to her reproductive and childbearing capacities’ and involved ‘desire to retain control and power’ over them (2000: 130-2). The deeply ambivalent nature of male power over reproduction on one hand, and the ‘massive male disengagement from parental responsibilities’ (Bledsoe et al. 2000: 3) on the other, suggests that far from segregating or stereotyping men there may be much to be gained by taking a holistic look at the changing ways men negotiate their reproductive and productive lives in the context of migration. Emerging, empirically-rich, research on masculinities and migration will make an important contribution in this respect (Yeoh and Hung forthcoming).

Reconceptualising the links between migration and reproduction in these ways means recognising that engaging successfully in migration for productive work may be centrally about, as well as in tension with, being a dutiful wife/reliable husband and a good mother/father. Whilst affirming that the division of household labour is unequal and that the devaluation of reproductive work is problematic, we argue that there remains a need for more serious attention to reproduction in migration research. Migration for a ‘better life’ may be intrinsically about reproductive relations as well as involving distinct reproductive strategies with different implications for reproductive well-being. We now turn to the specific context of growing rural-urban migration in Vietnam and China in order to explore how such an approach to linking migration, reproduction and well-being opens up new insights and valuable concerns.

### *Vietnam and China in Transition*

Vietnam and China have experienced a substantial growth of ‘new’ kinds of migration associated with their processes of economic transition. Both nations regard the scale of this mobility and its implications for population growth as a matter of concern and both have a history of attempting to control mobility and fertility, creating quite specific pressures on migration and reproduction. Below, we outline key similarities and differences in the context of transition, migration and reproduction between the two states. We focus on rural-urban migrants

engaged in a variety of migratory processes often cyclical, or seasonal, that may 'end' in return to the village, further migration, or with marriage/occupational success leading to settlement in the city.

In both states transition has been initiated through far-reaching economic reforms, with limited formal political change. Vietnam's reforms were largely modelled on the Chinese experience (from the late 1970s), but began a decade later (in 1986). Both have achieved high economic growth rates and initially positive responses to new incentives from their large agricultural sectors (Summerfield 1997: 204). Whilst Vietnam has substantially rolled back state employment, China, while attempting to reform state-owned enterprises, has faced huge challenges of tackling unemployment, new forms of poverty, and maintaining social and political stability. As Summerfield argues: '[t]he social safety net in Vietnam, in contrast to China, is separate from state-owned industry reducing the welfare loss of cutting state jobs, but in both countries, funding for human security has been problematic since the reforms' (1997: 204). Although absolute poverty has been reduced, inequality, relative poverty and social stratification have significantly increased in Vietnam and China (Khan and Riskin 2001; GoV 2002; Wang and Hu 1999; Zhang, et al. 2006). Growing differentials between richer and poorer regions, between different economic sectors, between and within rural and urban areas (GoV 2002; Wang 2004) are creating spatial inequalities in incomes, opportunities, and general development. This, combined with relaxed state control over movement, has led to rapidly increasing numbers of people moving, especially from rural to urban areas (Guest 1998; Summerfield 1997).

China has experienced unprecedented large scale rural to urban migration since the early 1980s. This has become known popularly as the 'floating population' (*liudong renjou*) or the tide of migrant labourers (*mingongchao*) (Zhang 1999: 5) and there are now an estimated 120-200 million migrant workers in Chinese towns and cities (Huang, 2009; State Council 2006: 3-4), constituting more than 10 per cent of the entire population of 1.3 billion. In Vietnam, although the level of migration is relatively modest compared to surrounding countries, it is large compared to pre-1986 and migration to urban areas has accelerated during the 1990s (Zhang et al. 2006). It has been generally understood in both countries that 'employment strategies to improve the family's well-being have resulted in increased rural-urban migration by men and young women, while middle-aged, married women remain in the countryside taking care of the farms and children' (Summerfield 1997:201). However, the aggregate flows mask changing patterns in the character of migration, gender differences in migrant flows and considerable micro-level diversity (see for example: Guest 1998; Dang et al. 1997; Davin 1996; GSO 2005; Zhang 1999).



In both cases migration and its linkages to reproduction are stratified by qualifications for residency and related social entitlements: whereas state-sanctioned migrants, and increasingly wealthy migrants, may obtain or purchase 'permanent' urban household registration, those migrants with work or business permits from their home authorities are only eligible for 'temporary' residence permits at destination (Zhang 2007). It is estimated that in Vietnam over 80 per cent of migrants have a form of temporary registration (GoV 2002:4), and there have been 'ongoing concerns that the registration system restricts migrants from accessing services in their places of destination' (GSO 2005:10). In China the overwhelming majority of migrants are 'unregistered' and they have largely been denied rights to urban social security schemes on the grounds that their security is provided by their home villages. Although temporary residence permits enable them to work in urban areas, they need frequent renewal at police stations and involve financial costs (Davin 1996; Li 2004). Attempting to secure a residence permit involves bureaucratic difficulty, frustration, time and substantial costs (Li 2002, 2004; Zhan et al. 2002) and 'only the most successful migrants could consider purchasing a permanent residence permit' (Davin 1996: 27).

In both Vietnam and China, the social rights of migrants, particularly female migrants, have been largely neglected by the state as well as by researchers until recently. Migrants' employment is often short-lived, contracts are non-existent or short term, they are easily fired, most live in poor conditions and they are vulnerable to harassment by the local police/authorities. In China, migrants complain of detention, arbitrary fining or even periodic repatriation to their rural origin (Davin 1996), in the name of 'maintaining urban order' (Li 2004) and similar treatment was proposed in Vietnam where the government is concerned about the number of migrants as well as their 'perceived lack of control of the migration process and a feeling that this has contributed to social problems such as increased crime and other social evils' (Guest 1998: 6). At the early stage of reforms, both official and popular perceptions of rural migrants were predominantly negative partly owing to the legacy of tight control over population mobility but also as a result of deep-rooted urban bias (Croll 1997; Goldstein et al. 1997; GoV 2001; Guest 1998; Skeldon and Hugo 1999). For example, they have been variously depicted as possessing traditional values and norms of preferring more children, particularly sons, in comparison with urban dwellers; as using migration as a strategy to evade family planning regulations at home; and more recently young female migrants have been linked to prostitution in urban areas.

However, a recent shift towards a more positive public discourse on rural-urban migration, supported by development agencies and by policy-relevant research (such as Xiang and Tan 2005), has led to more ambivalence towards rural

migrants in urban settings. While prejudice and discrimination remain widespread, both the Chinese and Vietnamese governments have recognised migrants' contributions to economic development and articulated commitments to improve migrants' working and social security conditions (GoV 2001, 2002; GSO 2005; State Council 2006), including relaxing the household registration system (GoV 2002; Zhan et al. 2002).

These changing perceptions are played out in official policy relating specifically to the reproductive behaviour of migrants. Population policy in Vietnam seeks to limit childbearing but has never been as strict as in China, with a two rather than a one-child policy (Summerfield 1997: 203). In China '[m]igrants in the urban areas are perceived as having too many children, because they are 'difficult to control' and 'no-one is responsible for them' (Davin 1996: 28). In 1991 the government established 'Measures for the management of family planning in the floating population' making it a national requirement to carry family planning certificates listing marital status, fertility history and contraceptive status (Goldstein et al. 1997: 481; Hoy 1999: 134). These should theoretically be shown before a residence, business or work permit can be issued, enabling government personnel in destination areas to police migrant's fertility behaviour (Hoy 1999: 135). In Vietnam, although the two-child policy has been more loosely implemented, with wide variations in adherence, malpractices have been reported (Banister 1993; Johansson 1998), and from 1988 families who did not observe the two-child limit were prohibited from moving into urban centres and industrial zones (Banister 1993: 82). However, fears that Vietnam might follow China's harder line on population have been dispelled by the strengthening of the official line that all family planning decisions are voluntary (GoV 2002; UNFPA 2004).

Having reviewed the general situation and prevailing interpretations of links between migration and reproduction in Vietnam and China, we now probe some inter-linkages between migration, reproduction and well-being that relate closely to the theoretical concerns raised in the previous section. Firstly, we draw attention to the significant economic content of marriage migration and, vice versa, to the significant reproductive content of economic migration. Secondly, we question the prevailing stereotypes that married women are either left behind with young children in the villages or come to the city to evade family size restrictions. Thirdly, we raise emerging concerns about managing reproduction around migration and point to the difficult trade-offs and unpalatable compromises they imply for family and individual well-being. Our attempt is necessarily selective and in particular is limited with respect to men because of the lack of published data.

*Marriage, Mobility and 'Economics'*

The general understanding in Vietnam and China is that the majority of migrants move in search of work, that young women migrate before marriage and afterwards are 'tied to the bamboo grove' (Fong 1994 cited in Kabeer and Thi Van Anh 2002: 120) by their reproductive roles and responsibility for rural farming households. Similarly older women who do migrate are seen as 'naturally' following partners (Dang et al. 1997: 333). These generalisations see economics as the driver of migration with marriage and reproduction as consequence or constraint. As noted, this perspective neglects both important economic elements to marriage strategies and reproductive dimensions to labour migration.

Tellingly, in Vietnam intra-provincial migration is usually excluded in migration studies because 'marriage migration', which is frequently intra-provincial, is seen as being unrelated to 'responses to socio-economic development' (Dang et al. 1997: 322). However, Murphy (2002) demonstrates that young women in villages in Anhui Province, China, often attempt to secure a better life in the future through marrying well. Indeed, Fan and Li (2002) explore new longer distance patterns of women marrying into better-off villages with high rural–urban migration in western Guangdong. They report that some men migrating to urban areas had difficulties finding a suitable marriage partner in their villages because large numbers of women were also migrating. Their subsequent marriages with women from inferior situations were characterised by greater social differences between husbands and wives, suggestive of retrogressive intra-household relations, and marrying-in wives were left at home to manage the farm and the children, making their husbands' continued migration possible. This demonstrates that changing patterns of marriage mobility may be integral to processes of socio-economic development, especially in the context of institutional imperatives to retain the family farm, and that they have implications for the character of reproductive relations.

It is also clear that labour migration itself may be about opening up space for different life options for young unmarried women, crucially including escaping the life of a rural farm wife. Strategies include young women sending remittances to increase obligations in the natal home to make a good marriage for them; searching for a desirable and ideally urban marriage partner themselves; and shoring up their personal financial security, making them less reliant on either father or husband (Wan 1993 cited in Davin 1996; Zhang 1999). As one young woman in Tianjin, China said: 'I hope I can marry and settle in the city if possible, and have a happy, stable marriage. I want to achieve something meaningful in my life' (Zhang 1999: 35). Zhang points out that most of the female migrants she interviewed intended to delay their marriages in an attempt

to work for longer periods or even settle in the city (1999: 31): for these women their urban jobs were often the means for social mobility that significantly included improvements in marital prospects, expectations and obligations.

*Left-Behind or Evading Family Planning Regulations?*

The generalised narrative that the wives of migrants are to be found raising children in rural areas is in tension with official and popular perceptions that migrants come to urban areas to escape restrictions on fertility as well as with the emerging evidence about the marital status and behaviours of migrants. Recent research shows that there are growing numbers of married women and couples in migrant populations and a significant proportion of female migrants are bearing or raising children in the cities, but at no greater rate than their rural contemporaries (Hoy 2009; Zhang 2010).

In Vietnam, 59 per cent of women migrants in Hanoi in 2004 were married as were 46 per cent in Ho Chi Minh City (GSO 2005:31-2). At least 36 per cent of migrant women in Hanoi and 16 per cent in Ho Chi Minh City were accompanied by school age children (ibid.: 68). Rates of contraceptive use amongst older married women are similar to those of urban residents and whilst younger migrants are slightly less likely to use contraceptives, this appears to reflect a desire to 'catch up' after delayed marriage (ibid: 7, 148). Despite their predominantly temporary residential status, it seems likely that substantial proportions of these migrants have married in the city and would like to settle permanently there (ibid: 57-8).

In China, the significant differences between married and unmarried women labour migrants in Shanghai suggest that the former 'are probably accompanying and working with their migrant husbands' and it is estimated that as many as a third of rural labour migrants are migrating as couples (Roberts 2002: 492). Rather than a 'floating population', they may be 'the vanguard' of potential settlers (ibid.). This has led to the emergence of 'urban villages' (chengzhong cun) (Zhang 2007) as well as residentially- segregated communities of rural migrants and their families in the suburbs of China's large cities (Zhang 2010). Hoy's study in Beijing in 1994 of 403 ever-married women of reproductive age who were registered as temporary migrants found that 80 per cent had children and of these, the majority migrated after the birth of their first child (61 per cent) (1999). Hoy's findings for registered temporary migrants concur with Goldstein et al.'s findings in 1988 in Hubei Province that unregistered migrants 'seldom...[moved]...to circumvent the nation's family planning policies' (1997: 488) and that 'temporary migrant women do not have more children than their non-migrant counterparts' (ibid.: 490).

*Managing Reproduction during Migration: Choices and Trade-Offs*

In Vietnam and China the household registration systems and their function of mediating access to urban social entitlements has been intended to discourage the migration of dependents, thus retaining the costs of reproducing the migrant labour force largely within the countryside, and to preserve social order in the growing cities. These institutional barriers pose severe constraints to migrants trying to build and sustain marriages, child-bearing and child-rearing. Being 'left behind' or temporarily returning to the village is among the ways in which women migrants and their families navigate these structural constraints and risks at particular life stages (see for instance, Fan and Li 2002: 634). Family separation may be resolved sooner or later, either by return of husband or onward migration of the family, or take on new configurations, for instance as children become old enough to be left with rural grandparents whilst their mother rejoins her husband to work in the urban area.

In Vietnam, lack of permanent residency creates problems for migrants with access to housing, credit, employment and the registering of motor cycles but is less conclusive with respect to social services for migrants (GSO 2005: 4). The stricter adherence to registration requirements in Ho Chi Minh City and the Southern Industrial Zone before 2005 meant that a fifth of migrants faced economic problems for schooling children in the city, as compared to less than ten per cent of non-migrants (GSO 2005).

In China, the restrictions related to the household registration system 'induce many migrants to send their children back to their home areas when they reach school age, even if they have not done so earlier. Even migrant women who marry urban residents may face this problem, as the children's household registration follows that of their mothers' (Davin 1996: 26). Few of the 70,000 school age children of migrants are enrolled in city schools (Ding and Stockman 1999:127), migrants are disproportionately subject to out-of-pocket expenses for urban health services in comparison to residents (Zhan et al. 2002: 51), and pregnant migrants, lacking maternity leave and rights, usually go back home to deliver to avoid the high urban maternal health charges and may experience worse birth outcomes (Davin 1996: 29; Zhan et al. 2002; Zhang et al. 2006)<sup>3</sup>.

This, combined with the impact of the overall restructuring and reform, has rendered migrant women workers with specific reproductive needs particularly

<sup>3</sup> Zhan et al.'s (2002:49) found that 44 per cent of the 2,381 migrant mothers who gave birth at three hospitals in Minhang District in Shanghai between 1993-1996, had no prior ante-natal visits as compared to only five per cent of permanent residents and the number of still-births amongst migrants (1.5 per cent) was twice that of the control group (0.8 per cent).

vulnerable. In Vietnam, despite the institutional legacy of the Communist Party, ‘women are losing some of these rights...[including]...labour laws, extensive access to maternity benefits and child-care centres’ (UNDP 2000: 9). In China the legislative framework ‘[d]ating from a time when rural women were not allowed to leave the land is especially weak in protecting the large numbers of female migrants who have started working in the city in recent decades’ (Zhang 1999: 33).

Once they have given birth, migrant women must make difficult choices and craft complex strategies to rear their children. Three-generational households, where grandmothers are available to care for small children, are less common and entitlements to grandmothers’ care are structured by gendered intergenerational obligations that prioritise sons and their children over daughters’ (Davin 1996: 26). Leaving very small children with others for extended periods may entail risks including serious malnutrition, neglected health, even death, as well as psychological and developmental problems for children (Xiang 2005: 3-4; Ye et al. 2005). Women who cannot make suitable arrangements for childcare and schooling either return to rural areas, or look after the children in the city without being economically active when children are young.

Family separation for labour migration involves dilemmas and hardships (Xiang 2005). In China and Vietnam, Summerfield reports that ‘growing numbers of men either divorce or illegally start a second family in the city. Migration is now contributing to a small but growing trend for families to break up’ (1997: 206). Revealingly though, Fan and Li’s Guangdong study found a new kind of marriage between migrating women and men formed on the basis of affection where, in four out of the five cases, husband and wife as migrant returnees stay back in the village to work rather than face spousal/parental separation (2002:632-4).

For many, migration is motivated by survival needs and involves unpalatable compromises with strong reproductive dimensions. Illustrative examples include: the young Chinese woman who bought her way out of an unhappy marriage by forfeiting her son and raising child support for the father through labour migration (Davin 1996: 28); the Chinese migrant who tolerates the infidelity, diminishing remittances and visits from her absent husband and at the same time finds the children she has ‘left behind’ to be alienated and undisciplined (Xiang 2005); and the large numbers of middle aged migrant women who work as scavengers because they lack marketable skills and do not want to return home unemployed (Ding and Stockman 1999: 128).

### *Conclusions*

The way in which reproductive strategies and capabilities are articulated with migratory processes has important implications for migration studies. Although it is well recognised that particular flows of migrants often tend to be structured by sex and by stages in the life course, especially the reproductive and marital life course where women are concerned, there has been little investigation of what this means for managing reproductive life. Rather than seeing reproductive factors as given constraints or triggers that play into who migrates and for how long, or separating out economic migration from migration ‘for’ marriage, we have argued that there is value in exploring how reproductive strategising articulates with migratory processes for women and men who are ‘making a life’. This approach may be central to understanding the impact of migration on different aspects of well-being, including sexual and reproductive well-being, as well as to identifying and addressing the specific social needs of migrants.

The changing character of rural-urban migration in Vietnam and China suggests that there are powerful context-specific linkages between migration, reproduction and well-being that merit greater attention. Here, many young women migrants aspire to a different sort of life, including a different sort of reproductive life, and their mobility may contribute to the renegotiation of gender relations in both rural and urban areas.

In contrast to the view that women in migrant households are ‘left behind’ after marriage, the ways of negotiating marriage and migration are much more diverse and complex than commonly portrayed. Migrant couples may both return to the home village after marriage, or migrate together either leaving children behind, sending them back, returning temporarily, or keeping the family together in the city. The alternatives of the wife and/or her children staying behind either temporarily or permanently involve dilemmas and hardships that can put the health, well-being and relationships of children and the mother at risk.

Improved understanding of these dynamics is important if social policy is to contribute to improved well-being. Despite the growing momentum of ‘new’ migration in Vietnam and China, the institutional constraints on movement and fertility that structure social entitlements are yet to be fundamentally challenged. This has interacted with the declining public financing of social provisions and with cultural expectations around marriage, child-bearing, child-rearing and inter-generational relations in ways that are strongly gendered. Migrants have been socially excluded in particular ways and the remedy involves pursuing strategies to enhance their entitlements and rights in urban society. Improving working conditions is of fundamental importance, but strategies also need to go beyond this to build broader entitlements for migrants and their families, in

particular to health, including maternal and child health, and education for migrant children. More determined and forceful national public action to counter growing spatial and social inequalities is also important so as to ensure that whole communities are not left behind by transition (Xiang 2005). This policy will play a role in enhancing the social resilience and adaptability of rural-urban migrants and also in reducing the risks, vulnerabilities, and perhaps the distances associated with building and managing family life for migrants.

The dearth of information about migrant men's reproductive agency is particularly striking, especially at a time when there is growing concern over their disengagement from the family, but for women too the linkages between reproductive and migratory motivations, strategies and vulnerabilities are poorly understood. Priorities for enhancing understanding must include both macro-level analysis to build a stronger reproductive and demographic picture of migration and detailed micro-level work investigating migrant livelihood trajectories, reproductive histories and well-being outcomes over longer time periods so that we can begin to understand the many ways in which migration as it is interconnected with reproduction plays a role in 'building a meaningful life'.

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