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**"We are not weak people in cities!"**

*- An empirical study of the identity-reconstruction of the Chinese rural migrant workers*

*Thesis submitted for the Master Degree in Sociology*
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# Preface

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, husband and son. Without their love, I cannot finish this thesis.

I am grateful to my supervisor, Professor Johans Sandvin, who has, in the whole process of the study, provided me with valuable advices and good suggestions.

I want to thank my informants who were so generous to give me their time and to share with me their life stories. I also want to thank those in Siping Village, who have provided me with necessary information and help during my field work.

In writing this thesis, I am so grateful to my husband, Geir. His love and support have helped me to go through the hard time in the writing process.

# Abstract

Viewing the rural-urban migration as a change of life world for each individual, this study aims to investigate how the individual constructs the meaning of the self from the new experiences in the migration process. The author examines through the self in three different stages of the migration process. She shows respectively through empirical studies how the self had been pre-shaped in the rural context in the decision-making stage; how the migration can bring a cleavage to the individual's self-identity in the migrating stage, and how the continuity of the self can be achieved again with a reconstructed self-identity in the individual's later stage of living in cities. With a critical point of view towards the researches in the same study field, the author argues that in the study of the rural migrant workers, the agency of the rural migrant workers should not be ignored; and to fully understand the rural-urban migration in the Chinese context, researchers, especially western researchers, should give a special attention to the cultural patterns.

**Key words**: Chinese rural migrant workers, Chinese rural-urban migration, Chinese urbanization, dual rural-urban structure, self, identity, lifeworld, individuals in social process.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Choice of the topic and the research problem

In the spring last year, the Norwegian state TV-channel NRK showed a documentary[1] of Chinese textile workers in Ningbo[2] who produced clothes directed to be sold in Norway. The program holds the view that while the Norwegian consumers spend less and less money on purchasing clothes, the workers in developing countries like in China are more unfairly paid with worsened working conditions. On one hand, the program presents a fact that the labour rights of the workers in developing countries have been neglected and unfulfilled. On the other hand, I feel it is not totally appropriate to criticize the phenomenon from a pure western point of view, as this kind of critics may lack an all-around understanding of the historical and cultural background in these developing countries. From the interviews with the Chinese textile workers shown in the program, I realize that most of the workers shown in the TV are in fact "rural migrant workers". It is exactly this group of city-warded migrants who are doing the hardest and dirtiest work in the cities with lowest pay and most unfavourable working conditions. I think since this group of people has been given a concern from the international society, it is necessary and meaningful to give a more profound analysis of the issue, and my personal background of being a Chinese may enable me to get a better understanding of the issue. The idea of doing a research on the "Chinese rural migrant workers" arouse in my mind for the first time.

Social problems of poverty and infringe upon the labour right of the rural migrant workers have caused some concern from both media and academic field, where the rural migrant workers are often described to be marginalized in the urban life or to be stratified in the bottom of the Chinese social stratification system. The main problem is that working and living in the cities, these rural migrant workers are not equally treated as city workers and normal urban residents due to the Chinese household registration (Hukou) system, according to which once a person was born as a rural resident (or a peasant), he will be peasant for his whole life even though he may actually have grown up, worked or lived all the time in cities. Since the urban-rural separation or segregation based on the Hukou system has led to a dual urban-rural structure of education, labour market, welfare and so on, we can well say that this

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[1] It was shown in the weekly program "FBI" (Forbruksinspektør)
[2] Ningbo, around 350 km to the south of Shanghai, is one of the biggest exportation-oriented textile producing bases in China because of its convenient sea transportation as well as cheap labours.

Hukou system has made "urban" or "rural" as a kind of ascribed social status and directly affect an individual's personal development in his whole life. This dualistic urban-rural structure is also the main reason that rural migrant workers are very often discriminated in the urban labour market with lower pay and unprotected labour rights.

In the rural-urban migration with the dual structural context, I notice a kind of dilemma concerning the identity of the rural migrant workers caused by the house registration system. As I said, these rural migrant workers are not regarded as normal city workers or urban residents when working and living in cities. At the same time, they are also different from their fellow-villagers who still live in villages and engage in agricultural production. In this way, *they are neither workers nor peasants*. However, in Chinese, "rural migrant workers" are called "ming gong" which can be directly translated as "peasant workers", since "ming" means peasant; and "gong" means worker. From this address, we can well say that *they are both peasants and workers*. Then who on earth are they? Facing this dilemma we find it difficult to identify these rural migrant workers, but how do they identify themselves in the dilemma of the identity? Here I find my research problem, which I define as followed:
***In the social process of rural-urban migration, how do young rural migrant workers reflect upon the new social realities, and how does the new life experience affect their sense of self and exert its impact upon the self-identity?***

This general research questions can also be concretized or divided into these questions: ***How can we look upon the personal change in the social process of migration? What kind of impacts can the discriminations or difficulties, which the individuals may encounter in the process, have on the individuals' self? How do they cope with the discrimination and adapt themselves to the new realities? What kind of factors have kept them staying in cities?***

## 1.2 Purpose and Significance of the research

The research topic of "the Chinese rural migrant workers" is in fact a study of the Chinese rural-urban migration. I notice that recent research on rural-urban migration in the fields of both sociology and economics are often oriented to the urbanization process on a macro level, discussing the questions such like, "In what degree can rural-urban migration contribute to the economic growth and vice versa?" "How does city-warded migration affect the urban unemployment and labour market?" "What kind of social consequences (mostly social

problems) are brought by the rural-urban migration and how can the government cope with them?" (e.g. Chen, Liu and Zhang (ed.) 2004, and Qian 1996). In these studies, the rural migrant workers are treated as a taken-for granted object in the process of the social changes. They are either quantified as an index or a measure for the economic growth, or mentioned as one objective factor in discussing how social structures can be adjusted to adapt to the social change of urbanization. Of course, these research questions are important and have certain practical social significance. However, in these studies, the agency of the individuals as actors of the process has been ignored. I think in the process of migration, the individuals do not passively accept the social realities, but on the contrary, actively and creatively construct the new social realities. I argue that to fully understand a social process, it is necessary to go down to a micro level and take an actor's perspective. Since there are few studies in this field that have systematically explored the topic of self-identity of the city-warded migrants, I hope my study, by examining through the self in the social process of migration can contribute to a better understanding of the Chinese urbanization process, from an actor's point of view.

This is also to say in this study, I want to explore how the individual rural migrant workers internally and actively experience the migration: how they interpret external structural realities and accordingly reorganize their life practice. By doing this, I will try to discuss the more general sociological question: "how social change is actually being experienced by individuals?" In this way, my study may contribute to a deeper understanding of the social problems appearing in the social transformation. I hold that to understand a social problem thoroughly, a researcher need get near to the people who actually experience the social problem and analyze the problem from their own perspective.

## 1.3 Background of Chinese Rural-urban Migration

In order to give a better understanding of the subject that I am studying, I want to provide my western readers with some background information about the Chinese rural-urban migration. The rural-urban migration is not a new social phenomenon in the Chinese modern history. We can find rural-urban migrations nearly in all dynasties throughout the Chinese history. Since we are talking about the large scale city-warded migration as a result of the industrialization and modernization, my historical presentation starts from the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, goes through the turning point of the Chinese economic reform in early 1980s and comes all the way up to today.

## 1.3.1 Before the Economic Reform

Generally speaking, the Chinese communist government has taken a policy of controlling towards the city-warded migration till today, but the control was especially strict before Deng Xiaoping, the successor of Mao, took the reform of economy in 1979.

It is well known that the Chinese communist government had a strict control towards the regional migration of its citizens, but it may not be well known that "free migration" as a citizen's basic right was clearly noted even in the first Constitution of the People's Republic of China (1954). In fact, the rural-urban migration was not controlled by the government at all in the period 1949-1952, which some scholars describe as a "relatively natural migration between rural and urban area" (Chen, Liu, Lu, Ding, Yang and Wang 2006: 13). In the period 1953-1960, with the recovery of the economy and the government's strategy of quick realization of industrialization, a large number of rural residents poured into cities and became factory workers. In 1952, the total urban population was 70 millions; while in 1960, this number had increased to 130 millions. And the proportion of the urban population in the total national population has increased from 12.5% in 1953 to 19.7 in 1960 (ibid: 15). This is the first large scale rural-urban migration emerging in the history of PRC. However, the quick increase of urban population had put great pressure on food supplies, accommodation, public transportation and social services in the cities. In this situation, the government had to adjust its policy towards the mass rural-urban migration in a context of definite state-planned economy. In 1958, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress passed "Regulations of the Household Registration ("Hukou" in Chinese), which stipulated that a rural citizen (Hukou registered as "rural") can only migrate to cities with a formal certification (of either employment from the labour department of the city or enrolment from urban schools) and the approval from the Household Registration Office of the city (Li 2004: 30). The establishment of the "Hukou" system which has obviously led to a rural-urban segregation can then be regarded as a man-made social barrier to prevent free rural-urban migrations. Since the employment and urban food supply was fully controlled by the state, it was, therefore, impossible for a rural resident to live in cities except for a visit of short stay. From then on till the beginning of the 1980s, the "Hukou" system had efficiently prevented the population flow from the urban villages to cities, for example the proportion of the urban

population was 19.7% in 1960, but in 1978 the number had decreased to 17.9% (Chen, Liu, Lu, Ding, Yang and Wang 2006: 20).

## 1.3.2 After the Economic Reform

The policy of economic reform or so called "the reform and open policy" was historically determined in the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of CPC (the Communist Party of China). According to this policy, the market mechanism should take the place of the state as the main mechanism to organize and adjust the economic construction, and multiple forms of ownership are also allowed to exist in the Chinese socialistic economic system. These institutional changes have not only enabled the Chinese economy to have experienced rapid increase in the next 20 years, but also provided Chinese peasants with basic prerequisites to migrate to cities. Since 1985, large scales of regional migrations between rural and urban area have emerged. For example, from 1985 to 1989, the growth rate of total national population is 6.47%; however, the growth rate of the urban population has reached to 17.71% (ibid: 25). These statistics show that thousands of peasants had migrated to cities in this period of time. Today, we see rural migrant workers everywhere in the cities. Most of them are doing heavy physical work, or doing small business. With lower income than native urban residents, they often gather together and live in suburban areas, where the living standard is much lower than the central areas in cities. All together, how many rural migrant workers are there in cities today? We cannot find exact statistics, since rural migrant workers are flowing populations: they migrate between cities for work, or move between their original villages and their working cities according to the family's need. According to Professor Li Qiang's research, the lowest estimation of the total population of rural migrant workers is between 70 to 90 millions, while the highest estimation has reached to 150 millions (Li 2004: 33).

One thing we have to notice is that the "Hukou" system has not been abolished with the implementation of the reform, but the effect of "Hukou" system as preventing a rural resident to hold its residence in cities has indeed been weakened, because the free market mechanism has made it possible for rural residents to make theirs livings in cities. At the same time, we should also notice that the "Hukou" system has still its impact on the rural-urban migration – it cannot prevent rural-urban migration, but it does prevent rural residents to become legal urban residents even after migration. And this characteristic distinguishes China's urbanizing

process from most of the countries in the world where a city-warded migrant with a stable job will naturally become a city resident after some time of working and living in cities (Shi: 2005: 63).

## 1.4 Relevant Literature Review

A certain number of literatures are referred during the process of carrying out the study and writing this thesis. I divide these literatures into three categories: 1. the category of methodology; 2. the category of "self" or "identity"; and 3. the category of Chinese rural migrant workers.

## 1.4.1 Category of methodology

The first category is about the methodology of the research. In this study, I have chosen a phenomenological approach according to my research questions. Therefore, under this category there is first literature about social theories of phenomenology, especially Schutz's methodological view towards the social science and social research, which includes chapters on phenomenology or Schutz in Andersen and Kaspersen's (ed.) "Classical and modern social theory" (2000), Wallace and Wolf's "Contemporary sociological theory, expanding the classical tradition" (1999) and Jiao's article on Schutz's book "The phenomenology of the Social world"(1932) in Xie's (ed.) "The summary of the Famous works on Western Sociology" (2005). A phenomenological approach also suggests that my study is a qualitative one. Silverman's two methodological books on qualitative research: *Doing qualitative research* (2005a) and *Interpreting qualitative data* (2005b) with concrete strategies, advices and tips are extremely useful for me through out the whole study process.

## 1.4.2 Category of literatures on "self" and "identity"

Since my research topic is about the Chinese rural migrant workers' self-identity, literatures on "self" and "identity" comes naturally into my reference list. These literatures include sociological theories about "self", mainly the Mead's theory of self (1934) and Goffman's *Presentation of self in everyday life* (1959). These two books from a symbolic interactionist perspective help me to better understand the individuals' decisions and actions in certain social situations. Modern sociological theories about identity construction in modern society, such as Giddens's *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (1991), Bauman's *Life in Fragments* (1995) and Richard Sennett's *The corrosion of character:*

*the personal consequences of work in the new capitalism* (1998) also give me inspiration on how to explore the self-identity in the context of today's modern world. I find that the vertical comparison of how identity are differently constructed in pre-modern, modern and late-modern (or post-modern) context can actually be applied in my horizontal comparison of how the self-identity of the rural migrant workers are differently formed and interpreted in the rural life world and urban life world, since in one way or another, the rural agricultural society and the urban industrial society can be respectively viewed as pre-modern and modern.

Besides theoretical literatures, I have also referred to some empirical studies of mobility and identity, among which I have carefully read Agnete Wiborg's article "Between Mobility and Belonging: Out-migrated young students' perspectives on Rural Areas in North Norway." (2003). As a social anthropologist, Wiborg mainly explores the relationship between identity and the geographical factors in the migration process of the rural Norwegian students. From Wiborg's research I learn that geographical belongings can be an important aspect of a person's identity construction, but I also realize that with the different social context, the same topic shall be examined through from different perspectives. In the Chinese context of rural-urban migration, compared with the Norwegian one, the rural-urban difference is much more substantial than the geographical differences, which implies that the identity maintenance of Chinese city-warded migrants will be more complex than the geographical belongings. But Wiborg's research does provide me with a concrete example on how to investigate the topic of identity among a certain group of people under some specific social situations.

### 1.4.3 Category of literatures about Chinese rural migrant workers

The most of the literatures under this category are in Chinese. My trip to China for field work provides me with a good opportunity to have gained rich materials about the Chinese rural migrant workers. However, there are recently also English literatures about the Chinese rural migrant workers (or Chinese rural-urban migration) mostly written by overseas Chinese in America. Due to the limited access, I only find a few in the Norwegian Library database, including "Urbanization and Social Welfare in China" ed. by Chen, Liu and Zhang (2004), "Contesting citizenship in urban China: peasant migrants, the state, and the logic of the market" by Solinger (1999) and "Rural-urban migration and its impact on economic development in China" by Qian (1996). Besides these three literatures, the other mentioned literatures under this category are in Chinese.

Among the academic literatures, both the Chinese and the English, I notice a tendency of researching this subject with an interdisciplinary approach, especially between economics and sociology (Chen, Liu and Zhang (ed.) 2004; Qian 1996; and Li (ed.) 2003). As I discussed in Chapter 1, these studies often take the economic growth and macro social development as the research question, where the rural migrant workers as active agents in the migration process are ignored.

Therefore, I put my focus on the sociological research which treats the rural migrant workers as the research subject. These studies put their research focus on the change that was brought by the city-warded migration. Some start from a sociological perspective of Conflict Theory and explore the change by examining through the new stratification system or the social conflict caused by the migration (Li 1995, 2004 and Zhu 2001). Some regard the change as a process of re-socialization and claim that the present problem of the rural migrant workers is marginalization, caused by the un-thorough socialization of rural migrants (Wang 2001; and Tang 2002). There are also studies with a theory of modernity which look upon the life change of the rural migrant workers as a path to modernity 一once they have achieved this kind of modernity, they will be naturally integrated into the city life (Zhou 1998; and Li 2003: 54). These literatures have enhanced my understanding of the Chinese rural-urban migration from various perspectives. In addition, they provide me with rich data, both qualitative and quantitative, which I cannot get from my own field work. In this way, my data base for this study is enriched.

However, I also find that in these studies the city-warded rural migrants are always compared with the native urban residents (or, with the urban residents as the reference group). For example, the research focusing on socialization and modernity seem to take for granted that through a certain process, the rural migrant workers will one day be totally socialized as urban residents or achieve the so-called "modernity", which is in fact from an urban standing point. For researchers who take perspective of the conflict theory or take a western humanistic point of view (e.g. Solinger 1999), they are critical towards the institutional structure of dual urban-rural systems, and regard the rural migrant workers as a weaker group in the urban societies. But the questions are how this "weak group" evaluates themselves, how they look upon their own roles, values and positions in the urban life world, and whether or not they need the mercies from the society? When the western humanists appeal for shorter working hours for

these rural migrant workers, maybe these workers want to work more for earning more money? I think it may be wrong to use a kind of urban subjectivity or even a western logic to understand the social action of the urban rural workers. Though they have shared a common urban world with the urban residents, their past rural life experience shall not be ignored. In this way, I agree with another sociology research student, Fu, who says that the rural migrant workers' rural features still affect their urban life which implies that they don't necessarily need modernity to adapt themselves to the urban life or vice versa; to have gained some features of modernity doesn't necessarily mean that they are integrated into cities. And we researchers need to enter the lifeworld of the researched group and interpret from their own perspectives (Fu 2006). But different from Fu, who seeks to explore the individuals' adaptability towards the urban city life, I would like to check the issue of self-identity, as I think the agency of the rural migrant workers includes not only their active adaptation to the new environment, but also, more importantly, their reflexibility of themselves over the social realities.

# Chapter 2: Methodology and Research Design

This chapter includes two parts. In this first part, I will tell about how methodology and relevant research methods are chosen in order to reach relevant research goals. The second part is concerned with the research design and the field work.

## 2.1 Methodology

Silverman defines 'methodology' as 'a general approach to studying research topics' (Silverman 2005: 109). Since we are doing a social research, 'the general approach' then refers first and foremost to how a researcher basically look upon the society as well as how the researcher understand the role of the social science. In this way, I need to seek for a general theoretical approach. Second, "the general approach" shapes a kind of "overall research strategy" (Mason 1996: 19; Silverman 2005: 109) according to which a set of methods are chosen and applied to reach the research goals. In other words, methodology can be understood as a set of strategic methods orienting to the research goal.

## 2.1.1 Methodology as a theoretical approach

In social science, there are two general methodological approaches to study the social phenomenon: "positivism" and "hermeneutics". The former one, influenced by the natural science, claims that any social phenomenon can be objectively explained by theories and therefore asserts that "(social) science involves more or less ungrounded choices of theories which can at best aim to be compatible with or to 'save' the phenomenon observed" (Outhwaite: 2000: 9). By contrast, the latter one thinks that the human actions and societies, as research objects of the social science cannot all be explained from the outside by theories, in stead, they should be understood from within; and what is required is not explaining but interpretative understanding (verstehen) (ibid).

I think when studying the group of rural migrant workers or rural-urban migration, we should not base the research merely on our taken-for-granted presumptions (e.g. the rural migrant workers will be socialized the same way as urban residents or they will achieve modernity through migration, etc.) and accordingly search for theoretical explanations, as the presumption which comes from our subjectivity may not exist in realities at all. It is obviously wrong to attempt to infer the practice from the theories or even use theoretical explanations as a kind of cause for social practice (布迪厄 Bourdieu 2003: 125; Fu 2006). I think to go back to the practice and go into the lifeworld of researched group is the proper way to carry out the research, which implies that I will follow the tradition of hermeneutics in my study. I also find that a phenomenological approach, which seeks to employ the "inner horizon" of individuals' subjective social action and emphasizes the active participation of the researchers (Wallace & Wolf 1999: 272-275) matches my study topic of self-identity very well. In many ways, to study the self-identity of certain people is to interpret the meaning of these people's social actions. According to Schutz, meaning is constituted from the start in the common-sense social world, a kind of context with intersubjective relationship (Harste and Mortensen 2000: 180-181). In order to catch the meaning of the social behaviour or the words of the informants, a researcher shall not only use his subjectivity, in stead, he should also try to build up "intersubjectivity" with interviewees and interpret from their positions.

In order to fully understand the "self" in the migration process, I feel I can unavoidably draw the theories of Symbolic Interactionism such as Mead's *self* (1934) and Goffman's *self-Presentation* (1959) into my theoretical framework. I believe that these theories can offer me

concrete guidance to trace the "self" from the intricate and disordered data that I have gained in the field. However, I may encounter questions like: "Is it contradictory to combine a Phenomenological approach with the theories of Symbolic Interactionism?" Well, my answer is "No." First, both perspectives study social actions. In fact, the "intersubjectivity" which Schutz advocate is in itself a kind of interaction. Second, to study the social interaction does not go against the idea that we should go into the inner horizon of the actors. On the contrary, by going into the inner world of the actors, we can achieve better understanding of their social actions and interactions. Third, in many social theoretical books, phenomenology is actually viewed as one branch of Symbolic Interactionism.

A phenomenological approach provides me with a clear scientific view to look upon the social phenomenon that I am studying, while the symbolic interactionist theories of *self* provides me with a more concrete theoretical guidance relevant to the research topic. Now, what I need to do is to make a decision about research methods.

## 2.1.2 Decision of research methods

My research topic together with the theoretical approach and framework, determine that my study is a qualitative one. Research methods in qualitative researches normally include participant observation, case studies, in-depth interviews, naturally occurring talks and texts etc (Silverman 2005a, 2005b). My first choice is in-depth interviews. In order to explore the self and self-identity of individuals, I first and foremost need to know how they think and how they feel by asking my informants open-ended questions. Giddens also suggests that a person's identity is to be found in "the capacity to keep a particular narrative going" (Giddens 1991: 54). I think by asking in-depth questions to each informant, I can attain a complete life story or a narration of the person, which can be analysed to explore the topic of self-identity. Besides, the method of in-depth interview matches very well with my phenomenological approach, which enables me to gain an access to the inner world and the private experience of my informants, so that I can form a clear picture of how they construct and reconstruct meanings in the process of social changes.

My second choice is observation. This decision was in fact made during my field work when noticed that some of my informants would always wear some nice clothes to meet me. Then I realized that they were intentionally presenting a kind of self-image in front of me. I

immediately thought about Goffman's theory of "presentation of self" in the "front stage" (1959). Though my research topic may be more about the "back stage" of the personal presentation, which can probably be reached by in-depth interviews, still, I think the "front stage" can to some extent reflect the preparation of the "back stage". My informants may probably talk in a special way in order to give me a certain impressions. So, to observe how they behave and talk in the interviews can well be good examples of how they think. The technique of taking observation at the same time of interviewing was also applied by Agnete Wiborg in her research of out-migrated rural students in North Norway (2003). To take interviews in a local village in the south-west of China, has also provided me with a chance to do a participant observation, which may not directly relate to the research topic but does enhance my understanding of the informants as well as their lifeworld.

## 2.2 Research Design and Field Work

### 2.2.1 Research area and field

My field work was mainly carried out in a local village named Siping in Chongqing Municipality, which locating in the South-west China, has one of the largest flow (rural-urban) populations in China. The local village, under the administration of Changshou County, is around 150 km from the Chongqing city (hereunder "Chongqing"). It has a total population around 3300, among which about 1500 are working in cities. According to one cadre of the village, the average annual cash income per person in 2005 is around RMB 2800. As a reference, the rural average annual cash income per person in 2005 is around RMB3236[3].

According to the Chinese tradition, most of the rural migrant workers would go back to their home villages to celebrate the Chinese Spring Festival (or the Chinese Lunar New Year), the most important festival in China lasting around 15 days. As the travel distances are usually very long, lots of rural migrant workers take around one-month holidays in the home village. This has provided me with a good chance to carry out my field work in the local village just one week before the festival began, when most of the rural migrant workers had already come back to help prepare the celebrations.

One thing I have to mention is that this village is the home village of my dead grandfather from my mother's side. My grandfather was migrating to Chongqing in the 1950s and since

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[3] Statistics are from the Ministry of Agriculture found in one of the official websites of agriculture:
http://www.ahnw.gov.cn/2006nwkx/html/200512/%7B7EF5AC98-F769-4363-B995-2EB26D3892E4%7D.shtml

then had settled his families in the city. He died in 1965. So, in this village live some of my far relatives. The closest relative in our family is one of my mother's cousins, who provided me with accommodation during my one-week field work in the village. I had been to this village twice in my childhood, and this is my third trip.

I have once discussed with my supervisor (a Norwegian professor) and a professor from Britain who has given us lectures on methodology, whether it is proper to carry out my field work in the village where there are some relative relations. My supervisor's advice is that even though I know better the cultural codes of social relations in my home country, I should still be careful to involve any kind of family relations into the research, as this may cause the doubt on the reliability of this research, as well as it can bring some problems to the ethical issues; while the British professor thinks that it should not be problematic if I take the scientific research attitudes. As my study is in the Chinese context, and I have never carried out such a study in China (even though I am a Chinese myself), I have consulted a Chinese professor at the Fudan University, Shanghai, during my stay in China. He told me that it was not unusual for Chinese researchers in this field to apply this kind of social network to set up research contact, but I had to be fully aware of my role as a scientific social researcher all the time during my field work.

I appreciate all the advices of the professors from three different countries, which I have given full consideration to. I agree to that it is not wise to use even far relatives as my informants; but as Silverman advises, methods should be linked to society and social context (Silverman 2005: 110). As a Chinese myself, knowing the cultural code of communication, I believe that in the Chinese society using a reliable social relation properly will guarantee me reliable data which enables me to do a reliable research. Even if I interview a stranger, let's say in the street, as soon as he agrees to be my interviewee, a certain social relation will also have be established between us behind which it may exist certain motivation. And this motivation can still affect the reliability of the data. So, in this way, the most important thing for the researcher, I think, is to use his scientific sense and "smell" whether the data he has got are reliable or not.

Considering that some may doubt the reliability of the field work in Siping Village, I decide to make another researching group in Chongqing with a "stranger" approach. The purpose is in fact to make a reference group which I can compare with the group in rural village. By

comparison, I can have a better sense to judge whether or not the data from Siping village are reliable and valid. The interviews with the stranger-group were taken before I went to the field work in Siping village.

As this is a qualitative research, the reliability of the research does not rely on the numbers of the informants I interview. I think 6-8 cases of interviews will be enough. Gender is not the main issue of my study, so I don't give a special attention to it. But I think the gender distribution of around 50%-50% is ideal. As to the age of my researched group, I have chosen the informants aged 20-40. I think normally it is people of this age group who seize both features of rural and urban life worlds, from which I can see more clearly the change process of self. Other features like education level, marital status, occupation etc were not given special considerations in the process of choosing informants.

## 2.2.2 Contacting informants and reliability of the data

As reliability of the data is essentially important to the reliability and validity of the whole research, and that I carry out some part of empirical research in the rural village which I have a personal relation to may cause some methodological doubt, a special attention are paid to the evaluation of the data's reliability.

All together I have interviewed 10 people, three of whom were interviewed in Chongqing, while the rest were interviewed in the rural village. I have mentioned, the intention to make two groups of informants (with one group in Chongqing, and the other in Siping village) is to judge the reliability of the data by comparison. I have inquired around 7-8 "stranger rural migrant workers" in Chongqing about whether they would like to be my informants. As I expected, most of them were quite sceptical to me as well as to the real purpose of my interview (at least in the beginning). The fact is that in the past years, lots of the newly migrant rural workers, being relatively simple and naive, have been cheated by some bad people in the cities. The bad experiences have made them much more cautious and sceptical when contacting with the people. Three people agreed to be my informants, two male and one female. However the interview with the female informant, a sanitation worker in her late 30s was not successful, since she was too shy to answer my questions. I felt she was quite nervous in the process of being interviewed. I think she was probably scared a little by the word "scientific research". I consider this interview as an invalid case.

Among the 7 interviews that I have conducted in Siping village, the first one was unsuccessful and considered as invalid. The informant, a male villager working as a carpenter in the city, was contacted through one cadre of the village. He agreed to be my informant immediately after the cadre introduced me to him, but during the process I felt that he was unwilling (or maybe shy) to answer my questions, since he always tried to answer the questions as simply as he could. So I began to doubt that he agreed to be informant because he felt not good to reject me in front of the village cadre. The cadres in China do, in many ways, represent a kind of political authority. Afterwards, I decided to contact the informants myself without direct involvement of village cadres. None of the 7 interviewees is my relative. And I set up contacts with them by walking to their houses and introducing myself.

In order to ensure myself the reliability of the cases in Siping village, I intentionally compare them with the two cases in Chongqing, not only the contents of the interviewees' answers but also the way how they answer my questions. And I find that they are not widely divergent or totally different. The common patterns of the life stories or the similar attitudes between the informants of the two groups, to some extent, ensure me that the data that I have gained from the Siping village is valid.

## 2.2.3 Brief presentation of my informants

Case1, Zheng Ke (Zheng), male, 25 years old, single, is a hairdresser working in a big hairdressing salon. He was one of the informants whom I interviewed in Chongqing. He actually comes from another village in Changshou county, and is the only-child in his family. He had finished his 9-year compulsory education[4] in the home village, and has worked in Chongqing as a hairdresser for nearly 7years. Before this, he had 3-4 month working experience as a small-car driver in Chengdu[5]. As he decided, the interview was taken in a coffee bar.

Case 2, Qiao Xiaobo (Qiao), male, 29 years old, single, works as a safety guard for a residential area. He was the other informant that I interviewed in Chongqing. He comes from a village in another county, which was around 250-300 km from Chongqing. His parents, both in their 60s are still living in the rural village, while his two elder sisters both work in eastern

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[4] Compulsory education in China includes 6-year primary school and 3-year junior middle school.
[5] Another big city located in South-west China, the capital city of Sichuan Province.

cities together with their husbands. He had worked in a city in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region[6] for nearly 4 years as a construction worker, and in Guangzhou[7] for 2 years as a factory worker before he began to work as a safety guard in Chongqing in 2005. As he chose himself, I interviewed him in the rest-room for the safety guards when he was free on a Saturday. Qiao has fulfilled his senior middle school[8] .

(Other informants were all interviewed in the Siping village. As they preferred, the informants of case 3 and 4 were interviewed in the house where I was accommodated, and the others were interviewed in their own or their relatives' home.)

Case 3, Yu Fuzhong (Yu), male, 40 years old, married with 2 children (one at the junior middle school and the other at the primary school), has done small business (selling small commodities in the street or at the station) from time to time in over10 years in big cities such as Beijing, Guangzhou, Shenyang[9] and Nanjing[10]. He has an education of junior middle school.

Case 4, Luo Ping (Luo), male, 24 years old, single, works now in Kunming[11] in a house-furnishing team formed by the local villagers. With an education of junior middle school, he has 5 years' experience of working in big cities, including Fuzhou[12], Guangzhou and Kunming.

Case 5, Li Biyu (Li), female, 38 years old, married with 2 children (one is in the senior middle school and the other in the junior middle school). With an education of junior middle school, she has lived and worked in cities with her husband since she was married at the age of 20. Now she rents a small shop and sells clothes in a suburban area in Shanghai since 2000.

Case 6, Yuan Juan (Yuan), female, 21 years old, single. She is not originally from this village. She is in this village for Spring Festival because of her boyfriend, another rural migrant worker who is originally from Siping village. She has worked nearly all the time in a nation-

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[6] Located in North-west China.
[7] The third biggest city in China, around 200 km from Hong Kong, is the capital city of Guangdong Province.
[8] 3 years' education after the compulsory one.

[9] Located in North-east China, it is the capital city of Liaoning province.
[10] Located in the middle part of China, it is the capital city of Jiangsu Province.
[11] Another city located in South-west China, the capital city of Yunnan Province.
[12] The capital city of Fujian Province, located to the north of Guangdong Province.

wide big chain restaurant since she left home village for the first time at the age of 16, when she was, in fact, a student of an occupational senior middle school. Now she works as administrative personnel. She works mainly in Beijing and Shanghai.

Case 7, Xia Wenhua, (XWH), femle, 31 years old, married with a 4-year old son. She has two years education in a local college and has lived in cities since 1998. She has worked as a quality inspector in a factory in Guangzhou, a restaurant cashier and saleswomen for health products in Chongqing. But now living Lanzhou[13], she is mainly a housewife at home.

Case 8, Xia Huifang (XHF), female, 36, married with a14-years old daughter. She has finished her compulsory school but had to drop out of the senior middle school because of the poverty of the family. She and her husband lives now in Kunming. While her husband is the boss of the local house-furnishing team working in Kunming (mentioned in case 4), she has got her own job working in a dining hall of a small company. She has lived in cities since 1998.

Except Case 6, all the interviews lasted around 1 hour. As to Case 6, the interview lasted around 3 hours. The informant, Yuan was talking most of the time in the interview while I was listening with questions to her from time to time. I feel she had a kind of strong emotional need to express herself from the inside. I didn't interrupt or stop her, as I think the deeper she talked about her life, the better I can understand her inner world.

Tape recorder was not used in any of the interviews; in stead, detailed notes were made. And these notes has been expanded into a full case right after each interview. When developing the notes into a full case, I also contacted some of the informants again to clarify some uncertain points.

## 2.2.4 Question designed

According to my research goal, I have chosen in-depth interviews with open-ended questions as the main form of the field work. This means that there is no fixed form of a questionnaire based on which I have to ask my informants certain questions one by one. To some extent, I would like to treat my interviews as a kind of naturally occurring talk consisting of active

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[13] The capital city of Gansu Province, located in the north-west of China.

interactions and mutual understandings, which cannot be all pre-designed. But a flexible form of asking and answering does not mean that an interview guide is unnecessary. I think an interview guide is important because of two main reasons.

1. The interview guide is in fact the researcher's systematic thinking about from which approach the researcher can search for useful information to reach the research goal. In my study, I want to research on how the rural-urban migrant workers rebuild their identity with the life world change from rural to urban. Of course, I cannot ask this question directly to my informants as they are not sociologists. So first, I have to work out what kinds of information that can reflect the inner process of the individuals. I think the information about their attachment to their original rural village, of their feelings about living in the city, of their interpretation of the rural-urban difference and of the relation of rural-urban residents etc., is researchable to answer my research questions. Based on these aspects, my interview guide was formed. (For more information, please see "appendix1: in-depth interview guide")

2. It is true that a successful interview should be based on effective interaction and good mutual understanding, but some times, the naturally occurring talk may go out of the control and be led in a wrong direction. In this situation, a clearly designed interview guide can remind the researcher all the time about the purpose of the interview, and therefore help the conversations to get back on the right track.

## 2.3 Other issues of the methodology of the research

Under this subtitle, I will talk about two issues: 1. Reliability and validity of the research. 2. Ethical consideration.

The first one is indeed about the quality of the study, which is mostly shown in "the procedure you used to ensure that your methods were reliable and your conclusions valid" (Silverman 2005: 209). According to Silverman, qualitative researchers need to be concerned about the reliability of the data and the quality of the interpretation (ibid: 210). I have already discussed how I work with the reliability of the data. As to the quality of interpretation, I think it should first of all, be consistent with the general methodological approach or the general scientific model that the researcher has chosen, and it should also be structured inside the theoretical

framework that the researcher has built up. Baker has through her own research (1982) provided me with an interesting or probably good way to analyze the interviews in my study. In her study, when her adolescent interviewees were commenting about the adolescent-adult talk, she found that her interviews themselves were instances of adolescent-adult talk (Baker 1982: 111, Silverman 2005b: 101). The same is true for my study, when I am asking my rural interviewees how they feel about their social relation with the urban residents, our interviews have already set up a kind of social relation between urban (as I was born and have lived in cities all my life) and rural residents. This suggests that the process of setting up contacts before interviews as well as the interviews themselves can be good examples of the informants' comments on how to deal with the social relation with urban residents.

Validity of the conclusion is itself based on reliability of scientific research methods. With a general hermeneutic approach, my study does not aim to explain the social phenomenon of rural-urban migration; in stead, it attempts to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon from an actor's perspective. In this sense, the validity is more concerned with how to enable my analysis and interpretative understanding to make sense. So the question comes back to the interpretation of the data, which I think is the core process of the whole study.

Ethical issues should always be considered if the research is about the human beings. In this study an informed consent (see appendix2) was presented to and signed by each informant before the interview. But I am also concerned about the ethical issues in the process of interviewing, as some questions might be sensitive to some of the informants. For instance, I was very careful to ask the questions about how the informants experience discriminations that they have experienced in the cities. On one hand, the discrimination, as a matter of fact, is one part of the social relation concerning the identity reconstruction, which I feel I have to ask about; on the other hand, I am afraid to bring some unpleasant feelings to the informants. As the interviews are about the individual's inner feelings and private life, a kind of intimate relation has been established between my interviewees and me. As Mason says, an intimate engagement can really impinge unexpected ethical issues (Mason 1996: 166-7; Silverman 2005: 257), so during all my process of field work, I have given the ethical issues a full consideration.

# Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Organization of the Thesis

## 3.1 Basic conceptions

First I want to explain what I mean by **self-identity**. **Self-identity,** according to Giddens is the "identity" of self, and it presumes reflexive awareness (Giddens 1991: 52). Though Giddens separate the two concepts of "self" and "self-identity", in this thesis, I include the notion of "self" into the concept of "self-identity" since the person's reflexive awareness is closely related to the understandings of "self". However, when I apply these two terms in the thesis, they may refer to the same thing but with different emphasis. I think "self", understood from Mead's perspective includes both subject "I" and object "me". Formed through the social interactions with "the generalized other" (Mead 1934), the self emphasizes the individual's social identity. Differently, the self-identity refers to the self as "reflexively understood by the person in terms of her and his biography". In this way, self-identity emphasizes more the continuity of self "across time and space" (Giddens 1991: 53). But generally and concretely speaking, by "self-identity" I mean the understanding of the self, the interpretation of the self's position and role, the image that the individuals draw for themselves as well as a sense of "who we are", "how we have become" and "where we are going" (Taylor 1989).

My general theoretical framework in this thesis was built around some central concepts with a theoretical approach of phenomenology. I begin with the phenomenological concept *lifeworld*, which was first developed by the German phenomenological philosopher Edmund Husserl. Later, the concept *lifeworld* has been further developed and applied by sociologists who follow the phenomenological tradition, including Schutz, Habermas and Luckmann. I think the rural-urban migration on the macro level is a process of urbanization, but on the micro level it represents the change of lifeworld. Therefore in my study of examining how the process of migration was experienced by the individuals, I can well apply this concept. Putting the concept *lifeworld* in the Chinese context of rural-urban migration, I have also developed some other concepts such as *life world (*different from *lifeworld)[14], rural world, urban world, imaginary world, remembrance world* and *fictitious world.*

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[14] *Life world* is one sub-world of *lifeworld* in this thesis. The concepts will be further explained on page22.

In the study of the rural migrant workers' adaptation to the city, Fu has also explored the similar concepts like *rural world*, *urban world*, *imaginary world*, *practice world* and *imaginary world in the practice world* and discussed how the adaptation of the rural migrant workers are shaped through the interrelation of the four worlds (Fu 2006). Further, Fu has built the following model to display the interrelations of the four worlds (see figure1):
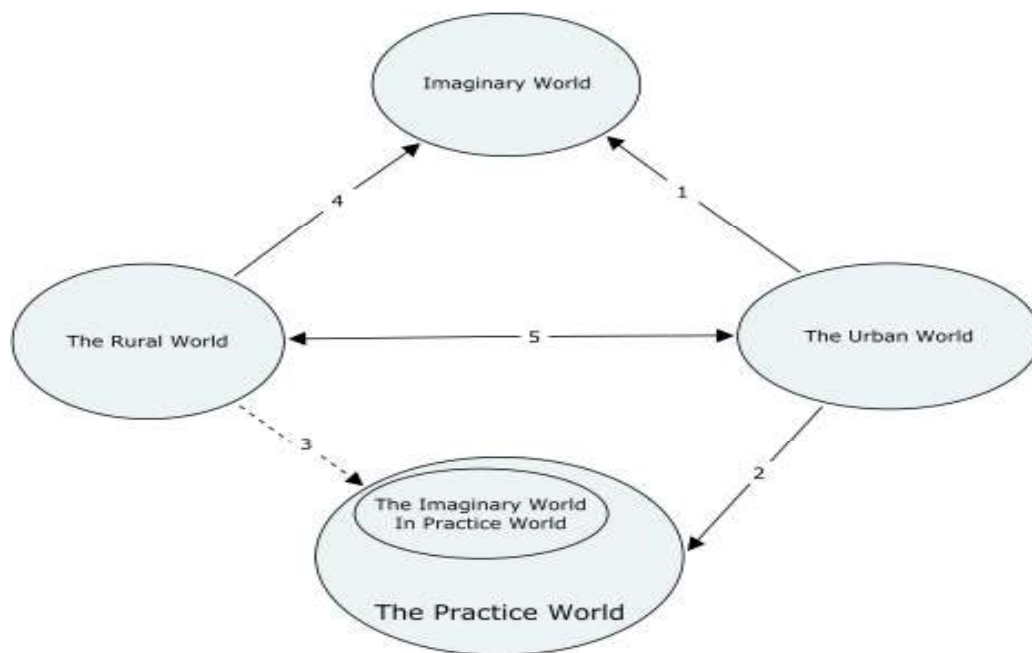


Arrow1, 2, 4: stronger influence;

Arrow3: weaker influence;

Arrow5: mutual influence

**Figure1:** Interrelations of the four worlds (Fu 2006)

Fu's model has inspired me. In Fu's model, the rural world and urban world are regarded as objective worlds on a macro level, while the imaginary world and the practice world are subject ones on a micro level (ibid). So this model in fact presents an interaction of the objective world and subjective individual agency. However, this model fails to depict how the subjective interpretation of the objective world can change through the social process of migration. Based on the empirical materials that I have gained from the field, by introducing the phenomenological concept of *lifeworld*, I have developed my own definitions of these concepts.

Husserl locates **lifeworld** to the most fundamental levels of consciousness (Wallace and Wolf 1999: 174). While's Husserl's definition is rather abstract, Schutz has later concretized the

concept as a "common-sense every day world" (Harste and Mortensen 2000: 180-181). Here in my thesis, I define *lifeworld* as a kind of individuals' internally and socially constructed world, which include all the individuals' earlier experiences and knowledge. And I take Schutz's point of view that the meaning in the common sense world is interpreted in an intersubjective relationship (ibid) and assume that the common sense life world is constructed intersubjectively by individuals. *Rural world* (the rural social setting for the social practice) and *urban world* (the urban social setting) represents two different kinds of real world with different social settings, which are constructed externally in the structure of the society and exist objectively.

Here I want to clarify when I separate the rural world and the urban world from the lifeworld, and treat them as objective external world, I don't mean that the social structures and elements in these worlds are objective themselves, which don't involve the subjective factors of the agents. Here I mostly treat these two worlds as a sort of reality of every day life. Just as Berger and Luckmann writes, "The reality of every day life appears already objectified, that is, constituted by an order of objects that have been designated as objects before my appearance on the scene." (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 22) What Berger and Luckmann mean is that through a process of "objectivation", individual apprehend everyday life as an ordered prearranged reality which is seemly independent of human being (Wallace and Wolf 1999: 279). In my thesis, I regard the rural world and the urban world exactly as this kind of objectified reality. They only represent the objective aspect of the social world. Opposite to the two objective external worlds, the lifeworld represents the individual's subjective and internalized experience of social world.

In order to investigate how the individuals experience the city-warded migration as a lifeworld change, I also attempt to "dissect" the individual's lifeworld for further analysis. By doing this, I have introduced some other concepts such as "life world", "imaginary world", and "remembrance world". I define *life world* as a kind of social setting in which the individual's social practice takes place; and it was constructed internally by the individual through his direct interaction with the environment (including all the elements that belong to this social setting). *Imaginary world* is a kind of fabricated social setting, in which the individuals imagine their social practices by interpreting the indirect social practices from others. *Remembrance world* is also a fabricated social setting, where the individual refer back to his past experience and reinterpret the meaning. Both the imaginary world and the

remembrance world belong to *a fictitious world,* which are subjectively constructed by the individuals.

For the rural migrant workers, before the migration, the rural world was their life world, which means that their social practices were mainly carried out in the rural settings. By contrast, the urban world was an imaginary world to them, which means lack of direct experiences of in it, the urban world was internally constructed by their imagination through other people's social practice. For example, the rural residents often know about cities through TV, newspaper, magazines and more importantly the description of their village fellows who have worked and lived in the cities. According to these indirect experiences of other people's social practice, they form a kind of urban world picture of their own, which can often be depicted through their expectations of urban life before they migrate. However, after the migration, by gradually experiencing the cities directly through their own social practice, the imaginary world of the city will gradually turn to a real life world. The urban world doesn't not only exist in their imaginations; but also becomes a real setting for their social practices. At the same time, the rural world, their former life world, will gradually appear as a remembrance world, which will be more and more constructed in their past memories. However, in the Chinese context of rural-urban migration, considering the fact that the Chinese rural migrant workers are in fact moving all the time between their home villages and working cities, I would rather say that after the migration, the rural world is both a remembrance world and a life world to the individuals.

Therefore according to my understanding, the individual's lifeworld in the process of rural-urban migration consists of four differently constructed internal worlds: *the rural life world, the urban imaginary world, the urban life world* and *the rural remembrance/life world.* I want to clarify that in realities, these four worlds cannot really be separated from each other. For example, even after the individual migrated to cities, his urban life world would still be partially an imaginary world. This means that the division of the lifeword (into four sub-worlds) is only for an analytical purpose or can only be treated as "ideal types."

## 3.2 The theoretical frame work

My understanding of the rural-urban migration with above conceptions can then be presented in such a model: (see Figure2)
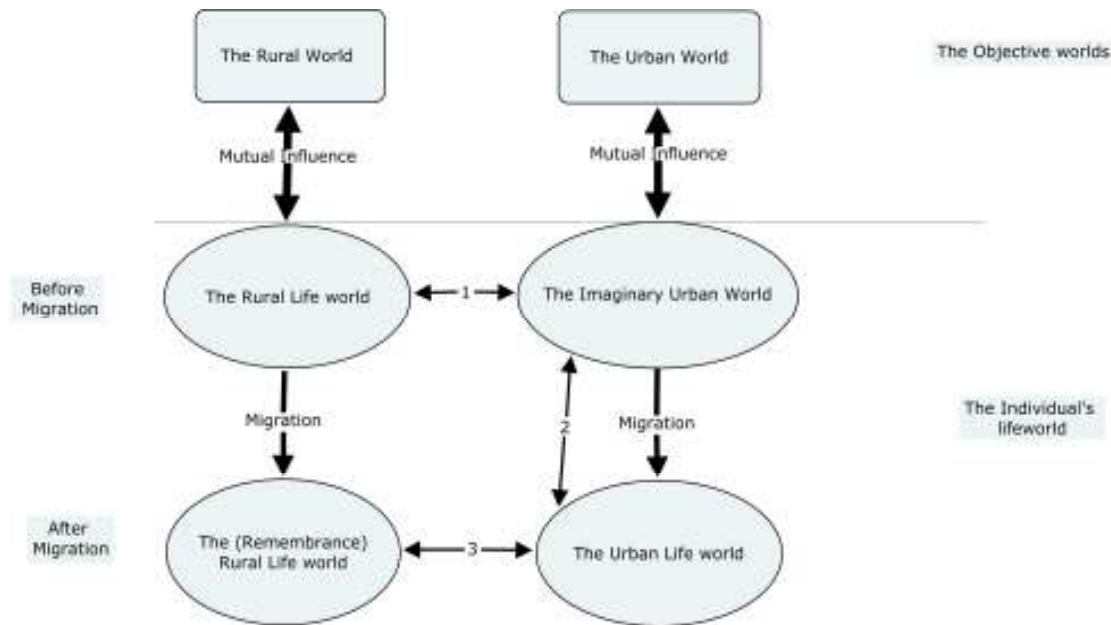
1: Interrelation shown in decision-making stage; 2: Interrelation shown in migrating stage;

3: Interrelation shown in Adaptation stage

**Figure2**: Interrelations of the worlds in the migration process

In my model, the rural world and the urban world are same as that in Fu's model, which exist objectively and externally; while the other four worlds in the ellipses (individual's lifeworld) are socially and internally constructed worlds which contain the individuals' interpretation of the two objective external worlds through the individual's action of migration. Compared with Fu's model, my model emphasizes more the individual's intellectual change of the interpretations towards the objective worlds in the social process of rural-urban migration. I think, in many ways the identity construction of the individual is itself a process in which the individual through their action and reaction interpret and reinterpret their relations with the objective social world. Therefore, the intellectual process can present us with how the self-image of the individual and the interpretation of self would accordingly develop and change in the process of migrating. While Fu seeks to understand how the different worlds interrelate and affect each other, I would rather explore how the four socially constructed worlds by interrelating each other, work together to affect the individual's decisions, understandings as well as their social actions in the process of migration. This suggests that the focus of my analysis in this thesis will be put on the four socially constructed worlds.

When I suggest to mainly look at the interrelations of the four socially constructed worlds, this does not deny the interrelations between the real external worlds (*the rural world* and *the*

*urban world*) and the four internally and socially constructed worlds. As I said, this thesis aims more to view the reflexibility of "self" in the process of change. I think, the change can be better explored in analyzing the four internally constructed worlds. Besides, I look upon the relation between the real worlds and constructed worlds as the one between the objectivity of the social structure and the subjectivity of the agent. If we take Giddens' theory of structuration (Giddens 1984), then this relationship should be already included in the construction of the individual's internally constructed lifeword.

So let's look at the four worlds in the ellipses. I have market three sets of interrelations. The first set is a horizontal interrelation between the rural life world and the urban imaginary world. I think, this interrelation reflects the individuals' decision making process before migrating to cities. The second set is a vertical one between the urban imaginary world and the urban life world which is embodied in the migrating process, when the rural migrant workers just come to the cities and gradually experience the city from imagination to realities. The last set is also a horizontal one, between the urban life world and the rural remembrance/ life world. This interrelation happens in the later stage of the migration, and shows how the individual migrants adapt themselves to the social reality and reorganize their life practice. I think the analysis of these three interrelations accords with the time order of the whole migration process, and therefore sketch out the whole process of the migration. By analysing these interrelations, we can depict self reflexibility in each stage of the migration process.

## 3.3 Organization of the thesis

So far, I have introduced my research topic, research question and explained in what way I have designed and carried out my study in chapter1 and chapter2. In this chapter I have drawn up a theoretical framework in which I will analyse the topic in details in the next 3 chapters, (chapter 4, 5 and 6). I have mentioned three sets of interrelations in the previous part. Each set of these interrelations will be respectively examined through in these three chapters.

In chapter 4, I bring my informants back to the time when they were making decisions to migrate. Through the decision making, I want to explore how the individuals, by interpreting other people's city experience constructed their imaginary urban world and made decisions by comparing it with the rural life world. In this chapter, I will also check the issues like the individuals' motivation and expectation, "self" values, social norms as well as the individual's

own interpretation of rural urban differences. When understanding the "self" in this stage, I distinguish two aspects of the "self": the self with a personal orientation and the self with a family orientation. By comparing the two aspects, I will show that how the traditional Chinese family values can affect the individual's decisions in today's society.

Chapter 5 explores the migrating process, that is, the stage when the individual has newly come to the city. In this stage, by experiencing and practicing the urban realities directly, the individual gradually built up his urban life world, which may conflict oppositely with his earlier imaginary world. By checking the confrontation of these two worlds, or the contradictory relationship between the imaginary urban world and the urban life world, I will not only analyze the problems that the individual meet in the city, but also the individual's understandings of these problems, for example how the individuals feel and view the various discriminations that they have met in cities? How they interpret their role, their status in relation to the local city people when they were suddenly brought into the same social context with the urban residents?

Chapter 6 is mainly about how the individual adapt themselves to the city life. In this stage, they may develop their own strategies to deal with the discriminations, reorganize their life expectation and review his earlier life world with totally different opinions. I will also discuss how the individuals reinterpret and re-evaluate their self in relation to the city and the city residents in this stage. By analyzing the relationship between the urban life world and the remembrance rural world, I will explore how the continuity of self and coherence of self-identity have been re-achieved again in the change of the life world.

Following these main chapters, Chapter7 is a short conclusion, where I will present some of the main findings in this study.

# Chapter 4: Decision making

## 4.1 Causes of migration

To explore the horizontal relations of the rural life world and the urban imaginary world is in fact an attempt to bring my informants back to their former worlds before the migrations. In this stage, it is inevitable to check the causes of the migration, that is to say, what kind of

factors has led to the decision of migration. I have asked all my informants the question why they decided to work in cities. Their answers are not so different from what we have already got from other studies, including:

1) Rural areas are undeveloped and backward. (case1)
2) Desire for a higher position in the society; the urge of the improvement. (case1)
3) Living conditions in countryside are worse than that of cities. (case2)
4) Yearn for cities. (case2, 7)
5) To earn money. The home area is poor, few chance to make money. (case2, 3, 4, 5, 8)
6) Affected by other villagers. It is popular to work in cities. (case2,7)
7) To enrich the personal experience (case1, 2, 4, 6)
8) Better chance for self-development (Case6, 7)
9) Hate agricultural work. It is too hard. (Case7)

In the study field of rural-urban migration, researchers usually apply the famous and influential "push and pull theory" (e.g. Lee 1966 and Myrdal 1969) to analyze causation of migration. Researchers applying this theory often search for factors in the objective worlds and, accordingly, regard the ones in the rural world as "push factor" while the ones in the urban world as "pull factors". Following this theory, I can also categorize the above 9 reasons into "push factors" and "full factors".

But I think the weakness of this "push and pull" model is that: first, it treats these factors as objective explanations and takes for granted that these objective factors would work automatically on individuals' decisions; second, the "push" and "pull" factors are relative factors, not absolute. Usually a push or a pull factor is itself a result of comparison between the rural world and the urban world. For example, when an informant says that he migrated because the home area is undeveloped, which we can regard as a push factor, it also refers to that the urban area is more developed, which is of course a pull factor. In this sense nearly each push factor will have a corresponding pull factor and vice versa. This implies that there will be too much overlapping in the analysis of causing factors. Besides, in the Chinese context of rural-urban migration, "the push and pull model" has to some extent been deformed due to the existence of dual urban-rural structure based on the Hukou system, which implies that the traditional push and pull factors may lose efficacy (Li 2004). For example, the urban world normally has the pull effect on the individual's decision to migrate, however in the

Chinese context, the Hukou system has caused both structural discrimination and limitation for the migrant workers. In this situation, the urban world has also strong push effect, but still the individuals want to migrate. Here, the "push and pull model" cannot effectively explain the Chinese situation.

Therefore, I think it may not be so appropriate to apply the "push and pull model" to analyze the Chinese rural-urban migration. Emphasizing individuals' agency and considering each "push" or "pull" factor is a result of the individual's comparison, I hold that we should shift our focus from the objective worlds to the individuals' lifeworld and analyze how the individuals concretely understand the social realities in the two objective worlds as well as how they expect a change of themselves in the process of migrating. My analysis here is a case study. I have chosen case 2 Qiao's narration for analysis. The reason for choosing him as the typical case for analysis is that he is the one who has talked most about why he decided to work in cities. Among the 9 factors, he provides me with 5 and also shares the four common points (no. 4, 5, 6, 7) with others.

**Case2, Qiao**

*A(author): "Why did you decide to migrate to cities and look for a job?"*

Q(Qiao): "I had been always looking forward to cities when I was small, because the living conditions were and are still worse than that of a city. But I migrated to cities mostly for money. My parents have engaged in agricultural production in all their lives. They work very hard, but our family is still poor. … We had enough food, yes, this was no problem, but we had rarely income by planting food. …If you want some cash in hand, you have to go out to cities and work. Before I migrated out to cities, there were people in my village who had worked in cities. After they worked in cities, they rebuilt their house and they gave money to the family. Every body envied them. In our village, if you can earn money in cities, every one would think you are a capable person and your parents and families would be very proud of you. If you cannot, every one look down at you and think you are not capable. So there has always been a strong social influence in my home village. I felt that it was a great honour to my family if I can earn money in cities. …I really want my old parents to have better life in their later years. I also need to save money for rebuilding our house and marrying a wife. Today, no girl will marry to a poor family without new house and money. I feel ashamed of myself being single and without kids in front of my parents."

*A: "How did you at that time view the difference of being rural and urban residents?"*

> Q: "Of course the living conditions for us rural residents were worse than that for an urban resident. (ask: How?) We wore poorer clothes and our furniture in the household was poorer than that in an urban household…. At that time I thought it was nice to be an urban resident, because urban residents had more spare time than us peasants. They just needed to work 8 hours in the factory, and then they could relax and amuse themselves. But peasants needed to work all the time with the plants and families. Even some times when we had spare time, there were not so much amusement for us as for urban residents in cities."

In Qiao's narrations, we can easily recognize the two worlds: his former rural life world and his imaginary world. His former rural life world was described when he told about his village life before he moved out to cities, for example, he said that his family was poor, they worked hard all the time, their living conditions was not satisfying and so on. We also get a picture of his imaginary urban world, where he thought lots of money could be earned; he could have better living condition and have more fun in his spare time. Even though we can identify these two worlds easily, I feel that it is difficult to separate them because Qiao was comparing the two worlds all the time, which means that he sketched out his respective two worlds with reference to the other. For instance, when he said that there was not much fun in his spare time at the home village, he actually referred to the city life where he imagined that workers in cities could have more amusements. Vice versa, when Qiao thought that the cities were places for making money, he didn't really expect that he could earn money very easily in the cities; in stead, this is just a comparison with the opportunities to make money in his home village, where they "had rarely income by planting food".

In this way, I think that when an individual making a decision to migrate to cities, it was in fact a process in which he intentionally reconstructed his imaginary urban world and reorganized his rural life world by referring to and interconnecting the other. However, I think this process itself will not directly lead to the individual's decision to migrate. What has caused the decision, according to my point of view is a certain relationship that the individual has constructed between the two worlds. Let's go back to Qiao's case. In his narrations he expressed that he migrated to cities mostly for money. And obviously he had constructed an imaginary urban world where he thought he could earn money. I have already explained that this imaginary world was in fact built by comparison with the rural life world. Let's suppose, if "planting food" could also provide Qiao a chance to make money at the home village, then would Qiao have migrated to cities for work? I wish I could have another chance to interview Qiao and ask him this question. But according to my analysis, I think if so, at least money

would not be the main reason for Qiao to move out of the village. So the most important point here is not that Qiao had built up an imaginary urban world in which he could make money, but that while he could not make money in his home village he could on the contrary do it in cities; or what he wished to achieve and could not achieve in the rural life world could by contrast be achieved in his imaginary world. Therefore I conclude that it is a specific relationship of the individual's two socially constructed worlds of **being opposing and yet complementing each other** that is decisive for the individual's decision to migrate.

## 4.2 Construction of the imaginary urban world

The individual's construction of the imaginary urban world is certainly very important for the individual's decision to migrate, as the imaginary world contains the individual's motivation and expectation. In Fu's study of the rural migrant workers adaptation to the city life, he describes the imaginary world as often embodying the individuals' dream of exceeding the parents' social status and life style (Fu 2006). On one hand, I agree with Fu. From the dialogs with my eight informants, I feel strongly that they all possessed certain dreams and concrete plans when deciding to migrate. Of course each individual has different dreams or plans, but in common we can describe their dreams as to better their lives, which can be also understood as to achieve a higher status in the society. But on the other hand, I do think that Fu's description is somewhat misleading, which gives us an impression that when the individual dreamed to exceed the former social status, they were intending to desert their former rural life and attempting to enter an urban one.

I have explained earlier that the construction of the imaginary urban world proceeds through the reference to, or comparison with the rural life world. Meantime, we should also give attention to the "self" in the construction of the imaginary urban world. In sketching out the new life in cities, the individuals had already possessed a certain understandings of their self: "who they are; what kind of role and responsibility they have; what they want to do and where they are going". To answer these questions, the individuals had to refer to their rural life experiences, as there was already a "self" or "self-identity" that had been formed in this rural life world. Therefore the self in the imaginary world can never abandon the rural life world. In this part, I provide two arguments: 1. The construction of the imaginary urban is structured inside a pre-constructed life pattern; 2. When constructing his imaginary urban world, the individual often holds certain values that have been formed through his interaction with local villagers in the rural life world. These two aspects are obviously related to each other, for

example an individual's values can certainly affect the individual's life pattern; and the individual's life pattern itself can reflect the individual's value systems. For the convenience of my analysis I would like to discuss them separately.

## 4.2.1 Pre-constructed life pattern

First I want to talk about what kind of pre-constructed life pattern the individuals had built for themselves when planning to migrate to cities.

Let's take Qiao's case again (page 28). Qiao moved out to cities mainly for earning money. If we look further why he needed to earn money, then we see that he needed money to rebuild the house and to marry a wife. To rebuild the house and marry a wife was in fact not only mentioned by Qiao. Another male single informant, Luo (case 4) did mention too that he was going to use the money he earned to rebuild the family's house so that he could marry a wife. In the Siping village where I had my field work, I found that nearly all the villagers who have worked in cities after earning money have rebuilt their houses. To earn money in the city, build the new house in the home village, and marry a wife is somewhat a kind of life pattern in the rural area especially for the **young male**. For the **young female**, they also follow a certain life pattern: earning money in the city and saving it for her future marriage in the rural village. From my free talk with the young girls in the Siping village, I get an impression that many young girls when deciding to move to cities knew that they would come back and settle down their families in the rural area. In this way, their life pattern can be described as earning money in the city – saving money in the rural village – getting married … Different from the young male who would mostly use the money to build the house, the young female mostly save money to prepare their dowries. For **those married** who decide to move to city for work, they life pattern is more tightly related to the rural life world than those young and single, as the families, especially the children have locked their future plan inside the home village.

So generally speaking, when individuals decide to move to cities, they do have a kind pre-designed life pattern, which is not only built in, but also oriented to the rural life world. And this can, to some extent, be proved by the considerable proportion of remittance that the Chinese rural migrant workers have sent to their families in the home villages. According to Li's research, the proportion of the remittance that the Chinese rural migrant workers have sent home is much higher than that in other countries (Li, 2004: 183). For example, in India, the average proportion of remittance that the rural migrant workers send home constitutes

from 1.3% to 6.5% of the total income of the rural family (ibid; Zhou 1996. 37). By contrast, in China, More than 70% of the rural migrant workers post remittance regularly to their family in the home village; Among the families that have family members working in cities, 46.3% have received remittance that makes up more than 50% of the total family income, and 22.3% have received remittance accounting for over 80% of the total family income (Li 2004: 185)[15]. In my own research, all of my eight informants send or have sent money to their families in the home village, and in fact to be able send money home is one of their motivations to move to cities.

So we can see that when the individuals are drawing up a new picture of themselves in an imaginary urban world, their "self" were still framed inside an already established life pattern in the rural life world. To wish that they can send money back to the home in the rural village suggests that their "long life circle" is still in the rural life world. By contrast, the constructed imaginary urban world is one temporary stage of "the long life cycle" (Li 2004: 59).

Li describes this kind of pre-constructed or pre-determined life pattern in the decision making stage as "locking of the individual's life expectation", caused by the Hukou system (Li 2004: 57-59). I have mentioned that today, Hukou system still prevents the rural migrant workers from becoming a real urban resident, and disenables them to enjoy the same labour, social rights and welfare benefits as an urban resident because of the dual urban-rural segregation. I think, the long-time existence of the institutional barrier has caused a kind of **psychological acceptance** among the individuals, the acceptance of their identity as "peasant" or "rural", since they know that by working in cities they will never become legally "urban", and they will be still treated as "rural". Therefore, the pre-designed rural life pattern in the construction of the individuals' imaginary world can also be understood as a result of the influence from the objective world towards the individuals' self.

## 4.2.2 Value, norms and local conventions

When discussing the pre-determined life pattern in the construction of the imaginary urban world, I mentioned that the Hukou system had led to the individuals' psychological acceptance of their social identity as "rural". Here, I want to argue that the individuals' pre-constructed life pattern is also an "orientation of the self" which contains how individuals

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[15] Data are from The Rural Research Group of the Ministry of Agriculture (1996)

look upon his social role, how they understand their responsibility as well as how they evaluate their self-value in relation to their families and the local community. According to my point of view, the locking of the individual's life expectation is a result of both the objective structural factor (Hukou system) and subjective social factors such as value system, norms, attitudes and local conventions. In order to get a clear picture of how these subjective factors can affect the individuals' decision to migrate, I suggest that we take the analysis back to the individuals' rural life world and imaginary urban world. In the decision to migrate, the individual holds certain value and attitude from the rural life world to evaluate the imaginary urban world; at the same time, the new elements of the imaginary world has also effect to influence the individual's value system and general attitude.

I think, Qiao's narration which I have quoted earlier can well present this kind of interaction of the two worlds (Page 28). When Qiao told us why he would migrate, we can first notice that he held a kind of basic value from his earlier life world that a young male should carry the economic responsibility for the family and he should earn money to better the family's economy. With this basic view, when he saw that some of his fellow villagers who had earned money in the cities rebuilt the house and improved family's living standard, he concluded that to work in cities was a valuable action: by migrating to cities he could realize his personal value and fulfil his duty towards the family in the local context. At the same time, Qiao imagined that by earning money in the cities he could, like his migrant fellow villagers, also receive certain admiration and respect from others, and his families would also be proud of him. Putting these elements of the imaginary world back to his life world, Qiao formed another kind of value and attitude: that is he hoped to bring his family an honour through his migration to cities. Here we can see again that the "self" in the individual's decision's making had never abandoned the rural life world. The traditional values, especially about the family and the local conventions in the rural life world are essentially important to the individual's decision-making.

Concerning the value and local convention, I also find a different pattern between genders. I have already used Qiao's case as an example to explain how the local norms and value system can affect a rural male's life view and attitude towards the rural-urban migration. How about the female? We have discussed that the young rural females in the process of migrating also follow a certain life pattern, for example they always take the migration as a means to make money for their dowries. The girl or girl's family preparing dowries for marriage itself can be

look upon as a kind of local convention or tradition which embodies certain norms of the local society. But at the same time norms about how a female should behave differently from a man have also certain impact on the individual's decision-making. Today it is normal for young single female to work in cities. How about 10 or 15 years ago? Li (case5) and XHF(case8) told me similar stories:

> Li: "I didn't go out to cities until I was married. At that time, different from today, there were not so many girls migrating to cities and making money. Our village was still very conservative, and there were few girls moving to cities. Of course, before I got married, I had thought myself that it would be nice if I could go to cities and experience the world, but I knew my family would not agree. But after I got married, my family could not make decision for me any more. Since my husband (from a neighbouring village) worked in Kunming, so I went out with him."

> XHF: "The first time I was in the city was to visit my husband in Chongqing. He (also a rural resident) was my boyfriend at that time and he worked as a carpenter in Chongqing. Then by chance I got a job offer from a man whom my husband had worked for. I was very happy, of course. But I didn't take it. At that time, people were still feudal-minded. I was not married yet, only got engaged. How could a single girl live alone in cities? My parents would not agree. I didn't want people thought we were living together in the same city without getting married. "

Both Li and XHF didn't migrate to cities until they were married. Li and XHF, both in their 30s, can be said to belong to the same generation. Compared with younger female informants like Yuan and XWH, Li and XHF both bore a more traditional attitude towards the gender difference, especially concerning how they should behave properly as a single female. Their attitude in fact reflected the norms and the general attitude of the whole local community, where a single female moving out of family was still considered impropriate in early 1990s. That's why neither Li nor XHF would migrate to cities when they were single. Here, we get a concrete picture of how the local norms and values from the rural life world can strongly influence a single female's decision. Today, even though the influence is much weaker than before, and it is normal and usual for young single girls to work in cities, still the parents of the girls would like their daughters to migrate together with some reliable persons, such as families, relatives or best friends. A single girl living alone in the city is still considered as "not so appropriate".

Therefore, I think, regardless of gender, the formation of the individuals' certain values that they apply to evaluate the decision of migrating, was indeed an internalization of the local society's value systems, norms and conventions. How has this internalizing process happened? Mead (1934) has explained in his theory how a small childe/individual forms a self-image through an interaction with himself by taking the role of the others, or a "generalized other" (Blumer 1975: 68). I think the society's norms and values have been internalized into the individual's self exactly in the same process where the individual interpret their own actions by taking the attitude of the "generalized others". For example, Qiao, as a rural young man, took the general attitude of the local villagers that "if you can earn money in cities, you are a capable person", and formed his own value standard to evaluate himself. He might have said to himself, "If you would others think you are also capable, you must migrate to cities and find some work."

As to female, we can take XHF's story as an example. XHF told us that when she was provided with a job in the city before she was married, she didn't take it. When she told us the reason, she did mix her own attitude with the general attitude of the whole villages. She first told us that "the generalized other" in this village was "feudal-minded", because they hold a kind of view "how could a single girl live alone in cities?" And then, she said, "I didn't want people thought we were living together in the same city without getting married." Obviously, when she evaluated her decision to stay or not in the city, she interpreted from the position of the other villagers. She might have had this conversation with herself: "What would others say if I take the job and stay in the same city as my boyfriend?" then her subjective self by taking the role of the generalized others may have answered, "How could a young girl live alone in the city? Oh, you must live together with your boyfriend without being married. What a shame!"

## 4.2.3 Analysis of the deviation cases

Till now in this section (section 4.2) I have discussed how the "self" has been interpreted and how the action of migrating has been evaluated by the individuals when making decisions whether or not to migrate. I specifically emphasize that the rural life world had never disappeared from the individual's evaluation of the choice. In stead, it has influenced the individual's decision with certain life patterns, values and norms, even though the new elements of the imaginary urban world may change or even challenge these traditional values

or norms. When I stress that the self is always oriented to the rural life world in the stage of decision making, some may ask, "Is there anyone who plans to settle down in the city?" The answer is "Yes". Among my eight cases, three informants expressed that when they decided to migrate, they had plan to settle down in the cities permanently. Some even said clearly that she would never come back and live in the rural village again.

Case1, Zheng

"I feel young people should have the desire to do things better. When I lived in the countryside which is backward, I had strong desire to leave and change my life. I wanted to climb up to a higher social status. Then I had to leave my home village and came to the city."

Case6, Yuan

"I was very young when I first left my home village for Beijing to work in a restaurant. I was only 16 at that time, too young to plan the future for myself. The economy in our family was not bad. My parents both worked in Chongqing, and I am the only child in my family. I migrated because my cousin who told me that the restaurant where she worked needed more waitresses, and if I wanted I could get the job. I was so excited to hear this, I was so eager to go to Beijing even though my parents didn't agree in the beginning. I knew that the outside world was much more exciting than the countryside. Besides it was Beijing, the capital. The outside world in my heart was always beautiful. I just wanted to go out and experience this, no matter it was to work there or just to visit there. So I didn't care about how much money I could earn, I only thought that I was young and I need to experience more to improve myself. My life should not be the same as the other villagers. It was boring."

Case7, XWH

"I was born in countryside, but I hate agricultural work. I had hoped to move out of the countryside since I was very small. When I was a small girl, I felt so unfair: why the children in cities can eat well and dress beautiful. I remember each time when I saw some city children coming here to visit, I envied them a lot. So I had always looked forward to moving to cities and never coming back again. It is true! Now I am a mother. I don't want my son to live in the countryside either, never!"

Well, considering the reliability of analysis and the validity of the findings, I feel it is necessary to analyze these deviation cases and provide certain explanations. For doing this, I will apply a comparative approach. In comparative studies, it is often emphasized that researchers should go back to the context to understand the differences, which suggest that we put these three narrations back to their respective life context for a better understanding of the individual stories. What kind of factors have led to the individuals' weaker attachment to

their rural home villages, and why had they a different pre-determined life pattern than the other informants. I find these four factors.

**First** these three informants somewhat belong to a younger generation, especially Yuan(21) and Zheng (25). Therefore their formation of "self" was less affected by the traditional values of the local village. Different from Yu(40), Li(38) and XHF(36), their childhood and early youth had already elements from the modern urban world through either TV, magazines or people in their life world. **Second**, all these three informants have parents or one parent who didn't engage in agricultural work. Zheng's parents had become workers in one local village and township enterprise in early 1990s; Yuan's parents were, among the earliest rural migrant workers, working in Chongqing; and XWH's father was a village cadre. The parents' non-agricultural life experience had no doubt affected their personal pursue and life expectation. By contrast, Luo (case4) and Qiao (case2) with age of 24 and 29 belong also to the younger generation, but their parents had been peasants all their life time. Growing in a more traditional family with agricultural background, Luo and Qiao's life pattern had been obviously more affected by the traditional values in the rural life world. **Third**, with better economic conditions at home, the three informants bore less economic responsibility to the family so that they can put more focus to develop their personal self. This explanation has in fact been verified by Pro. Li's empirical research, in which Li finds out that the migrant rural workers from poor rural areas are very often more active and willing to send the money home than those from better-off areas (Li 2004: 192). This is to say that those whose families are better off don't have to consider so much their family when making decision to migrate; in stead they could give more consideration to their personal development. About the personal orientation and the family orientation, I will discuss more in the following section. **At last**, each individual when planning to migrate to cities, they motivate to enhance their social status and improve their life quality. For normal villagers who do the hard agricultural work with low or no income, they often regard the richer families in the rural world as their reference group. Like Qiao, he envied those who had earned some money and rebuilt the house, and he wished to achieve the same as them. The same is for Luo, Yu, Li and XHF. For them, their reference group concerning their life goal is those relatively richer rural residents. But what about Zheng, Yuan and XWH, whose families are already better-off than other villagers? I think if the individual still has the motivation to do things better, then they have to get another kind of reference group and design a different life project. In the Chinese context, if those who are already in the top rank of the rural stratification system want to climb to a higher

social status, then they have to aim at the other stratification system, namely the urban one. Consequently their reference group would be the certain group of urban residents.

So from my above explanation, we find that these three deviation cases don't really go against my previous conclusion: the individual's rural life world is fundamental to the construction of the individual's imaginary urban world. Though the three informants shared the same rural world with other informants before migration, but they didn't share the same rural life world. Since their rural life worlds were differently constructed, their imaginary urban worlds accordingly presented different patterns. Here we can also see how **the rural world** and **the rural life world** are two different concepts in my thesis.

## 4.3 Personal orientation and family orientation – a family corporationism in rural china

In the individual's decision of migrating to cities, there are normally two kinds of motivation: one is for the sake of the person himself. For example, when being asked why to migrate, the informants provided reasons like "to rich the personal life experience", "for a better self-development", and "to earn some money to marry a wife" etc.  I think when considering these personal factors, the individuals were shaping a **self** with **a personal orientation** in their imaginary urban world, that is to say the choice of migration is mostly evaluated in relation to the individuals' own interest and development. The other kind of the motivation is based on the family's interest: individuals migrate for the sake of the family. In the Chinese context of rural-urban migration, to support the family and to enable the family members, especially the parents and children to have a better life, is usually one of the main motivations for individuals to take the decision to migrate. For example, I have, by analyzing case2, showed that Qiao migrated to cities mainly for earning money to better the family's economy. He expected to rebuild the family house and improve his parents' life. As I analysed earlier, this expectation is formed with Qiao's own understanding of his certain role and responsibility towards the family. In this way, we sense a self tightly attached to the family, or a **self** wth a strong **family orientation**. I think the individuals' family orientation has always been very important in the decision making process. This can also be proved by the high proportion of the remittance sent home regularly by the Chinese rural migrant workers.

In order to understand the rural migrants' family orientation, I think it is necessary to discuss some of characteristics of the family life in the Chinese context. First the concept "family" in China should be understood in a wider sense. In the west, "family" usually refers to the "nuclear" family, which contains a couple and children. However, in China, "family", especially in the rural area, refers to a much bigger unit, including the couple's parents, brothers and sisters (more importantly at the man's side). Though they may live in separate households, their economic relations are usually linked together closely. It is very normal in the rural China that in order to support one child in the family to finish the college education, all the family members, including not only the child's parents and grandparents, but also sisters, brothers, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, uncles, aunts etc, would work hard to contribute to the tuitions. In some cases, this kind of contribution is made without thinking to be repaid. In this sense, I feel that in a Chinese family, the family members emphasize more the interest of the whole family clan than that of the each individual, which is totally different from a western family. Li explains this difference by looking at the different ideologies between the east and the west. He says that one important difference between the Chinese family and the western family is that the western family emphasizes the independence of the individual and respects the individual family members' rights and interests (individualism); by contrast, the Chinese family stresses the interest of the family and regards the whole family as one corporation (family collectivism). According to the traditional Chinese ethics about the family life, the individual, in order to realize the whole family's interest, should sacrifice his own interest and give up his own will (Li 2004: 188). Therefore, we may assume that when making decisions to migrate, the individual probably considers more about "what is the best for the family" than about "what is the best for me". This implies that the self with the personal orientation is usually subject to the one with the family orientation. And this assumption can to some extent be verified by the stories of my eight informants, especially those who are married.

In my eight cases, Yu (case3), Li (case5) and XHF(case8) are married with children. When they are working in the cities, they keep their children living with their parents in the home village. All of them, especially the females, told me that it was very hard for them to be separated from their children, but they don't plan to take the children to cities, because keeping the children at home with grandparents is the best arrangement for the family's economy. They also told me that their parents are willing to help them take care of the grand-children. In China, it is very usual that the children live with grandparents. In many ways, the

Chinese grandparents take it for granted that they have the responsibility to take care of the grandchildren. They do it because they want to support their children's career, but it is also with the consideration of the whole family's interest. In the Siping village, I find that many of the children are in fact raised by the grandparents since the young people are often working in cities; and some of the old people besides taking care of grandchildren also do the agricultural work for the family.

Here we can also see a kind of family cooperationism in the individual's decision to migrate. The decision is always made with the support of the family members; and the migration as a means to support the family's economy is realized with the cooperation of all the family members. When one member in the family decides to migrate, all the members need to reorganize their responsibility and duty to make the whole family corporation work. In this reorganization process, the individual's self should subject their personal orientation to the family orientation.

However, I think we cannot simply interpret this subjection of personal orientation to the family orientation as a "natural altruism inside the family" addressed by professor Li (ibid). We should pay attention to the fact that the individual's personal interest in the Chinese context is very often closely attached, or bonded to the whole family's interest. When the family's economic status has been improved, each family member's personal economic status would also accordingly enhanced. In the famous Chinese ancient novel "Hong Lou Meng" written in the 18th century (translated as "A Dream of Red Mansions" or "The Story of the Stone"), the traditional relationship of family members inside big family clans is described as "Once one family member with honour, all the family with honour; once one with shame, all the family with shame"[16] This description may in fact from another aspect explain why the individual would be willing to sacrifice his personal interest in order to reach a common goal for the whole family.

When understanding the family cooperationism, we should also be aware that in the Chinese rural family, the most important part of the individual's economic responsibility towards the family is his obligation to his parents and children. As the famous Chinese sociologist, Fei Xiaotong says: "the main spindle of the family relationship in China is not the horizontal

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[16] My own translation of 一荣俱荣，一损俱损（YiRongJuRong, YiSunJusun）.

relationship between husband and wife, but the vertical relationship between the parents and children" (Fei 1998: 41). This explains why most of the rural migrant workers when talking about why they decided to work in cities, emphasize they want to give a better future life to their parents and children. In my field work, those informants who are single all mentioned that they hope to earn more money so that their parents can have a nice life in their later age; while for those who are married, besides thinking of the parents, all motivated to earn money for their children, especially the children's future tuition for college education. When I asked them, "when will you 'retire' from working in cities?" They all told me, "Till my children graduate from college and have a nice job."

# Chapter 5: The Migrating Stage

Migrating process here refers to the first stage when the rural migrant workers just come to city and start their new lives. Putting this process back to my model of "lifeworld changes" (page24), we are to explore the relations between the individual's imaginary urban world and urban life world. With the sudden change of the life world from rural to urban, the migrant workers usually find that the real urban world as a kind of social reality is so different from the one that they imagined. In this way, we can describe the relationship between the imaginary urban world and the urban life world as inconsistent or even contradictory with each other. In order to check the contradictory relations of the two worlds, we need to analyse what kind of difficulties that individuals have in the migrating process. Concerning the person's identity, we will also give a special attention to the discriminations that individuals experience in cities. As many rural migrant workers express, when migrating to cities, the biggest difficulty for them is the various discrimination that they receive from the local urban residents.

I intentionally raised the unpleasant issue of discrimination in the interviews. All the eight informants admit that they have met one or another form of discrimination in the cities. Even though some of them stress that they don't care so much the discrimination now, at least I can see and feel that the discrimination has once been one of the main difficulties for them, especially when they just arrived in the cities. I find that when talking about the discrimination, my informant often mix together three kinds of discrimination: 1. Geographical discrimination, from the local residents towards the immigrants, 2. Urban-rural

discrimination, from the urban residents towards the rural residents. and 3. Economic discrimination, from the rich to the poor. I think an individual may not necessarily encounter all these kinds of discrimination in the migrating process, and in many ways the three kinds are also closely interrelated and overlapped. Yet, I think the three kinds of discrimination can provide us three aspects of life world change in the process of migration, in which we can trace individual's self and self-identity.

## 5.1 Geographic factors

### 5.1.1 Geographical discrimination

Geographic change caused by the migration may not necessarily cause discrimination. My informants tell me that they often feel clear geographical discrimination when migrating to the eastern part of China, especially the coastal cities. For example, Li (case5) compares the two cities that she has worked: Kunming (another big city locating in south-west China) and Shanghai, and says that the people in Kunming are much more friendly and easy-going than the people in Shanghai whom she describes as "picky and snobbish". Similarly Luo (case4) compared people in Kunming with people in Guangzhou and Quanzhou (both two are south-eastern coastal cities) and tells me that, "even though Kunming people may sometimes look down at us, I think this is mostly because I am from countryside. If I were from the countryside in the local area, they will still look down at me. But people in Guangzhou and Quanzhou are different, if they hear you are not talking the same dialect, they will show a cold shoulder to you immediately. Even if I were from a city in other parts of this country, they will still be suspicious and hostile to me."

I think geographical discrimination has often something to do with the regional differences between the out-migrated area and the in-migrated area, especially the difference of economic development. China is a country with a big disequilibrium between the regional developments. The developmental levels of urban areas and rural areas, as well as in the East and in the West differ greatly. These differences together with the strong local protectionism, lead to that the people in the more developed eastern part of China feel a kind of local privilege and despise the people from the other parts of the country. However between areas with similar developmental level of economy, the discrimination will not be so obvious. This is why the inland rural migrant workers often feel geographical discriminations when they work in the eastern coast cities or big cities like Beijing and Shanghai.

## 5.1.2 Inadaptability caused by the geographic change

The geographic change may not necessarily bring discrimination to the individuals, but indeed it brings a kind of inadaptability to them in their first stage of living in the new area. Most of my informants (except case1 who has always worked in the local area) compare a lot the in-migrated area with the home (out-migrated) area, and says that in the beginning they were not used to the life in the in-migrated areas. The factors they mention include climate, language (or dialect), dietary and living habit, and so on. Obviously, these geographical differences have caused the individuals' inadaptability towards the new environment especially when they just arrived in the new place. Normally the bigger the geographical differences are, the stronger will the inadaptability be show in the beginning. Again, my informants compare Kunming with cities in the other parts of the country. And they think in Kunming with similar dialect and dietary habit, they feel less unfamiliar and easier to be adapted to the new environment, while in the other parts of the country, with bigger differences of the environment, they feel more unfamiliar and less adaptable.

The inadaptability, to some extent, also reflects a kind of insecure feeling among the rural migrant workers when being in a strange place. Just like Qiao (case2) told me when he worked as a construction worker in the Xinjiang Uyurs Region[17], he felt "frightened and unrest", and he never went out alone of the construction site. When I asked why, he said that because he felt the local environment and people were totally different from the ones in his home area, and he felt insecure when alone in it. Qiao's answer reminds me about the self's ontological security, discussed by Giddens. According to Giddens, the ontological security is anchored in the self's practical consciousness and is bracket into the "natural attitude" that the self takes for granted "in order to keep on with everyday life" (Giddens 1994: 36-37). I think the "natural attitude" is often based upon certain "natural setting", where the self has been so used to keep its existence and practice. Or, all the questions about the "self" have to be answered within this setting. So, when the "natural setting" of the individual suddenly disappears, and is taken place by another "unnatural setting", the individual cannot take his existence and daily activities for granted any more: his sense of ontological security is untied from the anchor of practical consciousness. That's why the individual will normally feel insecure or even frightened when he is suddenly set into a totally unfamiliar environment.

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[17] A region for Uyurs minority people.

When an individual has lost his ontological security, he has also dropped out his trust, not only the trust to the new environment, but also the trust to himself. In this sense, the continuity of self is broken: the meaning that the individual has set up within his former natural setting becomes meaningless and the individual has to re-answer all the questions about the "self". Therefore, I think, in the migrating process, the individual's inadaptability to the new environment implies a break-off of the continuity of self and a crisis for self-identity.

Relating the individuals' inadaptability with the notion of ontological security, we can probably understand better why the individuals always keep their daily association and communication within a social circle from their home areas. I think we can well consider it as a tactic to hold on their practical consciousness as well as to maintain the consistence of self.

In fact, when individuals migrate to a new area, they often would like to choose migrate together with families, relatives or reliable friends of the family who have had already migrated there before. All my eight informants did have accompanies when they migrated to cities for the first time. Nearly all of them say that without accompany and help of the relatives or friends, they would never choose to migrate to cities alone. On one hand, we should notice that the labour market in China is still not well-developed and the primitive social network (kin relation, relative and friend relation) still plays a decisive role for the individual to get a job (Li 2004). A survey of the 688 rural migrant workers shows that 75.6% of the informants have found job through this kind of primitive social networks (Zhao 1995). On the other hand, we should also look at the psychological reasons of why they would like to migrate or even live together with their fellow villagers when moving to a new life world. I think first of all, this is to maintain their ontological security. The crisis of ontological security doesn't appear when the individual comes to the unfamiliar environment. In fact, it did appear already when the individual made decision to migrate. Like Yu (case3) told me, without migrating with other 2 fellow villagers, he "dared" not to move to a place that is so far away from the home area. Both Yu and Qiao (case2) were young strong males, why would they fear when they migrated to the cities for the first time? I think, because they both sensed a kind of crisis for their ontological security in the long distance of migration. That's why both of them chose to migrate in group with other migrant villagers. So, according to my understanding, migrating together with fellow villagers and segregating themselves from urban residents in cities reflect the individuals' wish (conscious or unconscious) to maintain the continuity of their "self" that was shaped in the former rural life world.

## 5.2 Urban-rural aspect

To change from a rural social setting to an urban setting, the individual may also encounter the same problem that they have met from the change of geographic settings. He may also feel inadaptable and insecure in the beginning. However, in this aspect, I would mostly like to look at the aspect of social status, that is how the Chinese dual Hokou system has created two different kinds of social status (urban and rural), and how the rural migrant workers with a lower status are discriminated and excluded in the urban social setting.

### 5.2.1 An internalized status system

In both Chinese and western research fields of Chinese rural-urban migration, it has reached a kind of consensus that the administrative dual Hukou system has built up a social closure to segregate urban and rural areas, and has created two different social statuses for urban and rural residents (e.g. Sun 2003 in Li (ed.): 149-160, Li 2004 and Chan, K. W. & Zhang, L. 1999). Some western researchers hold the view that the institutional obstacle of the Hukou system is the main barrier to prevent the rural migrant workers becoming legal urban citizens with full social rights (solinger 1999). In reality, it seems as a matter of course that urban residents have higher social status than rural residents. Since the Hukou is a kind of ascribed status system: even though a peasant stops engaging in agricultural production and migrates to cities, he will still hold his social status as a peasant. The word "peasant" in Chinese not only refers to an occupation, but also indicates a kind of social status. That is why rural migrant workers are in fact called "peasant workers" in Chinese.

I think in order to explore how the individuals' experience of being discriminated and excluded in cities, we should first of all understand how the individuals themselves looked upon the social reality that they as peasants have lower social status than city residents before and when they migrated to cities. In this issue, I have found a dilemma among my informants. On one hand, they did feel unfair that people born in cities have some pre-ascribed privileges:

> Luo (case4): "It is of course unfair. People in cities have jobs and stable income; and when being old can get pension from state. How about we? We get nothing."

> Li (case 5): "It goes without saying that the urban and rural Hukou are incompatible with each other. People in cities (with urban Hukou) eat, wear and live better than us. Besides, they have

better chance in education and career than us in the countryside. When I should have gone to the senior middle school, I couldn't, because our family was poor. But for the kids in urban area, their parents had stable job and income. They could fulfil the education if they had the chance."

XWH (case7): "I have always thought it unfair since I was a small girl. As a girl in countryside, I envied the kids in cities, because they ate and wore better than us. "

However, on the other hand, they admitted that urban residents have a higher social status than them rural residents. This admittance, first of all, confirms the social fact that Hukou system has created a kind of symbolic social status and endowed certain privileges only to urban residents. For example, Qiao (case2), Luo, XWH, and XHF (case8) express clearly that before, an urban Hukou symbolized a higher social status to them, and they knew very well that even though they could get jobs in cities, they could not enjoy the same rights, welfare arrangements and benefits as the urban workers. Here, we can in fact see that the rural-urban discriminations had already been expected by the individuals even before migration. They would not feel surprised when they first met this kind of discrimination, in stead, I would say they were, to some extent, well-prepared for it when deciding to migrate.

I notice that in admitting urban residents have a higher social status than themselves, individuals were also trying to provide themselves a certain explanation so that they could accept the social facts. In many ways, they did agree to that people in cities were better than the people from countryside. For example, they admitted that "people in cities look more neat and clean" (case2,3,7), "are better educated or civilized" (case4, 5, 8) and "behave more courteous in public occasions" (case1,2,4,5,8). So, in this way, we can somehow say that the individuals had not only well expected that they would meet discrimination in cities, but also to some extent, psychologically accepted the social fact of discrimination.

Generally speaking, the dual Hukou system as a status system (Liu and Liu 2003 in Li (ed.): 264-283) is not just an outer structural system existing in the objective world, but also has been internalised in the individual migrant workers' imaginary and life world. And the internalization is important for us to understand how the individuals experience and deal with the urban-rural discriminations.

## 5.2.2 Urban-rural discrimination

When talking about the urban-rural discrimination, we should distinguish two types of discrimination on different levels. The first type is discrimination on an institutional level. This kind of discrimination is first shown in the Chinese dual structured labour market, where rural migrant workers have to engage in the secondary labour market, where the choices of employment is limited to some physically heavy, dirty, low-paid work with bad working conditions and nearly no protection by relevant labour laws[18]. And the most part of the secondary labour market is formed inside the non-formal sectors. Discrimination on this level is a formal one, institutionalised and legitimated by the dual Hukou system. For example, in Beijing before 2003, it had clearly stated in regulations issued by the Beijing Labour Bureau, that some sort of occupations were only for people with local urban Hukou, and for rural migrant workers, their choices of employment were limited inside a list of some 200 occupations, all of which belong to the category of so-called "black-collar" professions. If we look at this kind of control as a direct state-plan intervention towards the labour market, I think, more importantly, this institutional discrimination is realized through the market mechanism. That is to say, with a lower educational level, lack of technique skills and various kinds of capital, the rural migrant workers find it difficult and impossible to participate into the primary labour market. Li applies Frank Parkin's critical theory of exclusion and usurpation[19] to understand the phenomenon, and regards the institutional discrimination towards the rural migrant workers in the Chinese labour market as a kind of "collectivist exclusion" (Parkin 1979 and Li 2004: 139). This means that the Chinese rural migrant workers as a group are collectively excluded from the urban society.

However as I have mentioned in the previous part, the rural migrant workers had to some extend accepted (or even taken for granted) the social fact that the urban residents have naturally been endowed with certain privileges in the labour market. So they didn't actually expect to achieve the same as the urban residents in the first place. So I think, the discrimination on the institutional level would not change so much the individual's understanding of the "self".

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[18] There exist relevant labour laws to protect the workers' rights and benefits in China. However, since rural residents have for long time been forbidden to join the labour market in cities, these laws are only used to protect the urban "formal workers'" labour rights. Besides, most rural migrant workers work in the informal sectors without signing any work contract, so the laws are, in fact some empty papers to them.

[19] According to Parkin, resources in the society are always limited. Therefore, in any society, there will be certain regulatory systems, aimed to protect some group of people's access to the recourses, and to exclude other groups in the society from it.

What's more important is the discrimination on a more micro level, appearing in the daily life, the second type. This type of discrimination is more direct and concrete than the first type. It is the discrimination that the individuals can feel and sense in the social associations with the urban residents in the daily life, both in the work and after the work. Though I have discussed that normally in order to keep the continuity of self, the rural migrant worker would rather to keep their social circle within the rural context, still the association and communication with urban residents in the daily life cannot be totally avoided. According to my interviews, all the eight informants have experienced this kind of discrimination.

Zheng (case1, a professional hairdresser) and Yuan (case6, administrative personnel in a big chain restaurant) can be said to have achieved a higher professional status than the others among the eight informants, and seem to have been more integrated into the city life. However, these two have also told me about their experiences of being discriminated.

> Zheng: "Hair dresser is not a bad profession. It is a creative work with fashion. Most customers are friendly to us. In fact, in this profession, you need to talk to your customers and establish a sort of personal contact so that they will come often to you later. However, when I was still an apprentice, I was often bullied by the customers because I was not so skilled or maybe because they could hear some of my rural accent. Some of customers are very picky. It was alike that they didn't want a peasant to fix their hair style."

> Yuan: "There is a superior quality clothing shop in the same building with our restaurant. Some times, in the spare time of work, we several young girls would like to go there and have a look. Once I saw some nice clothes and would like to have a try. But the assistant, when seeing that I wore a work uniform of the restaurant, was so reluctant to serve me. She dared at my uniform for some time, doubting whether I can afford to buy. Her eyesight was a kind of superior. It seemed that she thought she had a higher status than me. But I know my salary was much higher than hers. The only thing is that she knew we working in the restaurant are from countryside. "

While Zheng and Yuan have met discrimination from stranger urban residents, XHF (case8) told me about her experience of being discriminated by her urban relatives.

> XHF: "Just after I migrated to Kunming, I liked to go to visit one of my cousins living in Kunming. She married with a local urban resident 25 years ago. But I feel her husband and mother-in-law didn't like me to be there. In their eyes, I was there begging for something. Though we are relatives, I felt they despised me. In fact, I just wanted to talk with my cousin."

I think, this kind of discrimination happening in the daily life, can very often hurt the individuals' self-dignity, and some times make them to doubt about their self-values. One thing we need to be aware is that in contrast to the discrimination that the individuals have experienced in cities, the rural migrant workers are often considered as capable, and treated as respectable in their home areas. According to Li's research, rural migrant workers have normally higher education, and more active labour force than the rural residents who stay in rural villages. And Li considers this group as the essence of human resources in the rural area (Li 2004). However when this group of people is stratified in the lowest rank of the urban society, and treated unfairly in the daily life, the huge contrast of the "generalized other's" attitude towards the self in the urban context and rural context may lead to two very different or even contradictory selfs. In this way, the continuity of the "self" and coherence of "self-identity" is broken.

## 5.3 The economic aspect

### 5.3.1 Economic discrimination mainly interpreted as the urban-rural one

Certainly, as a group of people with low income, the rural migrant workers have also experienced discrimination from the rich people. However, I find that in the beginning, the individual rural migrant workers' interpretation of their lower economic status is tightly attached to their lower social status as "rural". This characteristic is shown obvious in the individuals' understanding of rural-urban difference before migration. As we already discussed in chapter 4, in the individual peasants' eyes, the fundamental difference between rural and urban area is economic difference, which is also the main reason for them to migrate. For example, my informants before migration had thought that:

✓ There are more opportunities in cities than in countryside to make money;

✓ Cities are better developed than rural area;

✓ The urban residents have higher and more stable income; eat and wear better than the rural villagers

✓ The living standard in urban household is higher the one in rural household.

So, when individual rural migrant workers just came to cities, they regarded the urban residents as not only possessing a higher symbolic social status, but also enjoying a better substantial economic condition. In this stage, they often had an undue view that all the urban

residents were rich people, at least richer than themselves. Therefore, when they sensed some discrimination from the rich city people, they might still look upon it as an urban-rural discrimination. For them, they were poor, because they were from countryside.

Since the economic discrimination is mainly interpreted by individuals as the urban-rural discrimination, I will not talk so much on the economic discrimination. In stead, I want to shift my focus to the gaps between the reality and the individuals' expectation.

## 5.3.2 Gaps between reality and expectation

We should not forget that the economic reason is the main cause of the individuals' migration. As analysed in chapter 4, to earn money in cities is nearly the goal for every one. All of them expect to earn money in cities. But is it that easy in reality as they thought? Nearly every one admitted that after coming to cities, they have met some difficulties that they hadn't expected before. They have, to some extent, found some contrast between reality and their expectation. Among the eight cases, XWH (case7) have found the biggest contrast.

> XWH: "After I finished my two-year college education, I decided to migrate to big cities for work. At that time, it was very popular to migrate to Guangzhou. Those who worked in Guangzhou, seemed to have earned lots of money, so everybody was crazily eager to move to Guangzhou, as if one could find money everywhere there. I had read newspaper that some of the rural migrant workers could not find work there, but I thought, anyway I had higher education than others: it could not be that difficult. As long as I could live in the city, I can have job, income, money and capital. So I went to Guangzhou without thinking. Yes, Guangzhou was modern and beautiful. People there wore beautiful clothes in the neat and clean streets. It was more or less the same as I had expected. I was confident in the beginning. I read advertisement in the street and looked for job one after another. But it was not that easy. Most vacant jobs were in some small factories. The working and living conditions were not good, and the money was not much. Even for these jobs, it was not easy to get. Normally you need some acquaintance to introduce you to the factory. People from all over the country were working in Guangzhou. The social networks among the fellow villagers, town mates, or even province mates were very important. Finally with the help of some friend, I got a job working as quality inspector in a small factory. I had only worked there for four months. Long working time, low salary, poor working conditions, especially the strong chemical smell… I could not bear it any more. So after four months, I quitted the job."

I think XWH's story is a typical one for many young migrants. Before migration, they had usually depicted a nice picture for their futures. In XWH's case, she imagined that

Guangzhou was a beautiful modern city and people there wore beautiful clothes walking in the neat and clean streets, which is somehow true in reality. What's more, she imagined that if she could live in Guangzhou, she could also have done the same as the people living there: wearing beautiful clothes and walking in the modern and clean streets. Like what she said, "As long as I could live in the city, I can have job, income, money and capital." She did have an idealistic expectation, which was also higher than others. Compared with her fellow villagers, she didn't forecast so much the possible difficulties that she would meet in the city. Everything in the expectation was idealistic. Of course we should give consideration to her personal background: first she was born in a better-off rural family with a father working as the village cadre; second, she has relatively higher education than other rural-urban migrants. These two factors did enable her to have some sort of superiority in front of her fellow villagers, and lead her to a higher expectation. But it is often true that the higher the expectation is, the deeper the disappointment will be. Therefore, it would be most difficult for XWH to accept the reality in cities: she earned much less than she expected, the place she worked and lived was not in the modern part of the city, in stead, she had to stay most of her day in the noisy, bad-smelled workshop. All these have formed such a big contrast to her imagination. Inside the contrast, the self-image that XWH had drawn for herself was crucially crushed to pieces.

Beside XWH, Qiao(case2) and Luo(case4) who had also once worked in the eastern coast areas, also told me that the working and living conditions in the factories were very bad: long working hours, bad pay, and poor working condition (bad ventilation, poisonous smell, loud noise, no protection of dangerous operations etc.). According to the various reports of the rural migrant workers by the media, these problems are very usual. What's more, even though the salary is already very low, the employers often pocket and delay the rural migrant workers' pay. According to the State Council's investigation and research in April, 2006, only 47.8% of rural migrant workers can on the main get their salary in time (Chen and Xiao 2007: 158). The delay or pocket of the pay by employers was mentioned by XHF (case8):

> XHF: We rural residents migrate to cities for money. We know that it is not easy. Many problems we meet in cities can be surmounted as long as we can get the money we have earned in hand. My husband and his work team furnish new apartments in Kunming. The most terrible thing for them

is that after the work was done, some employers were not willing to pay. This can be said the biggest difficulty a rural migrant worker can meet in the cities.

From XHF's words, we can see that in fact, most of rural migrant workers are very practical. They don't request high labour rights like what are called for in the west. In stead, what they require is the basic demand of getting their pay in time. As long as they can get the pay, as long as the working conditions are bearable, it is ok for them. However, even this kind of lowest request can not be satisfied, how can we talk about calling for more labour rights for them?

## 5.4 Cleavage of Self-identity

In the previous three subsections, I have discussed from three different aspects how the individuals' urban life world stands in contradictions with their imaginary urban world. In each aspects, I have mentioned the relevant effects that can be brought to the individual' self or self-identity. Here I want to make a small summary of it for this chapter.

Like Giddens suggest, when checking a person's (self-) identity, we need to turn to the individual's capacity to keep a particular narratives going (Giddens 1991: 54). In my dialogs with the informants, I some times felt emotionally hard to ask about the informants' earlier unpleasant experience, like the topics of discrimination, despising, and unfair treatment etc. Though most of the informants were quite open to these issues in our interviews, I could still feel that they would more likely to talk about the successful parts of their city life. Yet, there is one informant who somehow refused to tell more about his earlier migrating experience in the eastern part of China.

Luo (case4) is an open-minded and cheerful young man. He accepted my invitation for interviews without further thinking. He was talkative and open in the whole process of interview. Our conversation can be well described as a pleasant one. However when we talked about his earlier experience of working in some factories in Quanzhou and Fuzhou, he was not willing to tell so much. He did tell me that he didn't like these two cities, especially the local people because they treated migrant workers very bad; the working conditions in the factories were bad, and he couldn't earn enough money even for his daily use. Then suddenly he told me, "Anyway, the experience was very very unpleasant. I even don't want to think more back to that. Can we change the topic?" Then I told him I

respected his feelings, if he wanted, we can stop the interview. Then he smiled, "No, it is ok. I just don't like that part of my life. I think it was darkest and most unsuccessful part, a failure in my whole life. I shouldn't have migrated to there and worked for 2 years. I feel I have wasted the time. I would like to tell you more about my other experiences, for example in Kunming."

I have been thinking why Luo would suddenly stopp telling me his story, and why he would remove one part of his story from the whole narrations. Taking the suggestion of Giddens, I think the reason is that the part of experience was so unpleasant that the individual cannot to find a way to include it into his whole life biography. Or with the Giddens's words, when he came to the unpleasant events, he was not able to "keep his narratives going" (ibid). That's why he had to stop at that point.

This incident that happened in the interview with Luo makes me to think such a question, how much can the individual's earlier difficult experience influence the individual's self-identity. Besides what I have talked in the above three aspects that the coherence of self was broken, more importantly, I find that the individual's self-identity is, to some extent, fractured in the migrating process. In order to repair the cleavage, they have to reconstruct their identity. Then we come to the chapter 6.

# Chapter 6
# Stay in cities, but with belongings to the home village

## 6.1 Decision to stay in cities – adaptation to the urban life world

When asking about the plan for future, some (case1, 6 and 7) plan to live in cities permanently, some (case3, 5 and 8) express clearly that they will come back to home village one day when they have earned enough money, while some (case2 and 4) are not so certain about the long future. But no matter which group we are talking about, all the eight informants say that they will continue to live and work in cities in the near future despite of all the difficulties. I have in chapter 5 discussed the inadaptability, discrimination and difficulties that the individuals have experienced in the first stage of living in cities. Therefore, the decision to keep staying in cities must imply a process of

overcoming all the difficulties and being adapted to the new life world. In the end of last chapter, I also conclude that the self-identity has been fractured in the confrontation of the individual's imaginary urban world and urban life world. So I think, to overcome the difficulties, to manage all kinds of discrimination and to be adapted into the new city life is also the process of reconstructing the self-identity as well as of rebuilding the continuity of "self".

Each informant has told me a story of their living and working experiences in cities. Even though each story is unique, I manage to include them into the following four aspects for detailed analysis. These four aspects are: 1. how the individual deals with discrimination, 2. how the individual gets adaptable to the city, 3. how the individual rebuilds their life goal and adjust the life track, and 4. how the individual review themselves in relation to the city and the city residents.

## 6.1.1 Goal as orientation of the self – dealing with discriminations

I have quoted one part of narration of case8 on page 51, where XHF said: "*We rural residents migrate to cities for money. We know that it is not easy. Many problems we meet in cities can be surmounted as long as we can get the money we have earned in hand.*" These words remind us of the main goal of individual rural migrant workers – to earn money. When a person has a clear goal ahead, normally in order to achieve the goal, they may simply disregard the obstacles. This is exactly the case for the Chinese rural migrant workers.

Chinese people believe strongly that hardness lead to success. In the famous Confucius teaching, a man needs to go through all kinds of physical and mental difficulties to achieve the success.[20] The rural migrant workers are no exception. They believe that in the way towards a certain goal, there must exist some difficulties, and in order to reach the goal, they have to endure all these difficulties. So for themselves, they had known in advance before migration that "it is not easy" to make a living in cities. In this way, they are usually well prepared psychologically for all kinds of difficulties. In order to reach the goal of making money, they are willing to bear them. This is why in spite of the poor working and living conditions, the Chinese rural migrant workers are still willing to work

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[20] See Mencius «Mencius • Gao Zi Xia» in Chinese 《孟子•告子下》. Mencius is another ancient Confucious philosopher living from 372 B.C. to 289 B.C.

hard: they work hard to pursue their life goal. This point may sound strange and is difficult for the western people to understand. But as a Chinese myself, I understand the moral and the belief of/in hard work very well. That's why some times when western humanists are calling for to protect the Chinese workers' labour rights, I feel they just simply put the western standard onto the Chinese context, while the important cultural codes in the individuals' action have been ignored.

Though endurance has something to do with the basic philosophical notions, it also embodies some practical tactics that the individual rural migrant workers applied to deal with the discriminations. When being asked how to deal with the discriminations, they told me if the discrimination is not too unbearable, they will very often endure the humiliation.

> Zheng (case1): "In these situations, the only thing I can do is to endure. If I quarrelled with my customer, I would have been fired immediately. I don't want to loose my career. Anyway it is normal to meet picky customers and suffer wrong in the service industry. Even the urban residents working in this industry can also meet this. In order to keep the job, I have learned how to endure."

> Yu (case3): "If I meet discrimination in the street when selling the goods, I just ignore it. I don't want to quarrel or fight with them. I was quite hot-tempered when I lived in countryside. But I have learned to endure. To go out for money, the peace and harmony is most important. It is not wise to make conflict with local people, as you will be the only one who suffers losses. Some times you just endure for a small moment, and then the people will buy your things. So you have earned the money from the people who gave you discrimination. You win." (Smiling proudly)

From above two cases, we in fact see different tactics by applying endurance to deal with the discrimination. Zheng endures the small humiliation because he wants to keep his job/career. But in order to defend the dignity in the "self" and maintain the self-identity, he looks upon the urban-rural discrimination as a kind of wrong sufferance that anybody (both urban and rural residents) can meet in the service industry. In this way, he put himself in the same position as other urban colleagues and therefore would not feel excluded from the urban community. If Zheng's tactic is more a psychological one; then Yu's tactic of endurance sounds more alike a rational action. He is fully aware of his goal of being in cities – to make money. And he knows to make money, he needs a peaceful or harmonious environment. He also estimates and compares the results of giving different

reactions: if he fights back, he will loose; while if he endures, he win. In this way, to apply the endurance to deal with the discrimination, is indeed a "rational choice" after careful calculation of win and loss.

But some times the individuals do fight back to the unfair treatments out of discriminations, normally after work. In the last chapter I have told Yuan's story of being discriminated by a superior-quality clothes shop assistant. (case6, page48) Further Yuan told me,

> "Of course when at work, you have to bear all the unfairness and ignore the discrimination, because if you react back to your customers, you will loose the job. But after work, I don't fear. I just say what I want to say to the unreasonable city people. So I told the shop assistant, 'you are just a shop assistant; there is nothing for you to swell with pride. Give me the clothes, I want to try!' She was somewhat shocked! Of course I didn't buy the clothes. I am a customer. I have right to buy or not to buy." (Laugh)

Here Yuan has showed us two different strategies to deal with discrimination in different situations. At work, in order to keep work, like other informants, she chooses to endure the discrimination; however after the work, when there is nothing to do with her goal of developing career and making money, she chooses to fight back. She fights back not only to defend her self, but also with full awareness of her social rights as a customer.

So, no matter what reactions the individuals take to respond to the discriminations, endurance or fighting back, the response is not simply a passive reaction; in stead, the different responses are chosen intentionally according to the individual's goal and assessment of various situations. They are indeed strategic.

Here I want to especially stress that the endurance of the difficulties or the discriminations should not be simply understood as the individuals' passive acceptance of reality. On the contrary it is a strategic reaction implying certain purpose and motivation. If the endurance is passive, then it is possible that self would get lost in the passive acceptance of the reality. However, it is not. The self in the individuals' choice of endurance is clearly consistent with the individual's life goal. When self is strategically oriented to the life goal that was set up by the individual before migration, the discrete self in the migrating stage

will be put back into the "trajectory"[21]. In this way, the continuity of self has been achieved and the cleavage of self-identity has been renovated.

## 6.1.2 Routine – getting familiar with the unfamiliar environment

When the rural migrant workers just came to the cities, they were suddenly set into a totally new and unfamiliar environment. As I analysed in chapter 5, the inadaptability towards the new environment was often shown in the individuals' crisis feeling of ontological security: without the former natural and social setting, the individuals felt their day-to-day practice were out of control with detachment from their practical consciousness (see 5.1.2). However, when being asked how they feel about the city they work now, some of the informants have expressed a kind of close and familiar feeling towards the city, including Yu (case3) who was probably the most inadaptable one in the beginning.

> Yu: "I have travelled to many different cities to sell goods. Each time when I come to a new city, I feel the city is totally new to me. But after some time, I will have a close feeling towards it. Some times when I travelled back to my home village to help the agricultural work, I would even begin to miss the city where I work. I think I have got used to that city. Everyday I pass by some certain streets and go to the same places to sell the things. It is alike everything is so familiar to me. Of course I will never belong to the city, but I do some times feel that I am part of it."

Here, Yu describes to us a process he has experienced, from being unfamiliar with the city to being familiar with it. He even says when he was back in the home village, he somehow missed the city where he worked. How can this change happen? Yu mentions that everyday when working in the city, he passes by same streets and sells his goods at the same places, and then he feels that he has got used to the things. I think what he gets used to is not only the objects in the environment of the city, but also his daily practice in the city. It is exactly through the repetition of the same daily practices that he gets more and more familiar with the city, so that in the end, he has a feeling of being one part of it. Here the repetition of daily practice is routine, a routine that Yu has newly set up after he migrated to the city.

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[21] Here i refer Giddens's "trajectory of self" as a coherent life track for the self.

In modern social theories, **routine** has considered as one of main characters of the modern society. Richard Sennett puts forwards that though routine or routinized work and life, the human being has managed to hold a stable life pattern in the new flexible world. (Sennett 1998) Similarly Giddens has used the concept of routine to explain how small kids adjust him to the pre-given world, he says, "…*acquired routines, and forms of mastery associated with them, in the early life of human beings, are much more than just modes of adjusting to a pre-given world of persons and objects. They are constitutive of an emotional acceptance of the reality of the 'external world' without which a secure human existence is impossible.*" (Giddens 1991: 42) I think when a migrant adult just comes to a new social setting, he in many ways resembles a small child who is just getting to contact with the new world. But difference is that while the small child needs the caretaker to set up a routine for him, the adult must form or set up his own routine. For the migrant adult, forming a life routine in the new social surroundings is in fact a reorganization of the daily practice though which he can attain a kind of mastery towards the new external world and get back the feeling that the life is "normal" and "predictable" (ibid: 126). With routinized practice, the individuals have set up regular contacts with the new environment, willingly or unwillingly. And though these regular contacts, the once unfamiliar world begins to turn familiar and close to them. More importantly, through the routine, the individual has managed to maintain the continuity of everyday activity within which the individual's practical consciousness is able to go on, and the sense of ontological security can be re-established. The individual will then feel less insecure and puzzled; instead, they will have much more confidence to perform in the new life world. Consequently the continuity of self can also keep going in the continuous day-to-day practice.

## 6.1.3 New life goal and new life track

With the new experiences in cities, the individuals can usually draw in new elements into their urban life world. The external world has certainly some influences towards the self. The life goal and life pattern established in the rural life world is, then, possible to be changed or taken place by a new one. This is true in the cases of my informants.

> Luo (case4) planned to become a factory worker when deciding to migrate to cities. He first worked two years in some factories in Quanzhou and Fuzhou. But he soon found out that he could not earn much than being enough for maintaining his daily life. Besides, he could learn nothing. He finally quitted the work in the factories, and began to rethink about his life in the city. He

realized that a person without education and skill can hardly survive in the city where there are full of competitions, and if he wanted to have a better life in cities, he need first of all master some good skill. Then he decided to join to a furnishing team formed by his fellow villagers. He chose to learn carpentry from some masters in the team, and afterwards, he continued to work in the team till now. Now he has quite satisfactory and stable income, and he is obviously content with his present life in Kunming.

When Yuan (case6) decided to go to Beijing to work in the restaurant, she just wanted to experience the outside world. She thought as long as she could stay in big cities, her life will be much more exciting than that in the countryside. However, after working some time in the city, she began to carefully plan her life. She expected to get promoted gradually. Therefore, she worked hard, and took every opportunity to perform herself. When the restaurant was planning to apply the computer system for ordering dishes, she joined some computer course and became the first waitress who can use computers in the restaurant. Then she was promoted as foreman. Yet, she hadn't stopped her pace. She soon found out that to manage the persons, is not as easy as to manage the work. Therefore, she intentionally observed her upper level managers on how they deal with different personal relations; meantime, she also attended some courses of human recourse management. Now, she has already been promoted as the department manager. She told me that she plans to open her own restaurant after she has saved enough money.

Luo and Yuan's stories present us with a different image of the rural migrant workers than we normally get from the media and some academic researches. Here, they are not people weak-positioned in the society, passively experience the city life with unfavourable conditions. In stead, they are active to make change or adjustment in order to make the things work. When they find one goal is not achievable, they are willing to overcome their weakness and to improve themselves by developing knowledge or skills. When they find that one path to the target is not accessible, they are creative to shape another. They not only concretize their life goal according to their evaluation of the situations, but also adjust the goal in accordance with their own potentials. In this sense, they strategically build and rebuild their life project, and hope to realize their self through the fulfilment of the life project. Like Bauman has expressed in *life in fragments* (1995):

*"Modern identity is carefully constructed with a view to a certain target in life. The fulfilment of such "life project" is based on the premise that you are living in an environment possessing a stability extending beyond your life span, so that individuals*

*may actually experience whether or not their actions bring them to the their life goals, or at least approximate this achievement."* (Quoted from Pedersen 2000: 425)

According to Bauman's view of modern identity, in the process where the individuals has established/re-established (by adjustment) certain life target (like career development in my two cases) and chosen a certain path to achieve it, there is also an internal process of constructing the identity, which the individual wish to present to others and to get accepted by others. In one word, the self is strategically adjusted and designed in the life project towards a final life goal.

In this chapter, I have used the word "strategic(ally)" several times. I use the word to describe the individual's life practice in cities, because their plan of the whole life project is intentionally divided into different steps; and the planning of each step is oriented to a determined, concrete, and feasible goal made from a whole perspective of their general life pursue. And the word "strategy" can exactly reflect the agency that they possess in this planning process. I think in the research of the Chinese rural migrant workers, we should not just treat them as a weaker group in the society and search for humanistic suggestions to integrate them into the cities. What we need to do, in stead, is to regard them equally as urban actors. Their agency in the migration should not be ignored.

## 6.1.4 New understanding of self in relation to the city residents

I have talked about three kinds of discrimination that the rural migrant workers may meet in cities. And in the early stage of staying in cities, the individuals mainly regarded the discrimination as an urban-rural one. This is to say, the individuals interpreted their main difference from urban residents as rural vs. urban. With the Hukou registered as "rural" for ever, the individuals have to accept their status as "peasants" even though they actually live in cities now. In fact, not only rural migrant workers, but also the urban residents refer to this urban-rural dimension as the fundamental and main difference between them and the rural migrants. In the city residents' eyes, the rural migrant workers are "peasants". When they call the rural migrant workers "peasant workers", the word "peasant" itself implies such an urban-rural discrimination.

I think, the individual rural migrant workers do possess a kind of inferior feeling of themselves when living and working in cities, especially in the beginning. But after some time, when they get to know more and more about the city, their interpretation and feeling may change. Qiao's narration (case2) presents this kind of change.

> Qiao: "Before, when standing together with the city people, I always felt myself inferior like we rural residents are shorter than them. They carried with ease and natural poise, and their demeanour was more elegant, but we from countryside behaved more restrained with humble clothes. Now, when standing with the city people, I still feel there is some difference between us. But I don't feel humble any more. We peasants can also wear nice clothes, and we can also act in a natural and unrestrained manner. Our difference does not lie in the surface of how we look and how we behave. The difference is deep under the appearance. The difference is economic one. I earn 6-700 Yuan per month, but for some rich city people, they spend several thousand just for a rich meal. The difference is so huge and I cannot think about that to spend several months' salary just for one meal. So the difference is not that we are countryside people. There are also poor people in cities, even poorer than us, no job and no income at all. City people really don't have that superiority in front us. There's nothing terrific for them!"

"There's nothing terrific for them (city residents)" is the sentence every informant say to me when talking about how they feel about the urban residents now. Like Qiao, most of the rural migrant workers, after living some time in cities, will have a deeper understanding of the cities and the society. Before, they blindly envied the people living in cities, as they thought people in cities have a kind of superiority and privilege in both their social status (urban Hukou Status) and economic status. The difference between them and city people, in their interpretations was more a symbolic and superficial one. Like Qiao described, he felt humble because city people wore better clothes and behaved in a more natural and elegant demeanour. However, Qiao soon found out that this kind of symbolic and superficial difference in people's appearance and behaviour is not something that cannot be changed. He can also look and behave exactly like a city resident.

One thing I want to mention is that on the day I interviewed Qiao, he wore some nice suit. At first, I thought that he did it because he took the interview as a formal occasion. But later, after he told me how he had felt when being together with city residents, I realized that clothes in Qiao's eyes was a symbol for a kind of social status, a kind of image or social identity that he intended to present when being together with me, a city resident.

His appearance as well as the way how he talked and behaved under the process of interviews is exactly an example of how he presents the "self" in front the city residents. According to Goffman, when individual enters other's presence, he projects a definition of the situation, according to which he chooses to perform properly (Goffman 1959). Therefore behind Qiao's "performance" in the interviews, there are some implicated meaning, including how he looked upon me, how he deals with the relation with me and what kind of impression he intends to give. I think, in the occasion of interview, Qiao regards me not only as a research student, but also as an urban resident. That he wore a nice suit, can then be understood as a signal to me, "When being together with you urban resident, I am not shorter than you. We are the same people."

Let's back to Qiao's narration. Later, with deeper understanding of the urban society, Qiao begins to realise that the fundamental difference between people is the economic gap between the rich and the poor. Though, generally speaking, the rural migrant workers have a lower position in the economic stratification system, the rural migrant workers find that there are also poor people in the city: not all the city people are rich or well-off as they thought before. In this way, their understanding of themselves in relation to the city residents has changed from the rural-urban dimension to the economic dimension. Therefore they know in heart, if they want to enhance their social status in cities, they have to first improve their economic condition.

In the chapter 5, I have explained how the individual's self and self-identity has been discontinued and fractured when the individuals have been put into an inferior position in the cities. If the individuals still held that the inferiority was caused by the dual urban-rural Hukou status system, then the break-off of the self and cleavage of self-identity would have been difficult to restore, because the external social structure is something that the individual rural migrant workers cannot change by themselves. However, when they realize that they can possess a higher position in cities by improving their economic status, then they have found a "recipe" to repair or reconstruct their self-identity. In fact, quite a lot of rural migrant workers do have achieved a good economic situation through their hard work. In Chongqing, there are many rural migrant workers who did small business in the beginning, but now turn to be quite successful businessmen. Though in Chinese society, the people from countryside normally have lower position in the society, the Chinese people do respect and admire success through hard work. So with economic

success, these rural migrant "businessmen" do have gained some respect from local society. More importantly, through their success, they have also achieved a continuous and complete self, which is reflected in the realization of life value and the growth of their self-respect and confidence. This also suggests that individuals may present a new identity in front of the city resident.

> Li (case5): "One evening, I had just finished work, and was going to pack up the goods and make the bed in the shop, when came a middle-aged Shanghai woman. She wore elegant clothes and seemed well-educated. I guess she worked in government or in some academic institution or something like that. She seemed friendly and easy going. She began to talk to me. I don't exactly remember what she said, but she expressed her sympathy towards us rural migrants and thought we were living such a hard and humble life in cities. Though maybe this was not discrimination, I felt so humiliated in her mercy to me. I can sense a tone of underestimation in her words. Yes, maybe we live and eat not as good as them, but we are using our hard labour to create our own good life. Since she was "friendly", I didn't have any reason to be "unfriendly" to her. So I exaggerated to her, 'Yes, the life seemed hard, but you know what, every day I can earn nearly 1000 Yuan. Yes, we seemed not to live so elegantly as you, but in this way we have saved lots of money, so that I can send my children to the best school in the city.' Of course I don't earn that much as 1000 Yuan per day. I just want to annoy her. She was really a little annoyed; because she thought I really earned much more than her. I can even sense a kind of envying in her eyesight, but she was not that talkative and friendly any more. She left quickly." (Laugh)

I am not sure if we should look upon the middle-aged, well-educated Shanghai woman's sympathy as a kind of discrimination. But no matter what kind of purpose the woman had with her, Li's reaction declares that: "We, rural migrant workers, are not weak in cities, and we don't need mercy!" The dignity and self-respect means even more important than better material life to the rural migrant workers. And Li's narration also shows that how the individuals maintained their identity by emphasising their economic status. Similarly XHF's story (case8) indicates the same:

> XHF: "before we, people from countryside, did receive some help from urban relatives. That's the reason why my cousin's husband looked down on us, and thought when I went to visit them, I was searching for help. But now, we in fact have much better economy than my cousin's family, since he has been laid off by his factory. Now we some times lend money to them. Urban people are not really better and capable than us. We rural migrants can live better than the urban residents if we work hard. "

I think these two cases have well exemplified how the rural migrant workers by enhancing their economic ability have managed to find their positions in the society. When they look upon themselves, they in fact put themselves in the same horizontal position as the city residents. They don't feel inferior because of their rural Hukou status. The individuals' self-identity has been repaired or reconstructed in the shift of their understanding of themselves from the rural-urban dimension to the economic dimension.

## 6.2 Belongings – the (remembrance) rural life world

When the rural migrant workers are getting more and more used to the urban life world, meantime, they are also more and more attached to their home village. When being asked whether they belong to the city where they work, all informants answered "no". Even though some of the informants have their home in the cities, they still consider the home in the rural village as their real home. Though working and living in the cities, they miss their home village and their belongings are even more attached to it. In this way, the rural life world never disappears from the individuals' urban life world, even though it some times turns only as a world existing in the individuals' remembrance and heart.

**First** of all, the individuals are more attached to their home in the rural village, because the rural home is the driving force for them to continue working in cities, especially for those who have children in the rural home village. These migrants on one hand miss their families and children very much, but on the other hand motivate to work hard to create a better life for them.

> Yu (case3): "These years I worked alone in cities and felt I have missed a lot of time to spend with my children. The life in cities is not easy, the work is hard and I miss my wife and children. But now, when I see the house has been rebuilt, the children has grown up, I feel gratified. I will keep working in cities until my children can take care of the family."

> Li (Case5): "I miss kids and kids miss me. But thinking that I can earn money in the city to make their life and future better, I know it is right to stay in the city and work hard. But one day after I have earned enough money, after my children can take care of me, I will go back to home village."

> XHF(case8):"I don't only owe much to my daughter but also owe very much to my parents. They are getting old now and don't have good health. When they are ill, I cannot be home to take care of them. But if we don't go to city to make money, my parents will have to work hard at home. If we

> work in the city, then I can post money to them every month, and they don't need to work. So in
> fact, when we work in cities, they can have easier and better life. So I feel relieved and happy."

These three cases not only show that the individuals are working in cities for their families in the home village, but also reflect that their personal values are realized in the rural life world by fulfilling their responsibilities to their family.

**Second**, the rural life world is the main life arena for the rural migrant workers. Already in the Chapter 4, I have discussed that when planning to work in the cities, the individuals had pre-shaped a "long life circle" in the rural life world. They decided to migrate to cities for earning money, but not for permanent residence. Though after some time living in cities, some rural migrants like Zheng, Yuan and XWH, have plan to permanently live in cities, still these people only occupies a small part of the whole rural migrant workers (Li 2004). For most of the rural migrant workers, they still regard the city-warded migration as a means to make a living. And their life project, on the whole, is organized inside the rural life world, the work experience in cities is only one part of the whole project. Li calls this kind of temporal migration as a "model of circulatory flow" (ibid: 274), which suggests that many rural migrant workers are in fact flowing between home village and cities. When there is need for money at home, they migrated to cities; when there is no need, they stay at home. A typical example is my case no.3, Yu. Yu has worked in cities for over 10 years. However during the 10 years, he has frequently been home to help the agricultural work. He told me he even could not remember how many times he has travelled between cities and home, either could he remember how many cities (both big and small) and small places he has been to sell goods. For him, the only stable place for him is his home in the rural village.

**Third**, the rural home village is the final stop of the rural migrant workers' life span, even for those who would like to permanently settle down in cities. And several informants, including XWH who had never thought to come back to rural village again when migrating to cities, told me that one day when they are old, they will come back to the home village. When being asked why, XWH says, "This is the place we have lived for generations. Anyway, I was born here and I come from here. Even if I can buy an apartment in the city and settle down, I will not belong to the city." Yes, no matter how long these rural migrants have lived in cities, the home village is the place where their

families have lived for generations, the place where they have their roots and the place that they really belong to. Here I can see the Chinese complex of "falling leaves settling on the roots" – a person residing elsewhere finally returns to his ancestral home – is still strongly affecting these Chinese city-warded migrants.

**Fouth,** the individuals are more attached to their home rural village by getting new understandings of their home place through new comparison with cities. Like what I explained in the chapter 4, when the individuals took decision to migrate to cities, they according to their imaginary urban world, made a comparison of cities and their rural home village. At the decision making stage, they often emphasize the negative sides of the village and exaggerate the positive sides of the cities. For example, they think the city is clean; the people with urban Hukou can have stable jobs and get pension after being old. However, after living some time in cities, after the imaginary rural world has gradually turned to be a real life world, they have made another, maybe more objective comparison of cities and the home village, in which the individuals find that their first comparison was not really true. Now, they are more inclined to the positive sides of their home village. For example, Yu told me,

> "Before, we thought the city was clean and beautiful, and everything in the city was nice. But now, I think the city is dirty with lots of pollutions and noise. By contrast, our home village has much better environment with fresh air and being quiet. It seems dirty after rain, but that is only soil and mud. It is natural things, not really dirty."

When Yu cares more about the living environment, Luo (case4) has also formed a kind of new understanding towards himself as a rural resident.

> Luo:"Before, we longed for an urban Hukou and wanted to settle down in cities. But now, I don't want to loose my rural Hukou. With rural hukou, even if you are unemployed in cities, you can come back to your home village. Then you have your farmland and you will not starve. On the contrary, the people in cities will have much worse situation than us, if they get unemployed. Now the competition in cities is so intense, the people in cities surely have more worries than us. Now even if you give me an urban Hukou for free, I will not take it. I don't want to loose my farmland. "

Like Luo, today, many rural migrant workers don't long for an urban Hukou anymore. The reason is that after experiencing the city directly, they have more objective view towards the city, the home village and the Hukou. Before, they have totally put themselves into an inferior position in front of urban residents. Now they look at advantages of being rural residents and even feel a kind of privilege in front of the urban residents. As to the urban Hukou, most of the rural migrants tell me that it is no longer important for them any more. As long as you have money, rural hukou is the same as urban Hukou.  Some villagers in Siping village even tell me proudly, "Now we think rural Hukou is better. Now there is new policy that the kids with rural Hukou don't need to pay any study fee for the compulsory education, while the city residents shall pay quite a lot." In Luo's narration, we can also find that the home village has become a sort of back-up stage for the rural migrant workers. Even if they fail in cities, they will still have their home village to turn to. In this way, with the existence of the remembrance rural world, they can even feel safer to attend the competition in the urban life world than the urban residents.

## 6.3 Interrelations of the urban life world and the (remembrance) rural life world

So far in this chapter, I have respectively talked about how the individuals' adjust and reorganize their relations to the urban life world and the rural (rememberance) life world. When understanding the self or self-identity of the individuals, I suggest that we should not separate these two worlds, in stead, we should look at the interrelations between them. I argue that the continuity of self and the reconstruction of self-identity are achieved as a co-result of both the individuals' adaptation to the urban life world and their deeper attachment to their rural life world. Here I provide **three arguments**

**First**, the individuals' adaptation to the urban life world needs the motivation from the rural life world (like earning money to support the family in the home village); and the strengthening of the individuals' attachment to the rural life world also presupposes the individuals' experiences from the urban life world. Without the attachment to the rural life world, the individual will loose the impetus to adapt themselves to the city; similarly without the physical absence from the home village, the individual would never be pushed into a situation to re-evaluate their former rural life world.

**Second**, I have mentioned that in the process of repairing the cleavage of the self-identity and accomplishing the continuity of self, the individuals have built up their new life-project with certain life target. In this new life-project, the individuals have shaped another kind of life-pattern. This new life pattern may be related to the old-life pattern before the individuals' migration, but may also be very different from the old one. For example, the young male rural migrant workers may have thought to follow the old life pattern when deciding to migrate: earning money in cities, going back to home village, rebuilding house and marrying a wife; now they tells me though the home village is the place that they belong to, they will not reject to set up their own family outside the home rural village: if they meet a nice girl in the city, say a young female rural migrant from another village or even from another province, they would like to get married outside the home village. In fact, during my stay in Siping village, I have seen several families with the daughters-in-law from another county or another province. In this way, the individuals, especially the young individuals' life pattern are more flexible and mobile.

Anyway, no matter what kind of life pattern it is for each of the individuals, it is consist of two parts: the part of the urban life world and the part of the (remembrance) rural life world. The fact that most of the rural migrant workers decide to keep working in cities, while meantime they feel more strongly attached to their home villages, implies that they have chosen a more flexible and mobile life style: travelling (physically and mentally) between cities and the home villages. For them, the city is mainly an arena for career and personal development, while the home village is more alike an arena for family and kinship. The two arenas together form a complete life project for them.

**Third,** in order to go through the life project, the individuals need both elements from the urban life world and the (remembrance) rural life world. And elements of each world are essential and unique which cannot be found in the other.  For example, for the individuals, to develop their career and personal self, they choose to stay in cities. But to stay in cities, they some times have to bear loneliness and discrimination. Then, they have to go back to the rural life world, or mentally refer back to the remembrance rural life world for some elements to remedy their sufferance in cities. These elements in the (remembrance) rural life world are often emotional supports which the individual cannot possess in the urban life world. For example, I have mentioned that the rural migrant workers often meet various discriminations in cities. However, I notice that when they are back in the home

village, they normally get highly respected, probably due to their relatively higher economic status and their economic contribution to the family. I think the respect they get from the rural life world can somewhat be understood as a kind of remedy for the discrimination they suffer in the urban life world. The emotional elements in the rural life world like family love, respect and gratitude are extremely important for individual to grasp a feeling of self-affirmation of their accomplishment in the urban world.

From the above three arguments, I would describe the interrelation between the individuals' urban life world and (remembrance) rural life world as a supplementary one. And it is simply in the supplementary relations that the continuity of self and coherence of the self-identity get finally re-attained.


# Chapter7: Conclusion

In this thesis, I take the starting point of regarding the city-warded migration as a life-world change for individuals, and I try to put the whole migration process into a model consist of individuals' four internally and socially constructed worlds. (See page24, figur2) Therefore, to explore the self and self-identity in this process is to look at the inter-relations of these worlds. Three sets of interrelations, each presenting one stage of the migration process, are the focal points of my analysis, and therefore have been discussed in details. These interrelations include the interrelation between *the rural life world* and *the imaginary urban world* in the **stage of decision-making**; the interrelation between *the imaginary urban world* and *urban life world* in the **migrating stage**; and the interrelation between *the urban life world* and *rural (remembrance) life world* in the **stage of adaptation.** From my analysis, I have got these main findings:

1. In each stage of the migration process, the individual is unavoidably affected by his earlier experience of the rural life world. These rural "elements" decide that in the migration process, the individual rural migrant workers cannot achieve the same social identity and self-identity as the urban resident. Therefore, in order to fully understand the social problems brought by the rural-urban migration, researchers cannot simply take an urban perspective; in stead, they need to refer to the rural migrant workers' rural life world.

2. To explore the self-identity of Chinese rural migrant workers, we have noticed that the traditional cultural elements are still having certain influence towards the individuals' decisions and actions. This implies that to understand the Chinese process of urbanization and modernization, we need to pay attention to the cultural codes. To solve the problems in this process, we cannot simply borrow the experience of the West. Meantime, considering the various cultural codes in different developing countries, I think it may not be proper or realistic to call for a global qualifying standard based upon the western ideology to judge the labour conditions in the third world.

3. Though stratified in the lower rank of the urban society, the rural migrant workers are not really weaker than urban residents. Though there are some structural limitations on their development in cities, they don't passively accept the reality; in stead they are active and initiative to change their destiny and create for their own future. To improve rural migrant workers' life and developmental conditions, we should be fully aware of their agency. To show a sympathy or mercy to them is itself discrimination. What these city-warded migrants need is not only a better material life, but also the respect and approval from the society.

4. We should also notice that inside the group of rural migrant workers, there is already a stratifying process. This suggests that in future's study of the rural-urban migration, we cannot treat all the rural migrant workers as a whole collective unit any more. Stratified into different positions in the society, they may have different demands and social needs. The internal stratification among the rural migrant workers is also reflected in the division between those who wish to settle down in cities and those who only regard the migration as a means of making living. Therefore, to understand their different problems in the migration process, it may be a best way to apply an actor's perspective, and go back to their differently constructed social worlds. In this way, my model may contribute to better investigate how the social change can be differently experienced by individuals.

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[1] Chinese translation of *Le Sens Pratique*
[2] The book has translated to English with title *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*

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(* My own translation of the title)

# Appendix1: In-Depth Interview Guide

**1. Establishing Rapport**
- Introducing myself and the objectives of the Interview

**2. Personal Background of Migrant**
- Name
- Gender
- Age
- Marital status and children if there are
- Educational background
- Migrated cities / areas
- Duration of working in migrated cities.

**3. Information before migration**
- Occupation and income in rural areas (types of activities carried out)
- Views on the difference / inequalities between rural and urban residency before migration for work
  (How important an urban registration status mean to them?)

**4. Causes for migration**
- The major cause that brought about migration / main purpose of migration for jobs
- Opinions from family members in the decision making
- Expectations about the city life

**5. Life experience in cities**
- Process of settling down in city and finding work
  (Whether or not with the help of urban relatives? How much did the help work in the process of finding a work in the city?)
- What kind of difficulties did they meet in the process of finding a job? Any discrimination? How to cope with them?
- Work and life experience in the city / present income
- Have you made any new friends? Are they urban residents or from countryside?
- Views on the difference / inequalities between rural and urban residency after these experiences
  (Does the urban residence status still mean a lot for them?)

**6. Impacts of city experience**
- Whether or not the earlier expectations are met? New expectations?
- How much has the city experience change their life, their characters/ personalities?
- What were the most challenging and difficult parts about living in urban areas for urban migrated workers?
- How do they view upon themselves in relation to the city they work? (Insider or outsider) / Have they been integrated into the urban community? (Social relation with the urban residents)
- Gain and loss in the migration
- Future forecast – back to rural village or still migrating for jobs.

# Appendix2: Informed Consent

**Informed Consent for a Master Thesis in sociology:**

**An empirical research of the identity-reconstruction of the Chinese rural migrant workers**

I am a Master student in sociology at the Department of Social Science, Bodø University College, Norway. I would like to invite you …………………to participate in a Master thesis research about rural-urban migrated workers' identity building in the social process of the urbanization. Your participation will be taken mainly in form of interviews. Pseudonyms in stead of your real name will be used in the thesis in order to protect your identity. This study is an academic one and will be shared amongst my supervisor and other appropriate members related to the Bodø University College. The Master thesis that results from this work will be published in a hard copy and will be housed at the Bodø University College library and the Department of Social Sciences at the Bodø University College, Norway. As a participant, you have the right to ask for more information about this study and to withdraw from the study any time during the interview.

I appreciate your cooperation to participate in this study.

Thank you!

Zhao Yan ……………

(Please sign below if you are willing to participate in the interview process for the Master thesis research study outlined above.)
Signature:. ....................................................
Print Name:. ...............................................
Date: …………………………………………………

# 知情同意

## 硕士毕业论文关于城市民工身份认同重建实证研究的知情同意书

您好,

我是挪威布德大学社会科学系的社会学硕士研究生. 我现在做一个关于社会民工在城市化进程中自我身份认同重建的一个研究课题作为我的硕士课程毕业论文. 因此我真诚的邀请您参与我对这个课题的研究. 您的参与主要包括我对您的一次采访. 为了保护您的身份, 您的真实姓名将不会出现在我的研究论文中, 取而代之我将使用化名. 这个研究纯粹是学术性的, 您在采访中所提供的信息只限于使用在我的毕业论文研究中. 除了我的导师和其他一些院系的负责我的毕业论文人员, 其他任何人员都不会直接接触到您提供给我的信息. 我的毕业论文将会在年中发表,并保存在布德大学校图书馆和社会科学系(挪威). 作为我研究的参与者,您有权利向我进一步询问关于我的这个毕业研究课题研究的情况和在采访中随时退出这个研究.

忠心希望您能加入我的课题研究, 非常感谢您的合作和参与.

  致辞,

敬礼!

<div align="center">赵艳</div>

(签名)＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿


如果您同意参与我的这个课题研究的采访, 请在下面签名:

姓名(签名): ＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿
在论文中的化名: ＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿
日期: ＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿