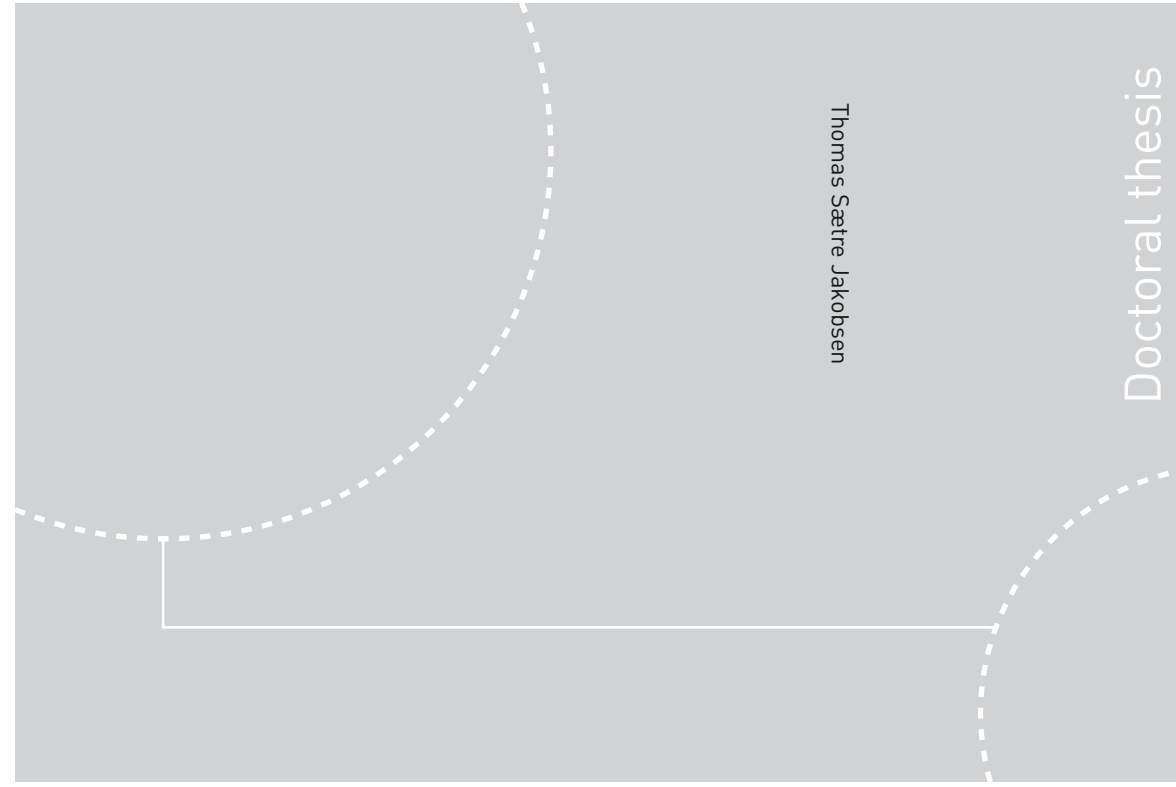


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Thomas Sætre Jakobsen

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Peasant-Workers Working Between
Farmland and the Workplaces of the Urban
in Post-Deng China

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Abstract

Deng Xiaoping China's ascendancy into the "workshop of the world" is largely premised upon the supply of cheap labor moving from the countryside into the cities for work. The 277 million strong army of peasant-workers move into the city but generally lack formal urban citizenship yet retain land tenure rights in the countryside as part of their agricultural citizenship. However, after more than 30 years of economic reforms, a moment referred to as post-Deng China, expectations proliferate within business, policy and scholarly discourses on the Chinese peasantry, of an inevitable disappearance of smallholder farming. The move of peasant into the city is commonly narrated by scholars through the construct of "transition", where the rural-urban movement of peasants for work is interpreted «...to involve not simply a movement in space but an epochal leap in evolutionary time» (Ferguson, 1999: 4). Still, this workforce relies on their smallholding in times of crisis, revealed by the 2008 global financial crisis when more than 14 million peasant-workers returned to their smallholding and decided to take up farming again, influencing subsequent labor shortages in the export based economy of post-Deng China. Investigating the possible discrepancy between peasant-workers living in the transition and the scholarly discourses of an inevitable transition from smallholding to the workplaces of the urban, provides the point of departure for this thesis.

Based on interviews with peasant-workers in Yunnan Province, Southwestern China, who combine *dagong* labor (wage-work) in the provincial capital of Kunming with smallholder farming in its vicinity other times of the year or their working life, this thesis investigates how peasant-workers and their family members who stay at the farm perceive and physically move between the rural and urban sites of work. The author investigates the way peasant-workers move back and forth between smallholding and Kunming according to different transitions in their life-courses (e.g. rearing children) (article 1). Moreover, I investigate the expectations of two generations of rural-migrant workers and how the interviewees differently imagine and move between smallholding and the workplaces of the urban (article 2). The thesis also investigates alternative ways of interpreting the rural-urban mobility of work for peasant-workers than the construct of transition (article 3).

This thesis details the importance of smallholder farming to the daily and long-term social reproduction and its varied importance at different times in the life's of peasant-workers, despite 30 years of rapid urbanization in China. Furthermore, this thesis details how the

informalization of urban-based wage work is experienced differently for two generations of peasant-workers, who are differently positioned to withdraw from wage-work. While there is a divide in the way the two generations of migrant workers engage with smallholder farming, both generations yearn for an alternative future than working as *dagong* labor, either it pertained to returning to their smallholding or they aspire to become self-employed. Inspired by a practice theoretical point of view, I have interpreted the movement between smallholding and workplaces of the urban as “embodied movement in context” of people who are relating to these contexts through their physical motility and imagination. Understanding life as the continuous flow of conduct means taking seriously how life is lived with its malaise and expectations as opposed to life as it is contemplated from afar (Bourdieu, 1990). From this points of view, living within a transition for the interviewees is not simply a matter of enacting work on a predetermined path towards a known end-point (urbanization, industrialization, proletarianization) but is rather characterized by coexistence, ambiguity and hesitation. Thus, through investigating discrepancy between peasant-workers living in the transition and the scholarly discourses of an inevitable transition from smallholding to the workplaces of the urban, this thesis refocus the rural-urban mobility of work for peasant-workers.

To do this refocusing the author situate this study alongside the Chinese working class literature, which has largely explored life and work of rural migrant workers (*nongmingong*) in the factories of southeastern China, where the relationship between place-making, work, and social identity is often told through a familiar narrative linking urbanization with industrialization and proletarianization. In contrast, this study is situated within a rural-urban space outside the heartland of industry in post-Deng China, where the interviewees work within petty-capitalist workplaces with no official work identity (e.g. *nongmingong*) to be appropriated. Smallholdings remain vital for the survival of these peasant-workers over time, as they move back and forth between their natal homes and the provincial capital of Kunming, both imaginatively and physically. This thesis adds to the voices that are critical of the orthodox interpretation of the movement of peasants off the land and into the city as a teleological transition towards urbanization of work. By reconnecting the work carried out at the smallholding and the workplaces of the urban within the lives of smallholder migrant households, this thesis bring forth the alternative visions of work harbored in the working practices of peasant-workers in Yunnan.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is submitted as part of the fulfilment of a PhD degree at the Department of Geography, Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). The work was carried out at the Department of Geography in Trondheim and was financed by the Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences, NTNU. I would never have completed this PhD without all the emotional support, constructive criticism and hard work carried out by family, friends and colleagues. The research participants for this PhD, without their generosity and curiosity to this outsider who intruded into their lives, none of this would have been possible. I dedicate this PhD to you and all peasant-workers who struggle for material security and dignity in contemporary China.

Alongside me through these years I have had the privilege of having my supervisor, Professor Ragnhild Lund. Your determination, work ethics, honesty, and belief in this project has been integral to my work in these years. You have been inclusive since the beginning and during supervision or trips abroad I have often felt more as a colleague on equal terms than a student in training, which I strongly appreciate.

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Thomas Sætre Jakobsen
Trondheim, 31.01.2017

Chinese terms used in this PhD: Glossary

Dagong – “working for the boss”. This is the concept used for talking about migrant work for the interviewees (also used in other literature on rural migrant workers in China, c.f. Pun, 1999).

Dibao – Minimum living standard guarantee program. Payments provided to people beneath the official poverty line in China, which varies between rural and urban areas.

Hukou - Household registration. *Hukou* refers to the place where one is officially registered as a citizen in China. There are two main forms of *hukou*, agricultural and non-agricultural. One’s rights to social welfare provisions follows from the place where one’s *hukou* is registered

Nongmingong – Rural workers. Official designation of peasant-workers. Usually refers to peasant-workers employed within assembly line manufacturing workplaces.

Quchu – go out/leave. Refers in this context to going out to work or leaving the village for work.

Waimian – Outside. In the context of work, the interviewees refers to working and residing outside the village.

Sanwandaxian – “the weight of the three mountains”. This is an idiom, which refers to the difficulties of securing housing, education and health-care in urban China.

Tongxian – Fellow villagers. Refers to people from the same village.

Xiaoxue – Primary school. Primary school starts from children are 6 or 7 years old and last 5-6 years.

Zu – Working team. The smallest administrative unit in the countryside in China.

Zhongxue – Middle school. Middle school starts from children are 12 years old and lasts 4-5 years.

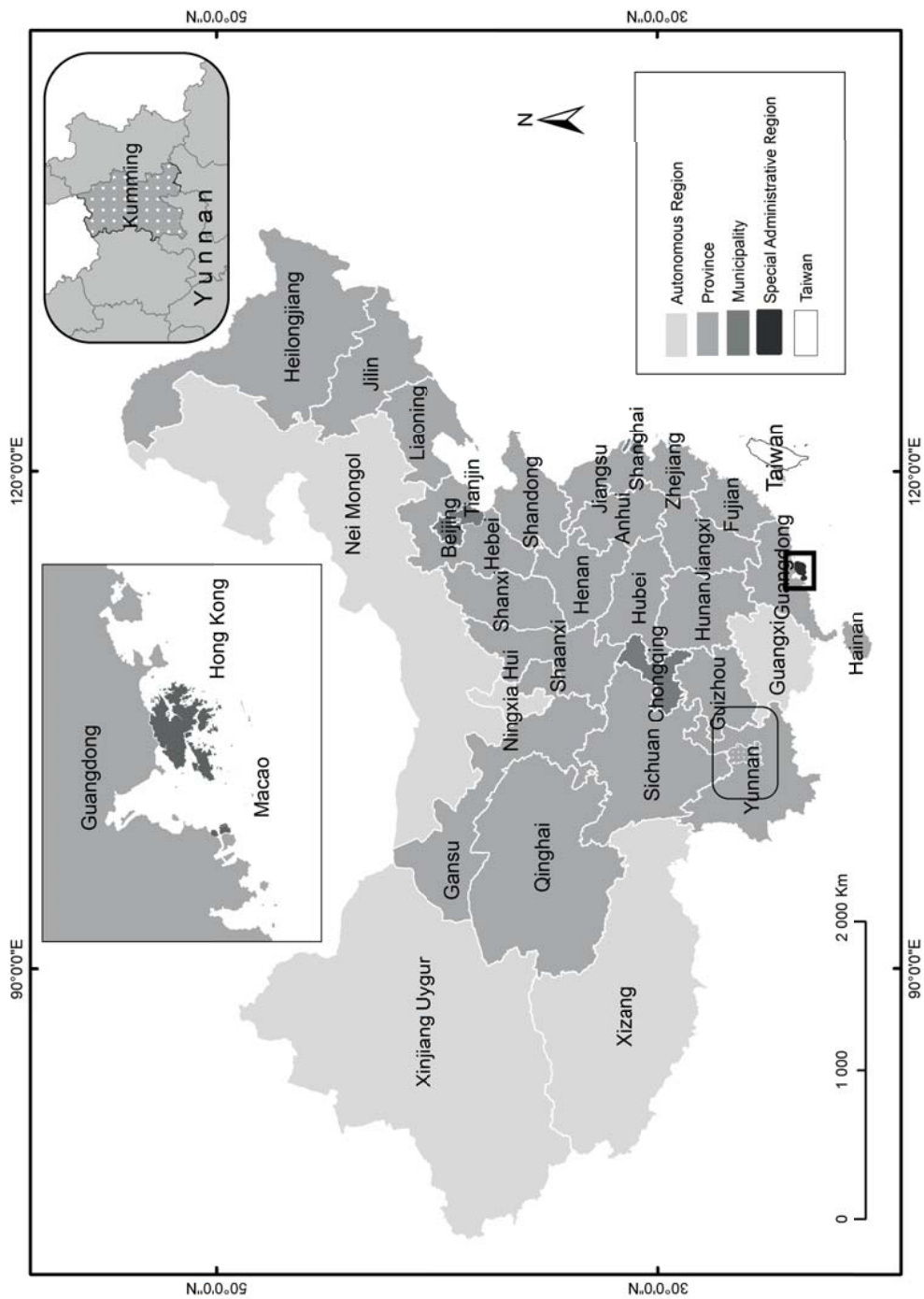


Figure 1: Map of China with Provinces

Note: Taiwan is controlled by the Republic of China and claimed by the People's Republic of China.

Attribution: Radmil Popovic, 2017

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Part I

1 Expecting Urbanization? The Rural-Urban Mobility of Work for Peasant-Workers in post-Deng China

1.1 Introduction: Working Between Smallholding and Wage-Work

We often tend to associate mobility with freedom. The ability to move around, to see, explore and enjoy, that is, being a nomadic subject is often interpreted as positive qualities of contemporary life (Cresswell, 2006). Conceptually we have linked mobility with development, the more developed a society the more mobility (roads, automobiles, people on the move, communication technology, flow of information through networks, etc.) there is (Urry, 2000; Zelinsky, 1971). In this vein, mobility often signifies a move from some primordial start towards modernity and progress (Giddens, 1991). Others argue that mobility is a new way of talking about inequality, in effect concealing how the access and ways of moving or staying put is socially differentiated along social divisions such as ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality and social class (Kaufman, Bergman and Joye, 2004; Lund, *et al.*, 2013; Skeggs, 2004). The mobility of peasants from agrarian societies towards the city often symbolizes all off these features; freedom, development and modernity. Yet, as Marx long ago observed, there is ambiguity of this move for peasants off from the land and into the city. With the example of English peasantries, Marx investigated how the process of dispossessing agrarian producers from their means of production, i.e. their farmland, both freed them from the guild system and their serfdom, while simultaneously transformed them into workers within the industrial factory system where they now came into a relation of exploitation to capitalists (in Yan, 2003: 579). Thus, as satirically pointed out by Paul Virilio (in Notar, 2012: 281) in *Speed and Politics*: “The time has come, it seems, to face the facts: revolution is a movement, but movement is not a revolution”.

In this thesis, I investigate the rural-urban mobility of work for smallholders in post-Deng China at a time of intense contestation over the future of smallholder farming. Based on fieldwork in southwestern China, Yunnan province, I focus on how peasant-workers and their family conceive, stay and move between smallholding and urban based wage-work as part of their future oriented flow of practice. Movement contains a central position within the post-Deng (1992-) Chinese imaginary, centered on the specter of unceasing urbanization, perceived to signify modernity, progress and development. Since the early 1990s, the rising percentage of

the population who resided in urban areas and national economic growth coincided to the degree that urbanization became something of a goal in and of itself. The percentage of the population who resided in urban areas grew by more than 30 percent between 1978-2010, and in 2011 China surpassed the 50 percent mark, signaling that for the first time in its history more people were living in urban areas than in rural ones (UN, 2014). Moreover, from 1978-2007 the Chinese economy grew by a staggering 8 percent annually (Zhu, 2012). Projecting the growth of the population living in urban areas has also become an important task for the World Bank and other consultancies, illustrated by the McKinsey report *Preparing for China's Urban Billion*, where the authors estimated that by 2025 there would be an additional 350 million residents in urban areas from a 2009 baseline and that by 2030 more than one billion Chinese would live in cities (Woetzel, *et al.*, 2009). The main driver behind the increasing urbanization of China is by most accounts the raising number of people moving into urban areas from the countryside (Chan, 2008). Thus, expectations of a transition from smallholding to urban based wage-work for peasants are omnipresent in post-Deng China.

US based China expert Philip Huang (2011a: 460) argues persuasively for how these expectations of urbanization are influenced by the narratives of the perceived inevitable decline of the peasantry

Adam Smith (1723-1790), Karl Marx (1818-1883), and Max Weber (1864-1920), perhaps the three most influential economic and social theorists of the modern West, all thought that, with the coming of capitalist economy and society, family-based peasant farm production will be replaced by individuated industrial workers. In China, under the ideology of modernizationism and the wish to become more like the developed West, that perception has taken on the force of indisputable truth in the social sciences. It is considered almost too obvious to require conceptual clarification or empirical demonstration. Most assume the inevitable disappearance of the family-based peasant economy and its replacement by the individuated workers-based capitalist industrial economy, and of the old three-generation farm family by the new two-generation nuclear family. The widely used construct of "transition," to some given but unspecified end goal, has only served to strengthen such unilinear modernist assumptions.

However, contrary to the experience of the British peasantry who had their land expropriated

most peasants in China still holds land-tenure rights, even after they start working in the city. The 150-280 million-strong rural migrant labor segment of the urban workforce generally lack formal urban citizenship yet retain land tenure rights in the countryside as part of their agricultural citizenship. Thus, notwithstanding the massive dispossession of land from smallholder that has taken place since 2005, mostly by the hands of local governments¹, most peasants still retain tilling rights over their land (He, 2007). Meanwhile, while many peasants went out to work since the mid 1980s, especially after government support to communities and smallholder farming dwindled since the late 1980s, married women, children and the elderly often stayed behind (Biao, 2007; Yan, 2003: 586). Indeed, the global financial crisis (2008-2009) effectively revealed the continued importance of the smallholding to rural migrant worker's sustenance, when more than 14 million migrating peasants returned to their smallholdings (Chan, 2010). Adding to this is the observation made by some journalists and researchers' who points to how peasants are less willing to change their citizenship from agricultural to urban *hukou* (household registration system) after the global financial crisis and when they go out to work, they venture closer to home. Indeed, this is cited as an important reason why the price of labor has peaked in recent years and many companies have relocated inwards and westwards to lure peasants to their factory gates. Some even suggests that China's competitive advantage of an abundance of cheap labor now belongs to a bygone era (Loyalka, 2012; Wildau, 2015).

As such, the actually existing realities of work for most peasant-workers in post-Deng China involves, either themselves or their kin, working the land partly for own subsistence needs and partly for cash-crop production (He, 2007). In this thesis, I take this as a cue that investigating how peasant-workers conceive, stay and move from and to the smallholding as part of their rural-urban mobility of work, remains an important line of inquiry. That is, I wanted to understand the rural-urban mobility of work for the interviewees from the perspective of practice theory, where how people think and act are mutually shaped by their "being-in-the-world" or as molded by their "embodied doings and sayings in context" (Simonsen, 2007). This

¹ The main explanation for why local governments confiscate farmland is that this provides a source of potential revenue, as they transform the land into a commodity that real estate developers can buy (Andreas and Zhan, 2015). The reason why expropriation of agricultural land has picked up speed since 2005, particularly land close to cities, is that between 2004-2006 the agricultural tax was abandoned and thus local governments faced fiscal difficulties (Walker, 2009).

involves taking the actually existing reality of work as the point of departure, before elucidating how people experience their work within a wider social context of possibilities and impossibilities (Bourdieu, 1990). For me, this involved taking the place of smallholder farming in the lives of the smallholder and peasant-worker interviewees seriously. Hence, research question 1 of this thesis concerns the place of smallholder farming in the rural-urban mobility of work for peasants-workers and their family members who stay to cultivate the land.

Nonetheless, wage-work in urban areas has become a vital part of the work for smallholder households in post-Deng China, who often combine farm work with wage-work in the city (Murphy, 2002; Chan, 2008). In the cities, rural migrant workers generally work within the lower echelons of the urban labor market, where they work without a working contract, regulated working hours, independent labor unions, and their salaries are generally too meager to support the living expenses incurred had they brought their family to live with them in the city (World Bank, 2014). In the city, they are barred from the same welfare provisions as “natives”, as they are judicially regarded as “outsiders” as they lack urban citizenship (*hukou*) (Fan, 2002). The welfare entitlements of citizens in China is generally only accessible in the place of *hukou* registration and as most peasant-workers are unable to convert their registration or do not see the benefits of changing their *hukou* as this would make them lose their entitlement to arable land, they remain barred from forms of welfare enjoyed by urbanities (e.g. unemployment insurance) (Chan, 2014).

Yet, rural migrant workers go the city to realize their diverse life-projects, either it pertains to becoming someone within the city or supporting smallholder life back home through remittances. However, by the early 2010s, some scholars have argued that the Chinese economy was not able to create enough employment for the rural labor force to keep up with the expectations of rising rural-urban migration (He, 2009). The slowdown in the economy is also one probable cause for the relative decline in the number of new rural migrant workers in urban areas since 2010, as the growth per annum of migrant workers have declined from 5.5 percent in 2010 to 1.3 percent in 2015 (China Labor Bulletin (CLB), undated). As such, there seems to be more than a transition that is played out in how peasant-workers approach the workplaces of the urban. Thus, how rural migrant workers conceive, stay, or move in relation to expectations to urban based wage-work needs further elucidation. The second research question of this thesis investigate the role played by wage-work in the rural-urban mobilities of peasant-workers.

Yet, it is not only peasant-workers and their kin who think and acts in relation to the rural-urban geography of work for peasants in post-Deng China, but also the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the media, capital, and scholars (Day, 2013a). Often these debates take the inevitable decline of the Chinese peasantry as a pre-given factor, without questioning the merits of this narrative in a situation far removed from the British peasantry that once constituted the ‘baseline’ for how scholars interpreted that modernity, capitalism and proletarianization spread in Europe. Thus, when Philip Huang (2011a: 460) argues that “under the ideology of modernizationism and the wish to become more like the developed West...has taken on the force of indisputable truth...It is considered almost too obvious to require conceptual clarification or empirical demonstration” he arguably points to how the common sense might make also social scientists skewed in terms of forgetting to scrutinize our categories of thought and action. The interpretative framework that he elucidates, where the move of peasants off the land and into the city is interpreted as an inevitability waiting to happen, has been much critiqued in recent years (McMichael, 2008) As argued by Philip McMichael (2008), the underlying historization behind both Liberal and Marxist interpretations of the trajectory of change within the peasantry, is that they are always already on their way to transition from peasants to workers.

Within Marxism, the move of peasants off the land and into the city is commonly interpreted as a process of proletarianization, where the peasant’s link to the farmland is severed through dispossession or pauperization, and in its place the worker emerges (Tilly, 1981). This historization, particularly based on the British industrial revolution, was effected by what Marx called primitive accumulation, where peasants were forced off the land through both dispossession and pauperization (Marx, 2004). Thus, a process of proletarianization took place, defined by Lois Tilly as an “...increase in the number of “people whose survival depended on the sale of labor power” (Tilly, 1979 in Tilly, 1981: 402). Proletarianization is often associated with factory work due to its central place within the historical narrative of European development, where these former peasants become workers within assembly line workplaces (Ferguson, 1999). However, as masterfully problematized by James Ferguson in his work from Zambia, there is a tendency among scholars to understand the relationship between industrialization, urbanization and proletarianization «...to involve not simply a movement in space but an epochal leap in evolutionary time» (1999: 4).

As such, I find James Ferguson's problematization of what he calls the "modernist myth", a perceptual familiarity between the British historical experience of the industrial revolution and contemporary landscapes of urbanization and industrialization elsewhere, interesting also for questioning dominant interpretations of the rural-urban movement of smallholders in post-Deng China. James Ferguson goes on to explain the double meaning or ambiguity of the concept of myth. On the one hand, he explains, we have "the popular usage, which takes a myth to be a false or factually inaccurate version of things that has come to be widely believed" (1999: 13). On the other hand, he suggests we understand myth "...not just as a mistaken account but a cosmological blueprint that lays down fundamental categories and meanings for the organization and interpretation of experience" (Ferguson, 1999: 13-14). I take this double meaning of myth as a productive point of departure for the purposes of the investigation here, as it points to the importance of investigating the way expectations of an unrelenting transition from smallholder agriculture to urban wage-work are enacted or conceived in how peasant-workers and their kin relate to smallholder farming and wage-work respectively (research question 1 and 2). On the other hand, it opens the possibility for asking what cosmological blueprints that are discernable from how smallholders live (act and conceive) the relation between smallholder agriculture and wage-work, and how this lived reality of the rural-urban work for peasant-workers and their families contrast with what Philip Huang (2011a: 460) calls social scientists inclination to interpret the movement of peasant to the city through the "ideology of modernizationism".

As such, this line of inquiry opens for re-interpreting the rural-urban mobility of work for smallholders as something else than a pre-determined historical transitions towards proletarianization. That is, it might provide another way of thinking about the rural-urban geographies of work for smallholders differently from the interpretive categories that tends to take this as an "epochal move in evolutionary time". As such, I hope it will allow me to be vigilant for transposing the "modernist myth" categories of thought and action from Western social science into the reality of work for Chinese smallholders. Hence, in research question 3 I inquire into the relationship between smallholder farming and wage-work in the rural-urban practices of work (the mobility of work) for smallholder households.

1.2 Research Questions

The main research question of this thesis is *How is the rural-urban mobility of work practiced by peasant migrant workers and smallholder migrant households in China?*

To further break up this question I have investigated three interrelated questions in this thesis.

- 1) How do peasant-workers relate to smallholder farming?
- 2) How do peasant-workers relate to urban based wage-work?
- 3) What is the relationship between urban based wage-work and smallholder farming in the lives of smallholder migrant households?

While many peasant-workers remain in the city for years of their lives, the way they maintain the relationship to the smallholding through their practices of being part of a family based work organization, imagine their future and carry out work situated as both ‘peasant’ and ‘worker’ within a context of contestation over the future of work for smallholders in contemporary China, is the question this thesis addresses. In this thesis, I work from a practice theoretical point of view, as I intend to investigate how peasant-workers and their kin actively engage with, withdraw and appropriate the activities and sites of work that are “closest to home”, i.e. smallholder farming and urban based wage-work. When I ask *how is the rural-urban mobility of work practiced by peasant migrant workers and smallholder migrant households in China*, I take practices to have a double meaning, both as something that is physically carried out through doings (e.g. moving) and of how people conceive their current situation based on their past experiences and expectations for the future (Bourdieu, 1990). Thus, I ask how peasant-workers relate to smallholder farming and wage-work respectively, through their doings and sayings, as part of their future oriented flow of practice. As I aim at inquiring into how peasant-worker imagine and physically enact smallholder farming and wage-work as part of their work for survival and dignity, I hope this thesis will produce new insights into how peasant-workers and their kin relate to the changing world of work in post-Deng China.

I want to emphasize that it is not my purpose here to explain the broad patterns of urbanization and schisms between rural and urban China, which many far more qualified scholars have already done (Chan, 2008; Chan, 2012; Guo, 2016; Wade, 2004). Moreover, others have discussed how competing ideas about the future of the peasantry are treated within the Chinese intelligentsia (Day, 2013a; Hale, 2013; Jacka, 2013; Mulvad, 2016), which I will here only

bring in to contextualize my study (in chapter 3). My intention is rather to discuss some of the effects of elite discourses, state policies, the conditions of urban wage-work, and the unsettled future for smallholder farming in smallholder's practices of work. Certainly, the contestation over the future of work for peasants in post-Deng China has affected more than the economy and settlement pattern, it most probably informs how smallholders conceive, stay, or move as part of how they relate to the present and imagined future of smallholder farming and urban wage-work. The results from this thesis are based on two stints of fieldwork. In article 1, I revisit the data manufactured during a household survey in four villages in 2009 as part of my master thesis. In article 2 and 3, I draw upon a total of eight months' fieldwork in 2013 in the provincial capital of Kunming and two villages in its vicinity, as I explored the expectations of a transition within the lives of peasant migrant workers and peasant households. To elucidate how the radical rural-urban transformations taking place in post-Deng China influence smallholders' perceptions and conduct of work, I have talked to, together with two great research assistants, rural migrant workers who are working or have been working in Kunming and done household interviews in two villages in the countryside of Yunnan.

1.3 Placing the Study

Kunming in southwestern China where parts of the fieldwork for this thesis was carried out, as with most of the cities in China after 1978, has transformed radically, especially since the early 1990s. This has happened as public officials together with developers have embraced urban development, and put these notions into practice by transforming the built environment into a cityscape characterized by sparkling high rises, large boulevards and fancy shopping malls (Notar, 2012). Moreover, after hosting the world horticultural exhibition in 1999, growing ever more expanding trading networks across the southeastern Asian region and becoming one of the largest tobacco growing and processing provinces of the world, Yunnan province and especially Kunming city has become a regional giant. Additionally, with increasing inequality between the countryside and the cities of Yunnan, being one of the provinces with highest prevailing poverty rate yet with impressive figures in terms of economic growth over the last decade, has contributed to a gap between the province's cities, with Kunming being the primary, and the countryside secondary (Donaldson, 2011). Thus, the relationship between Kunming and its hinterlands embody many of the inherent features that other Chinese cities project and practice towards its peripheries, especially socio-economic inequality and serving as the

physical manifestation of what modernity means in the current age (Zhang, 2006). Thus, in article 1 I investigate how peasant-workers moving to Kunming for work, in different times of their lives move back and forth between the smallholding and the workplaces of the urban according to different life-course transitions. In different parts of their lives they are working as peasants and others as workers. Therefore, I prefer the concept of 'peasant-worker' as it points to the ambiguous situation of these subjects, not easily pinned down on the landscape of class and citizenship.

However, while most old cities of China have transformed into shiny versions of themselves over the last 30 years, the cities of the southeastern Pearl River Delta retain a special place within the imaginary of the transformation of China from Maoism to Dengism. Here there used to be only agricultural land and scattered villages, now transformed into the «workshop of the world» with its assembly line workplaces, a cityscape transformed with wide boulevards, skyscrapers, and bright shopping malls, and is now known as the industrial sunbelt of post-Deng China (Lee, 2007). The rural migrant workers toiling the floor of subsidiaries of global corporations such as Apple and Samsung, have come to retain a particularly strong presence in the literature on rural migrant workers in China (Chang, 2009; Pun, 2005). These scholars work with the concept of class, where they investigate the possible move from shared class situation (i.e. rural migrant workers without urban citizenship in the lower-echelons of the urban labor market) to the formation of a working class consciousness (Chan, 2010; 2012; Chan and Selden, 2016).

A generational perspective has recently become the main analytical plot of scholars investigating the possible formation of a working class (proletarianization) in the manufacturing stronghold of the Pearl River Delta (Chan and Selden, 2014; Pun and Chan, 2012; Pun and Koo, 2015; Pun and Lu, 2010). One of the main arguments put forward in the debate concerning the change in aspirations between the generations of rural migrant workers, is that with the post-1990 generation (i.e. those born after 1990) of rural migrant workers we are moving from seeing peasant migrant workers who circulate between rural and urban areas towards a transition of a more settled working class (proletarianization). Some authors explain this transition in terms of the changing way migrant workers relate to the smallholding as they argue that the young generation of rural migrant workers «...embrace modernity and distance themselves from the conservatism of the countryside» (Frenkel and Yu, 2015: 276). Others

argue that it is the increasing expectations for urban life that makes the post-1990 generation of rural migrant workers “have higher expectations than the first wave of rural migrants. They aspire to develop technical skills, earn living wages, enjoy comprehensive welfare, and hold the full range of citizenship rights in the towns and cities they inhabit” (Chan and Selden, 2014: 616). Indeed, these scholars argue that it is the system itself that mitigates against the full emergence of a working-class consciousness, where the continued land-tenure rights and the fact that most of the youths were raised in the countryside, and the continued exclusion from formal urban citizenship results in “an *unfinished process of proletarianization*, which leads to a deepening sense of *becoming incomplete*” (Pun and Lu, 2010: 498; original italics for emphasis).

Indeed, with the young generation of rural migrant workers confronting the urban milieu of the Pearl River Delta it was as if the peasantry in China finally moved within the mainstream of history where urbanization and industrialization is a movement towards a known, even familiar, end-point of proletarianization. This is revealed by the way scholars, through invoking the language of *unfinished* and *incomplete*, placed the relationship between rural-urban movement of peasants and work on a familiar pathway towards proletarianization. As such, the way this literature narrates the movement of peasants off the land and into the city, i.e. proletarianization, resonates strongly with how Marx and Thompson told this story². I have both for theoretical and empirical reasons found it productive to place my own work in dialogue with the scholarship on rural migrant workers in the Pearl River Delta. Particularly as this body of work, what I will refer to as Chinese working class studies, has more than any other literature in the Chinese context discussed the relationship between urbanization, work and experience for

² For Marxist strategy, the multiplicity of people and occupations that make up the working class historically posed a problem. For strategy, it was difficult to produce a coherent narrative that defined the predicament of the working class in its totality, as this proved close to impossible due to its unruliness, its multifaceted situations and problems faced. Moreover, for strategists of the working class, they needed a subject that was the working class. That is, how could they produce a coherent narrative that encompassed everyone within the working class? To solve this dilemma, strategists placed manufacturing work and workers within the factories as the figures representing the working class in its entirety. It is important to note that this was a strategic choice, made to advance the cause of the working class at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Somewhat paradoxically, this strategic choice later, particularly with the work of Karl Kautsky, turned into official history of the working class. Thus, in the hands of scholars such as Kautsky it changed from a strategic choice to a truth about what defined the working class (Haider and Mohandesi, 2015).

peasant-workers. Indeed, when the workplaces of rural migrant workers are represented it is often the assembly line workscapes of the manufacturing stronghold of the Pearl River Delta that are on display.

The petty capitalist workplaces I encountered in Kunming arguably represent a different “type” of workplace than the typical scholarly representations based on ethnography from the manufacturing stronghold of south-eastern China. To investigate the question of how peasant-workers related to smallholding and wage-work through their movement and imagination back and forth yet with socially differentiated experiences, I conducted interviews with two generations of peasant-workers, outlined in article 2. The young generation of peasants in China, those born during the late 1980s and the 1990s (hereafter referred to as the post-Deng generation, after Premier Deng Xiaoping, who reigned in the period 1978–1992), has grown up in a period of heightened symbolic dominance of the urban field over the agrarian (Day, 2013a; Yan, 2003). This has highlighted the changing sociospatial context from the generation of peasant migrant workers born in the 1970s and early 1980s (hereafter referred to as the post-Mao generation, after premier Mao Zedong, who ruled in the period 1949–1976). The gradual shift from optimism towards pessimism in terms of the viability for livelihoods and habitation within the post-Deng countryside is succinctly summarized in a recent review study:

for the whole of the 1980s, while urban reforms faltered, rural China enjoyed a decade of unprecedented high growth, widely shared prosperity, massive reduction of poverty and political stability [while] the following decade from the mid-1990s onwards formed a sharp contrast [as the countryside] descended into economic stagnation, political contestation and social decay. (Zhang, Oya & Ye, 2015: 300–301).

Thus, it seemed to me important to explore in what ways this gradual decline had translated into changing wants and needs between the generations, indeed as the literature above from the Pearl River Delta highlights. However, what I found was much more ambiguity, uncertainty and indecisiveness in terms of wants and needs for their future work than was often the case in the typical representations of the young generation, where it seemed to be a flat rejection of the countryside that was going on. Rather, what I found was that the prevailing situation of waged-work, of *dagong* (literally `working for the boss`), points to how work itself is undermined as a base for material security and citizenship. Kunming, while having its share of industrialization

within particularly resource processing such as within tobacco and rubber, does not belong to the heartland of industrialization in post-Deng China.

Furthermore, while there was relatively sharp gap between the generations in how they engaged with smallholder agriculture, visible in the young generations dis-identification with farming, both generations displayed dispositions towards wanting more; more autonomy from *dagong* as they imagined or enacted forms of work that involved a different future than working “under the bosses heels” either it pertained to returning to their smallholding or dreaming of setting up their own business. Moreover, due to the discontinuous work in the city, where they face unemployment, periods of exhaustion or sickness, both generations in different ways rely on the smallholding for their sustenance. Hence, I hope this thesis can contribute modestly to an expansion of discussions around the future of work for rural migrant workers, by taking a view from outside the heartland of industrialization in post-Deng China.

These contradictory findings but also as I came to learn more about the campaigns launched by the CCP since 2005 to rejuvenate the countryside under the slogan of «building a new socialist countryside» (Ahlers and Schubert, 2010; 2013), which released some cautious yet well-founded optimism on behalf of agrarian citizens in post-Deng China, made me feel compelled to rethinking my understanding of the relationship of working between what I at the time conceived of as the backwards the agrarian countryside and the modern city, between work, place, and identity. Especially the relational dependence between them as it was enacted within the practices and perceptions of the interviewees made me reconsider the way I tried to tell the story of rural-urban mobility in the lives of smallholders.

Through investigating the practices of peasant migrant workers and how they actively relate to the activities and sites of work “closest to home”, the smallholding and the petty-capitalist workplaces of Kunming, this thesis investigate how peasant-workers conceive and physically work between smallholder farming and wage-work. As they move back and forth between the city and the smallholding according to different life events (funerals, marriage, the spring festival), transitions within the life-course (marriage, child rearing, old age), seasonally according the need for hands within agriculture, or in times of crisis (unemployment, sickness, exhaustion) and sends money back home to sustain the agrarian household, the relationship between city and countryside came into view for me not so much as a relationship between past

and present but more as coexistence and simultaneity, explored in article 1 and 3. Moreover, the role of the smallholding and those maintaining it in the lives of peasant migrant workers, in times of crisis such as unemployment or exhaustion as they returned but also in more normal times as the place where their children were raised or as the loci of their expectations for the future of their working life, enacted a reverse story of movement and imaginary from the city and into the countryside. Hence, in article 3 I question the prevailing notion of work in the literature on rural migrant workers in post-Deng China, and by drawing upon Marxist feminism and the notion of social reproduction I attempt to reconnect the sites (smallholding and wage-work), activities (unwaged and wage-labor), and subjects (rural migrant workers and the left-behind) of work for smallholder migrant households.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The fieldwork I conducted both in Kunming and in two villages, both interviewing two generations of rural migrant workers and smallholders «left-behind» provided me with a lot of anxiety and nervousness in terms of how to tell this story. Was this anxiety I felt to be blamed on the uneasiness of retelling a classical story of change and transition yet with other actors and sets or was it something else? Partly the anxiety I felt was a result of the difficulty of comprehending what went on and the difficulty I had of pulling it together as I drifted along the rural-urban divide myself, back and forth between countryside and city, without feeling fully immersed into either during my fieldwork as the ethnographic canon often requires. Thankfully other scholars experiencing the same sense of inadequacy has solved this conundrum of multiple site fieldwork brilliantly through the extended case method, which I will outline in-depth in chapter 2. Having investigated how the life-course transitions of the interviewees impinged upon their rural-urban mobility, it became difficult to bracket off either the rural or urban parts of their subject position, aspirations and practices. Thus, in chapter 3 I detail the Deng Xiaoping rural-urban landscape of expectations and practices that rural migrant workers and their kin are situated within. However, there was something else on my mind that made me uneasy of retelling a story of an epochal transition between countryside and city, between workers and those left-behind, between productive and unproductive, between peasants and proletarians. It had both to do with the hesitation, ambiguity and difficulties for many of the interviewees of pinpointing either the countryside or the city as the loci for their desired futures due to deteriorating returns to smallholder farming yet informalized low-pay

wage-work in the city, but also the prevailing understanding of how smallholders relate to their activities and sites of work within the existing literature. Thus, in chapter 4 I present the theoretical point of view taken here, drawing upon the practice theoretical “turn” and the “mobility turn” within and outside the field of geography. In chapter 5, I present a summary of the three articles for this PhD. In the final chapter, chapter 6, I discuss the main contributions of this dissertation.

2 Researching the Mobility of Work for Smallholders

2.1 Introduction

The practice theoretical understanding of peasant migrant workers, as both rural and urban, both agrarian and capitalist, both smallholding and wage-work, is of great importance to this PhD project (see chapter 4). Through the fieldwork I tried to capture this fluidity by looking into the temporal mobility of the interviewees (#article 1), the shifting social experience between the generations (#article 2) and challenge the spatial and social conceptions of work as solely wage-work (#article 3). The data are drawn from fieldwork in Yunnan Province where semi-structured interviews was the main method together with observations in workplaces, homes in the city and the village, and leisure time. Interviews were conducted in Kunming, the provincial capital, with 32 rural migrant workers and 52 household interviews in Baicai (*baicai* means Pak-Choi, which is the main cash-crop of the village) and Kaoyan (*kaoyan* means tobacco, which is the main cash crop of the village)³. The interviews were conducted during the spring 2013. Together with me to do the interviews I worked with two research assistants who knew the local dialect as well as standard Mandarin.

I will start this chapter with outlining the research design I have worked from, which I place within the landscape of the extended case method as developed by Michael Burawoy (2009; Burawoy, *et al.*, 2000;) and James Ferguson (1999). Of course, doing fieldwork in a foreign environment, with only a superficial command of the local language, had strong implications on the kind of project I envisioned and was able to carry out. Therefore, I will subsequently reflect on how working with research assistants have influenced the quality and content of the data. Thereafter, I will present the methods I used, primarily interviews and observation from an extended case method point of view. Finally, I will go into the ethics and how I analyzed the data.

³ These are fictive names for the sake of anonymity.

2.2 The Extended Case Method

The extended case method has been developed by the Manchester school of social anthropology and the Berkley school of Sociology, with subtle differences between them (Burawoy, 2009). It is particularly Michael Burawoy who has done the coding of this largely embodied critical knowledge tradition (1998; 2009; Burawoy, *et al.*, 1991). Few geographers have taken up the gauntlet, which is a shame I would add, as it has much to offer those of us who are interested in connecting the lived experiences of everyday lives and larger social transformations through fieldwork in multiple locations. What distinguishes the extended case method? In short, its extension. It is extended in four directions,

The extension of observer into the lives of participants under study, the extension of observations over time and space; the extension from microprocesses to macroforces; and, finally and most important, the extension of theory. Each extension involves a dialogue: between participant and observer, between successive events in the field, between micro and macro, and between successive reconstructions of theory (Burawoy, 2009: xv).

Burawoy's approach is refreshing as it is built around a steadfast commitment to both ethnography and theorizing through connecting the lived realities of people within their contexts to larger social processes. This is exactly my own aspiration when it comes to science. I must admit that I have more intuitively carried out my research than followed the extended case method, however, with the benefit of hindsight I see that much of what I have been doing and my intentions for doing it were guided by a "program" similar to the extended case method. Thus, I see it as beneficial to relate it to this codified program and develop more how I have worked based on similar principles.

While Michael Burawoy is programmatically interested in extending his research in time, I have been mostly interested in extending the research in space by trying to understand the reasons why the mobile smallholders I meet in Yunnan were not as eager to settle in the city as the narrative of untamed urbanization in post-Deng China in general conveyed, and the literature stemming from the research on rural migrant workers in the Pearl River Delta often proclaimed. Thus, one way I have extended the research undertaken here is by placing it in dialogue with the "case" of rural migrant worker lives in the Pearl River Delta. On another level, I have theoretically, started questioning the theoretical assumptions and historization of

the literature on rural migrant workers in the Pearl River Delta as a way of challenging existing theorization but also become better positioned to interpret the social imaginaries of the interviewees here. In this regard, James Ferguson's (1999) book *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* was influential. In this book, he questioned the logic of the perceived relationship between urbanization, industrialization and proletarianization within the scholarship on Zambia. As he aptly documented, both urbanization and industrialization were short lived on the Zambian copperbelt, despite the earlier perceived inevitable growth of both, by scholars working there. He explained the expectations of social scientists with what he termed "the modernist imagination", seen as scholars seemed to perceive the link between urbanization, industrialization and proletarianization to be an inevitability. In hindsight, James Ferguson proclaims, this was more an enactment of a western modernist imagination (1999). While Ferguson did not put it in those terms, I think the issue he raised was that while we are unable to see anything without theory, if we leave theory unquestioned in the pursuit to see things in person and upfront, we risk severely misinterpreting the context of our research.

Thus, the dialogue between theory and events in the field is important here, as it is for me. In the previous chapter I attempted to question the "thesis of proletarianization", based as I see this as hiding more than it reveals about the world of work for peasant-workers in contemporary China. That is, while it is useful for the narration of the relationship between work, identity and politics of the working masses within the Pearl River Delta and similar sites of manufacturing, the slippage enacted by researchers who generalize from this context to the rest of the rural migrant workers is problematic as it conceals the informality of urban life for most rural migrant workers. More importantly, as I have argued in this thesis and in article 2 and 3, this informality should not necessarily be interpreted as a byproduct or a stage in the inevitable path towards proletarianization. Particularly as such an interpretation, potentially conceals the interrelationship between work, aspirations, and lived experiences that extends across the rural-urban divide for many if not most rural migrant workers in China. Thus, herein "...lies the secret of the extended case method – theory is not discovered but revised, not induced but improved, not deconstructed but reconstructed" (Burawoy, 2009: 13).

The dialogical ethos behind the extended case method is something that appeals to me, as I

have “commuted” back and forth between data and theory after the fieldwork⁴. Indeed, if there is an overall spatial extension of my study of peasant-workers in Yunnan to *nong min gong* in the Pearl River Delta, there is also a spatial extension between those left-behind and those working outside that has been very influential in how I have interpreted the practices (doings, organization, and aspirations) and social-spatial space of work for the interviewees. Through interviewing household members in the study villages and those working outside, I was starting to get a sense of the interrelationship between working the fields, the household and wage-work for the interviewees. Indeed, for me the reconnection of these practices of work generated much anxiety about how I could understand them within larger social processes.

For me they provided something even better, they rather challenged how I and other researchers interpreted or portrayed larger social process. Indeed, the conception of work, workers, and workplace as commonly defined both within Marxism and the common sense that I was embedded within, was brought down by the interrelationship of work for the interviewees. My ability to see this, was of course made possible by the theoretical glasses I wore, which I had learned from my great colleagues in the department working within the livelihoods framework, where the household takes center stage (for a useful review of this literature, see Scoones, 2009). While I left the livelihoods framework behind, as I became more interested in the practices of work and as I found it difficult to use when my ambition was to connect the work of smallholders to larger social processes, its ability to see the left-behind and the migrant workers as part of the same micro economy provided a useful break with Marx and Thompson’s conception of proletarianization (work, workplace, and identity). Thus, for me the extension of interviews and observations in space, across the rural-urban divide, made me question the utility of E. P. Thompsons brand of Marxism to my project.

Thus, for me theorizing (deconstructing, improving and reconstructing) and fieldwork are mutually imbricated. The goal is not to refine theory for the sake of providing the most complex theory, but to trace the connections between larger social forces and people’s everyday lives. While Michael Burawoy and James Ferguson prefer participant observation, there is no intrinsic reason why a more pragmatic methodological approach cannot be used, such as combining overnight stays in the villages of the interviewees, interviews on day-trips and observation.

⁴ I borrow this formulation from my colleague Michael Jones who uttered it during a seminar at our department.

Ideally, if my only concern in life had been research, I would have liked my research to be more extended in time and more immersed within the lives of the interviewees to establish rapport between researcher and researched. Alas, this ideal world does not exist. Thus, I have tried, as most people do, to make the best out of an imperfect situation.

There is much I can say about the fact that I brought my family with me, or rather that I could not do without my cohabitant and our two boys for several months, but suffice to say is that this influenced the choice of living in Kunming and extended my social obligations way beyond the research project. I have had to work with my own feeling of “not getting it right” due to these reasons, probably because of my early training in anthropology where long periods of immersion into the field site is the cherished norm. Helpfully, other researchers have been open about how the spatially extended form of their fieldwork made them use less time at each fieldsite than they felt comfortable with based on common standards within their discipline (Ferguson, 1999). Moreover, as admitted by Frank Pieke in his wonderful article “Contours of an Anthropological Theory of the Chinese State”, the fact that he had two small kids back home made him limit the fieldwork to three weeks at the time (2004: 534). Furthermore, more than my social obligations and the extended field I was working with, my superficial command of Mandarin set certain bounds on how I could do fieldwork. Most importantly, it made it necessary to work jointly with a research assistant in the field. I now turn away from the overarching design of the research, coded here through the extended case method, towards more detailed issues of the fieldwork, starting with the sampling, before I detail the methods I used. Subsequently, I go more in depth on language issues and working with a research assistant in the field before I reflect on some of the ethical conundrums I have faced. In the final section of this chapter I detail how I did the data analysis.

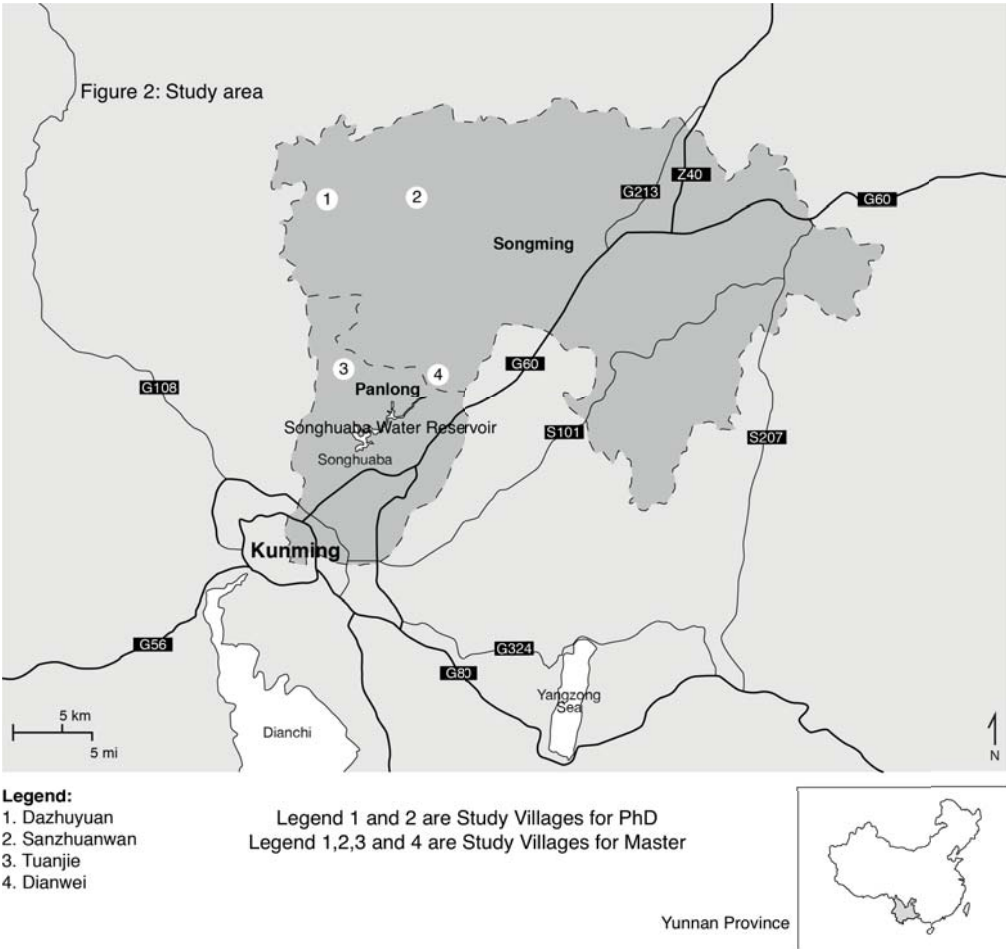
2.3 Interviews, Observations and Sampling

While some details of the methods are explicated in article 1, 2 and 3, I will here go more in detail than was allowed for in the articles. Overall this thesis draws on two stints of fieldwork, one which I did during my master thesis in January 2009, which forms the basis for article 1, and for article 2 and 3 I did fieldwork during my PhD from December 2012-August 2013. The details of the fieldwork carried out during the master thesis are outlined in article 1. As I used interviews and observation during both fieldworks I will, however, shortly reflect on the

differences between the approach taken during the two fieldworks and the data that was produced.

The main differences between the two fieldworks consists mainly in my own role *vis-à-vis* the research assistants and in what data I got from it. In 2009 I was making my first steps as a researcher as I got an opportunity to do fieldwork in Yunnan under the auspices of Kunming Institute of Botany, at the World Agroforestry Center, where I also worked in 2013. In 2009 I worked with four research assistants, four university students, who I recruited through a colleague at the World Agroforestry Center. I got great assistance in designing the questionnaire (appendix 1) from my colleague, who was a doctoral student at the time and who worked in the study area with his PhD. He also accompanied me to the field. As the research assistants carried out the interviews, my own in-depth understanding of the lives of smallholders in Songhuaba Watershed, the area of the four villages visited in 2009 and the two villages where I did fieldwork in 2013 (figure 2), remained limited. Thus, when I returned in December 2012 I was determined to be present during all interviews and get more involved in the research process through designing the interview guides myself, one for households (appendix 2) and one for migrant workers (appendix 3), and to be able to communicate directly with the research participants, such as through asking follow up questions, gestures and body language. In 2009 we limited the interviews to a household survey, by asking many detailed questions concerning demography, income, expenditures, agriculture and other livelihood activities (including migration).

Figure 2: Map of the study villages for the master thesis field work (article 1) and PhD field work (article 2 and 3)



One of the reasons why I felt that such a detailed questionnaire was warranted at the time, was that I could not be present during all the interviews as four research assistants was working simultaneously. As my budget of time and money was very limited, using four research assistants proved the most efficient strategy given the goal of comparing different villages in terms of the impact of out-migration. I can say that the data from the fieldwork in 2009 was more numerical and quantitative than the detailed fieldwork I carried out between December 2012 and August 2013. However, for the goals I had in 2009 it was turned out to be ‘good enough’. After the fieldwork in 2009, I sat down with each research assistant and asked them to clarify things in the questionnaires they had filled in, I did this to make sure there were no

misunderstandings after the translation. When I used the data again for this dissertation, in article 1, I analyzed parts of the data that I had not dwelled on during the master thesis. This related to how transitions within the life-course, such as marriage and child rearing (data from the demography part of the questionnaire), intersected with the migration of household members (data from the migration part of the questionnaire) (see appendix 1).

In 2009 the team leader assisted us in gathering the inhabitants of the four villages in an open space in the village, either outside someone's home or in the "face" of the village (the place where visitors arrive through the public road) to make a map of the village, to get a general overview of how many were working outside, the general educational level of the village, where the agricultural fields lay, water resources, and public institutions. We asked the villagers to pin point how many lived in each household, approximately where they lived, and whether people there worked outside as migrant labor and the highest educational background of the family. While I have called this "participatory mapping" elsewhere (article 1), I am not so sure that it qualifies as participatory in a strict sense as I could have done more to ensure representativeness and let the inhabitants more define what was important "items" to place on a map of the village (Mikkelsen, 2005). Again, this was a cost-effective strategy given the limited time at my disposal, and in 2013 I did not see the need to do a similar exercise as I had more time in the field and could get an overview of these issues more organically as we interviewed the same households as back in 2009. The reason I chose to re-visit the same households in 2013, was that I at the time intended to compare the different data I gathered, however, the objectives of my research and how I viewed the data changed over the course of the fieldwork and the writing up of the results, so I dropped this. Another reason that I thought that revisiting these villages would be a good idea, was that people living there at least had some familiarity with who I was and with research. Of course, some grumbled that they had not seen any improvement in their standard of living since the last time I was there hence they questioned the utility of participating in my research, which I tried at best to explain that I could not deliver on this time around either in any direct way at least. The rest of the chapter deals with the fieldwork I carried out for the PhD dissertation, between December 2012 and August 2013.

In terms of how we sampled the interviewees, I intended from the beginning both to interview the family members of migrant workers and peasant migrant workers. As I had brought with me my family to Kunming, I did not wish to be away from them for long periods of time. Thus,

Songhuaba Watershed seemed like a convenient area to carry out the research. Besides, my colleague from 2009 (the PhD student, now a post-doc) could assist me with getting in contact with people he knew in the area. His introduction was important to me in the beginning, and eased the contact with the team leaders who I called beforehand. Songhuaba was also convenient in terms of travel time, costs and I reckoned that it made it easier to bring a research assistant to the field. This time I wanted to go more in-depth into the lives of the interviewees, so I chose two villages from the four villages we visited in 2009 (see figure 2).

It turned out that one of the villages had been relocated to Kunming, as part of the expropriation of farmland policies that was taking place in the area, which the local government perceives as necessary to protect the water reservoir in the area. Thus, partly by chance it became Kaoyan and Baicai⁵ that I sampled in 2013, though it was not totally coincidental that I ended up with these villages. Both villages were located remotely from Kunming in terms of access by public transport, which made commuting to Kunming difficult if not impossible for those working in the metropole. Thus, I reasoned that migration was an important part of the livelihood mix of the families living there, which was confirmed in the data from 2009. My ambition was not to capture the “exceptional” in terms of interviewing smallholders who had suffered land acquisitions, which can be understood as extreme acts of “expecting urbanization”, but rather to try to investigate how the everyday life of smallholders became influenced by “expecting urbanization”, with an eye towards the working practices smallholders. I also targeted only those migrant workers who went to Kunming, mostly due to the low costs involved as I was living there but also as this was the main destination for migrant workers from Kaoyan and Baicai. Moreover, as I was interested in exploring the rural-urban linkages of work in terms of expectations and practices, Kunming, being the capital of Yunnan and the main destination for rural migrant workers from the whole province (Chan, 2008), it felt natural to limit the research to this city. With the benefit of hindsight, I see that the choice of villages and the city of Kunming as places with unique characteristics yet being non-exceptional in terms of not being export processing zones or villages where everyone has lost their land, provides a comparative

⁵ In figure 2 the name of the study villages for the PhD are Dazhuyuan and Sanzhuanwan, which refers to the name of the villages at the administrative level above Kaoyan and Baicai. Each village has a village committee and beneath this there are several village groups or work-teams (*zu*), Kaoyan and Baicai are thus administratively located beneath Dazhuyuan and Sanzhuanwan. Kaoyan and Baicai are fictive names, in order to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees.

perspective to the Chinese working class studies literature. However, seeing my work in conjunction with the Chinese working class studies literature was not my stated intention from the beginning, I was just an eager student trying to learn the ways of smallholders in contemporary China at the time. Thus, sampling of sites and informants happened both as part of a larger plan to learn the context of the interviewees, and based on improvisation, by seizing opportunities that turned up when we were in the *modus operandi* of fieldwork.

We started by revisiting the villages that I had worked in back in 2009, where we encountered especially family members of migrant workers, and a handful migrant workers who had returned or were home for visits. We recruited the interviewees in Kaoyan and Baicai first through a list of names I had kept from my master thesis of which households we had visited in 2009, and then we asked around if people knew this or that family (in 2013). I targeted both households with and without migrant workers, and in the end, we interviewed 52 families, of which 32 had one or more family members working outside. I chose to interview also families without migrant workers to better understand the dynamics of out-migration in the villages, as this provided a comparative look, and as I intended to compare the data from 2009 and 2013 when I started the fieldwork. These families made me realize how difficult it was to survive by relying solely or mainly on the smallholding. Moreover, I reckoned that to understand why some were moving out for work I had to try to understand why some did not pursue this option (see appendix 2). Furthermore, it was by interviewing many families that I could map out the social landscape of the village, who belonged to the political or economic elites, which I felt was important when I interpreted the data later on in terms of the expectations of the different interviewees for wage-work in the city.

We kindly asked parents if they could provide us with the contact information of their children who were working in Kunming, which we most often were granted. Then my research assistant would call to set up an interview. After people had seen us as we returned every day, they seemed more relaxed about our motives for being there and would chat with us given that they had the time. In the beginning, particularly in Kaoyan, they seemed more suspicious. However, after we started staying the night over in the team leaders house there, they could place us within a household and seemed to trust us more. We recruited several migrant interviewees also through a snowball method, as especially the post-Deng generation migrant interviewees were forthcoming in sharing the contact information (name and phone number) of their *tongxian*

(fellow villagers) working in Kunming. We also recruited some migrant worker interviewees who were not from Kaoyan and Baicai, one we recruited through my second research assistant, five through our driver, who himself was a migrant worker, and one interviewee from Baicai (Ru Chen, see table 1) set us in touch with eight migrant interviewees (four were from Baicai).

Ru Chen was a very social person and had a wide-ranging network of friends and acquaintances, and he generously introduced us to these interviewees. At the time, I thought it was a good idea to widen the reach of the research outside Kaoyan and Baicai, to include more voices and from other kind of occupations than the largely service based workplaces that the migrant workers in Kaoyan and Baicai were engaged in (see table 1 and 2 below). By including several interviewees from the network of the driver, we also got several interviewees employed in the booming construction industry of Kunming. I felt that this enhanced the trustworthiness of my conclusions as I, with interviewees from several occupations yet who shared the background of growing up in the Yunnanese countryside, could better sketch out the different challenges faced by the two generations of interviewees. In total, we interviewed 32 migrant workers, where 20 of these came from Baicai and Kaoyan (see interview guide in appendix 3). Retrospectively, I can see that another reason that I chose to get more interviewees into the mix, had to do with my anxiety of “getting it right” in terms of getting enough interviewees, as I was commonly asked by colleagues at KiB what “is your sample size?”. As I ended up not using most interviews directly, due to my style of presentation where I see the need to contextualize each interview and present in-depth experiences of the interviewees, I see that I could have stopped earlier or even better, returned to each interviewee several times for example, in order to enhance the trust between us. However, in the end the results of the targeted sampling of migrant workers provided me with a rich background from where I could understand the context of the interviewees and of the working lives of peasant migrant workers in Kunming.

In both Kaoyan we were invited to stay over-night in the house of the team leader and in Baicai we were invited to stay over-night whenever we visited in the house of the former team leader. While I hesitated at first, because I was unsure how the rest of the villagers would perceive us in terms of our allegiances and loyalty, I accepted the invitations and on several occasions, we stayed overnight in both Kaoyan and Baicai. Particularly the stays in Kaoyan provided us with unique insight into the daily lives of the interviewees, as we often shared meals with the team leader, his parents, wife and two daughters. For me this provided a unique opportunity to

observe the daily schedules of work and rest, and the gendered divisions of labor within the household. However, it is fair to argue that observation was a complementary method I used alongside the main method of interviews. Thus, the observations happened unstructured, as I used the field diary to note down things that I found interesting or that had been said in more informal conversations around the dinner table. I found that the fact that we were introduced by the team leader to other interviewees assisted our introduction into the village, as people could “place” us as being affiliated with the team leader.

The team leader is elected every fourth year by the inhabitants of the “team”, the *zu* or what I term the village, elected by the villagers through nomination and then the two persons who receive most nominations will be elected through a ballot. Upon election, the team leader commits to become a member of the CCP by passing an examination (conversation with team leader in Baicai). The team leader works as an intermediary between the villagers and the village committee, which is the highest ranking administrative and political body in the countryside, and have between 3-10 villages (*zu*) under its jurisdiction. The team leaders complained about their lack of influence on the village committees’ work, and the frustration they had with the apparent embezzlement of public funding that took place among the top ranking officials in the committee. In some ways, the team leaders, two men in their mid-40s, acted as key informants in that they introduced us to other villagers and eased our introduction into the village. While I started out with being skeptical to the affiliation we had to the team leader, as this could make interviewees perceive us with suspicion or mistrust our proclaimed positions as “neutral outsiders” interested in learning from the experts about smallholder life and *dagong*, our introduction into the village seemed to be bolstered by this approach. As people knew where to place us, they seemed more at ease with our presence there. Besides, interviewees were generally not shy in lambasting the team leaders’ reluctance to make land adjustments when people died or when people married and set up new households. In the end, the team leaders in both Kaoyan and Baicai became key-informants for my understanding of the villages and household matters (see interview guide team-leaders, appendix 4).

Both in 2009 and 2013 I used a diary during the fieldwork to note down different stuff, such as my own feelings and reflections on my own presence in the field, details from informal conversations or impressions from the interviews (in 2013), the relationship with the research assistants, and daily expenses. For the 2009 master thesis, I did not use these fieldnotes much,

and to be honest with the short duration of the fieldwork they were not that helpful either as I had limited time to write things down. For the PhD, I have used the observations from the daily lives of the interviewees, such as working the fields, cooking, child rearing, daily transport, house building, and social relations, as a means of asking more detailed questions during the interviews, as a basis for discussions with the research assistants during our drives back and forth, and for coding the data for article 3 (see below on data analysis). Moreover, I noted down information from each interview after we had finished, such as the duration, how I evaluated the flow of conversation and the atmosphere of the interview, where it took place and at what time, and other pieces of information that I found relevant (such as the relationship between different interviewees). The observations were not something I had planned neatly, they just started happening in a more improvised manner and after a while with some regularity in what I observed. I used the observations to contextualize each interview during the data analysis (see below) and to keep a record for myself of the interviews. I also took many pictures during the fieldwork in Kaoyan and Baicai, of houses, tools, farmland, crops, means of transport, and meals. I also asked the interviewees if they wanted me to take a photo of them, as I had brought a camera with an integrated printer I could give the photos to the interviewees as a modest token of gratitude. The intent was simply to give the interviewees the pictures, I had not planned to use the photos for anything else. However, for me the pictures have been helpful in bringing the data to “life” now in the write up of the results.

In terms of how we conducted the interviews for the PhD, we used a tape recorder for most of the interviews with rural-migrant workers. Meanwhile, either I or the research assistant filled in the questionnaire (see appendix 3) at the beginning of the interview, with name, age and other pieces of information that could identify the interviewee. Only after we had compiled this information, did we ask for permission to use the tape recorder. One of the reasons why I kept the information separate was that I shared the interviews with the person doing the transcription and translation of the taped interviews and I did not want to share information that could identify the interviewees with more people than deemed necessary (see ethics below). Most migrant interviewees were comfortable with having the interview on tape, however, three interviewees told us that they did not feel comfortable with being tape recorded. Also, when doing the interviews with family members who stayed behind in the villages or those without migrant workers we used a questionnaire (appendix 2), without tape recording the interview. If I had more money and time, I would have preferred to tape record all the interviews, however,

transcribing and translation is quite costly. Subsequently a local college graduate did the transcription and translation. The informants were recruited through asking one of their family members in the village if we could get their contact information or through snowballing with interviewees residing in Kunming. Interviews were carried out at local parks, in the home of the interviewee, tea-bars and workplaces. Some of the interviewees had settled in their village while most still worked in Kunming at the time of the interview. All research participants went to Kunming with the primary purpose of finding a job and their work experiences ranged from a few months to more than a decade of working for the boss (*dagong*). In 2009 one of the two villages became formally a part of Kunming, which made one group of interviewees Kunming locals on paper. In quotes, I have not used the interviewee's real name for the sake of anonymity.

While some of the issues we discussed were sensitive to the informants, like information about their wages, relationship to their employer and their family situation, most of the interviewees were forthcoming in answering our questions. The most important methodological consideration was to make the interviewees realize that we were interested in hearing their story, which is arguably best achieved through attention, gestures and body language, and asking the right kind of follow up questions. This is what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as non-violent communication, steps taken to minimize the social distance between interviewee and interviewer (Bourdieu, et al., 1999). It was important for the informants to know who we were and what our purpose was, which was explained at the start of the interview. However, at times we could sense the uneasy flow of the conversation, which would make us stop and explain again to the interviewee the purposes for the interviewee and who I was. My beginner/intermediate proficiency in Mandarin Chinese enabled me to understand most of the content of the conversation after I had worked in the field for a while. Additionally, the ability to speak some Mandarin made it possible to somewhat stumblingly express my sincere interest in learning from the interviewees perspective of their social situation and the experiences from *dagong*.

2.4 Working with Research Assistants

The topic of working with research assistants has been much discussed within the literature in the last two decades (see Middleton and Cons, 2014; and Turner, 2010 for a useful reviews).

The main axis of this discussions center around either the relationship between the researcher and the research assistant (Turner, 2010) or between the research assistant and the researched (Temple and Young, 2004). Common topics discussed along these two axis are power relations, trust, positionality, and ethics (Lund, Panda and Dhal, 2015; Molony and Hammett, 2007; Temple and Edwards, 2002; Twyman, Morrison, and Sporton, 1999). The silencing or omission of the use of research assistants has been a point of entry, which has led to important gaping holes in many accounts of research (Middleton and Cons, 2014). This is important not only because it misrecognize the important work carried out by often local research assistants (Jentsch, 1998), but also as how data was gathered or constructed and by whom matters for its interpretation (Edwards, 1998). In the following I discuss how I and the research assistants worked in the field and how it influenced the research process.

During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to work with two individuals who served as interpreters, guides, brokers and friends. In February 2013, after settling in with my family in Kunming, I was introduced to the first interpreter through some contacts at a local research institution (see below on research access). My Chinese language proficiency was quite limited at that time, and I needed to recruit someone who had both mastered the local dialect and could speak English well. At the end of my fieldwork, I could keep up with most conversations with informants; however, I still relied on an interpreter. Nonetheless, mastering the language to some degree definitely proved valuable, as it provided me with greater access to the people we were interviewing and allowed me to independently ask informants follow-up questions. Part of the reason why my Chinese language proficiency improved, was that I took private language classes on days I or my interpreter did not have time to go to the field due to other obligations. Further, mastering some mandarin allowed me to discuss the meaning of words and phrases with the research assistants.

The first research assistant I worked with during this fieldwork was a young man with plenty of field experience from both his own studies in social anthropology and his subsequent work for foreigners on various projects in Yunnan. As this was my first experience of being someone's boss, I can honestly say that there was much insecurity on my own part over how best to wield this power and how to make the relationship between myself and the interpreter both relaxed and professional; this insecurity contributed to some of the difficulties we experienced down the road. The fieldwork started off in an area north of Kunming, where we

revisited families that I had met in 2009 while doing fieldwork for my master's thesis. One of the ideas I had was to track down these families to look at their geographies of work and their livelihood resources, and to assess how political changes within the area had affected these families. The farmers had experienced drought and were under the auspices of watershed policies that limited what they could collect from the outlands (particularly the forest), and most families were forced to rely on more than simply the land, for income. In arranging these interviews, I also hoped to meet family members who were either working in Kunming at the time or who had returned to once more live off the land.

On our first day in the field we visited a town that was approximately two hours north of Kunming, by bus ride. There, we met up with a friend of a friend. As the Chinese New Year was fast approaching, with its feasts, celebrations and people returning from their regular homes and workplaces to visit family, this was a good opportunity for us to see how the interview guides worked in practice. There were also important things to sort out between me and the research assistant. During our many travels back and forth, we had plenty of opportunities to discuss issues of research ethics and encounters, and how we should work together during the interviews. As my research experience was limited, I first had to become comfortable in the role of field researcher; simultaneously, I had to manage the relationship between myself and the interpreter. Fortunately, I knew the geography of the area well as I had been there during my master thesis fieldwork, which made me more comfortable taking charge of things in the field. My interpreter haggled with drivers, found out about the logistics (as we had to take several buses to get there) and quickly tried to determine who we should talk to about *da gong*, working for the boss. He also made great strides in ensuring village committee leaders that we did not intend to embarrass them or create any bad press about the area. Through these encounters, my interpreter became like a gatekeeper.

I quickly learned that my interpreter was used to working on his own, and we had many conversations about how to make sure that we communicated well enough during the interviews and conversations we had with research informants without making our informants feel uncomfortable. I also realized, during this first week and soon thereafter, that being two young men had some advantages and some drawbacks. As an example, in the first week of fieldwork, we were quickly introduced to the town leaders; one of the leaders invited us to a gathering of his friends that same evening. When we arrived, we were placed by the table with the host and

his comrades. Most of the people who were eating were men, and an important part of the meal was alcohol (as well as the toast that guests were expected to initiate with persons of different rank). Interviewing women, proved to be quite difficult, both because they became very shy when the two of us approached them and because some of them appeared to fear us. Other times, we had difficulty breaking out of the male-dominated environment with the necessary tact and posture to avoid humiliation for any of us.

The relationship with my first interpreter involved a continuous negotiation over the material components of the research, such as money, logistics and time. Since I had obligations towards my family who were staying in Kunming while the assistant had no such obligations we often found ourselves placed differently in discussions concerning how to spend our days and whether it was necessary to commute back and forth. With the benefit of hindsight, I see the need to express more clearly the terms we worked under, such as working hours and payment.

Later in the fieldwork, I arranged to have a new research assistant; this new assistant was a young woman who had plenty of experience working with disenfranchised groups in Kunming and elsewhere in China. From the beginning, she took a keen interest in the research project and understood very well the ethical dimensions of performing research among marginalized peasants and rural migrant workers. Retrospectively, I can say that this put me at ease when we travelled to meet our informants, as I could focus entirely on the interaction and the content of the conversations. It also helped that, at that time, I had become more at ease with going around and asking strange questions and striking a balance between conflated power relations and clear conveyance of my requirements from the onset. What I soon discovered was that her skills – in terms of communication and sensitivity towards other people's emotions and body language – quickly put people at ease about being the objects of research. Her way of breaking the ice often came with laughter and humbleness, and a steadfast dedication to reach out to our research informants. Our collaboration and friendship grew with time, as we shared many personal and field stories, as well as opinions, during meals and travels. Quickly, communication with a wide variety of village members, both young and old, men and women, became possible. What also changed was the fact that we were seldom expected to participate in male-dominated situations to the same degree. Whether this was due to her sensitivity and ability to put people at ease or simply due to people's gendered perceptions of us is difficult to determine.

Due to my experience with the first interpreter I started off the relationship with my second assistant quite differently. Issues of payment, time and logistics became less ambiguous as a written contract was made. The downside to such an approach is that it formalizes the relationship along the worker-employer axis. However, based on the previous experience I anticipated that if these things were less contestable the professional exchanges and friendship between us would be more relaxed. With both research assistant's conversations with men could easily switch from talking about livelihoods and hardship towards more mundane stuff of life like popular music, entertainment opportunities in the area, and the content of the white liquor we were often offered a taste of. Though these shifts in topics and issues of the conversations took place with both research assistants, the second assistant had a way of sensing when to withdraw and when to linger on in an often unspoken manner. My second research assistant displayed a tactfulness and sensitivity towards both the signals and expressions of research informants and I that had a profound way of relaxing the atmosphere of the interviews. The tone between the assistant and researcher developed into more like that of old friends and colleagues than that between worker and employer, at least from my perspective. A point to remember is that research assistants themselves get tired after a few interviews and it is often a good idea to make sure that he/she feels free to take breaks (see also Caretta, 2014). It is also important to acknowledge that I found that I and the second research assistant more strongly shared a common commitment to research that was grounded in the concerns and practices of the interviewees, which also facilitated the research process.

2.5 Ethics

Doing research in foreign environments and being a western man one faces many moral and ethical dilemmas. For instance, why should "someone like me" do research in China at all? Would it not be best if I left China to be represented and analyzed by the Chinese? Is research a form of colonialism? Furthermore, how can research within an authoritarian censorship that practice mass surveillance be carried out without putting informants and local research partners at risk? Moreover, how has these concerns affected my research and writing, have they become internalized as a form of self-censorship? I will in turn deal with these entangled questions, as some still remains unsolved and others I have tried at best to cope with through improvisation.

First, why do research in China at all as a westerner, is it not best if I and other aspiring foreign researchers leave China be? This is partly a concern that overlaps with colonialism and post-colonialism. I can only treat the complexities of this theme superficially here, but there is a disturbing history of colonialism and racism being carried out in the name of research where white European or American researchers have taken on to interpret, represent and appropriate the knowledge of “the other” (Said, 2006). Important forms of critique against this practice has been forwarded (Ahmed, 2000; Mies and Shiva, 1993). This is what Paul Robbins (2006) critiques when he argues that “research is theft”. However, research as theft and research as colonialism are not always correlating, so even “native” researchers might end up appropriating the knowledge and practices of locals. Thus, also “native” researchers cannot escape the entanglements of power that comes with unequal access and performative value through party-membership, class, gender, sexuality, race and age.

My access to the study villages was granted through local contacts at a research center in Kunming, at the Kunming Institute of Botany (KIB). I was lucky to have much autonomy in my research and I arranged for most of the research independently of KIB, though I would not have had the privilege of doing the research without their generous support. Thus, the professor who invited me at KIB, became my first gatekeeper. When going to China to do research, one needs an invitation from a host institution, and he generously provided me with the invitation and invited me to join a workshop of the host institution. Subsequently, the research assistants became my gatekeepers as I had to speak “through” them and as they helped me with logistics, setting up interviews per phone with migrant workers, and so forth. I have anonymized the research assistants here and in the articles, as a precautionary measure against any potential risk to their current lives. During the fieldwork, I also paid for a health insurance to the research assistants as the greatest’s risk we faced, physically, was when travelling back and forth between the research sites and our homes.

Throughout my fieldwork and particularly now in the writing phase I have been worried about how my research potentially could affect my partners at KIB, especially as my fieldwork was conducted at a time when the government seemed particularly anxious as there was a transition in the top leadership taking place (from the Hu-Wen administration, 2003-2013, to the Xi-Li administration, 2013-). As the head of the village committee of Baicai grudgingly told me, as long as my research kept under the radar and did not investigate into ethnic conflict I could

carry on my research but I should be quick about it. Thus, I have remained concerned about how my research could affect my local partners. While I have felt on this responsibility, this did not impede me in the issues I researched. On the contrary, I had much autonomy during the research both to pursue the topics I most yearned for and to roam around the countryside as long as I did the “official tour” when I first arrived at the villages, which includes visiting the heads of the village committees (the supreme policy body in the Chinese countryside, at the village level). This is not to say that I could do anything, rather my chosen topic of research (*dagong* and rural development – the practices and future of work) at the time, was perceived as apolitical. However, while the village officials had a say in whether I could carry out the fieldwork or not, the inhabitants of Kaoyan and Baicai had less opportunity to stop my fieldwork. We always introduced ourselves, by explaining who we were and the intentions of our fieldwork and all interviewees could of course turn us down or withdraw from the interview (see appendix 2).

Yet, the interviewees had not asked us to come there and neither did they decide that we should focus on working outside the village and their overall work. In this respect, the fieldwork I carried out involved strong asymmetry in terms of setting the terms of the encounter. On the other hand, we tried to be as careful as possible when it came to not disturbing the interviewees or taking too much of their time. To accommodate this, we did several interviewees when the interviewees were carrying out their work in the fields, in their kitchen or even as migrant workers. However, one incident revealed the limits of my own ethical reflections in the field, which happened as we were finishing an interview with a girl working at a supermarket in an urban village in Kunming. Suddenly the owner of the grocery store came running, clearly someone had called him or somehow notified him, because he came straight at us and scolded us for trespassing into his store. I can take some scolding; my worry was for the girl and my research assistant. The research assistant was used to scolding from her work, and assured me that she was fine, a topic we spoke of over and over, but the interviewee we could not know how her boss treated her afterwards. We made sure that she did not lose her job by asking the interviewee who had introduced us to check on her. When I left Kunming a couple of months later she still held her job, so at the very minimum we did not cause her to lose her livelihood. What seemed as a good idea at the time, to interview some while they were working with their consent and with assurances that it was not a problem from their colleagues and the interviewee, turned out to be a bad call from my side. If I had been more vigilant, and not so eager at getting

the interview we had set up beforehand, I would hopefully not have placed any informants in that situation. Overall, I carried out fieldwork that was far from flawless when it came to doing everything right in terms of power asymmetries and I have often wondered whether fieldwork in the global south by a male western researcher should ever be carried out (see Robbins, 2006 for a great exposition of similar doubts).

Yet, there is a case to argue that the interviewees are not an untouched village community, on the contrary, the one-party state, urban popular culture and the market is more than omnipresent the villagers lives. As such, if it had not been me with my commitment for improving the terms of conversations around the future of work for smallholders in contemporary China by discussing the gap between the lived experiences of peasant-migrant workers and the discourse on unfaltering urbanization, someone else would most definitely not be as vigilant and “critical” as I have tried to be, and would probably “speak on behalf of the subaltern” (Spivak, 2010) with less hesitation. As convincingly argued by Paul Robbins (2006), the best we can do is to attempt to redefine the terms of the conversation and unless we feel, fraught with hesitation and doubt for sure, committed to engage in these conversations, someone else, like the World Bank, Multinational Corporations or agents of the state, comes to define the terms of the conversation. Additionally, it could also be argued that is doubtful whether village life has ever been a pristine and completely egalitarian community in terms of ownership over resources and power to define the terms of conversations and what is deemed important (Wolf, 1990). Thus, fieldwork always involves muddled terrains when it comes to negotiating different ethical imperatives in the grey areas of research.

Furthermore, for me one of the pressing issues, in addition to how my research affects my partners in Kunming and the researched, is how these concerns have affected my own writing and thinking. That is, to what extent and in what ways have I been engaged in self-censorship? First, I think it is difficult to disentangle the ways I have been engaged in suppressing ideas or avoiding certain subjects due to the way this places the research participants or my partners in Kunming at risk. To avoid risking the pursuit of truth, and to remain free of impediments in my quest to re-interpret the work of mobile smallholders, I have avoided placing my research partners in Kunming in the position that they needed to go through my written material before publication. I have made this decision with hesitation and doubt, but I still feel that this work is my responsibility and if there is a risk in how it gets received then hopefully I will be targeted

as the culprit. Moreover, I have anonymized the research participants and field sites in the articles, as well as here, to make sure no one gets purged. To be honest, I am not sure whether anyone within the CCP would grant my work any interest, and it is probable that they will not see it as an attack to their project for the peasantries, but to minimize the risk I have made sure it will be very difficult for anyone to track down my informants and make connections between this work and my partners at KiB.

My “paranoia” when it came to the risk I could infer on the research participants and KiB was triggered by the increasing purge against civil society groups, that were outspoken against the CCP, as Xi Jinping took hold of the party in early 2013. The purge has escalated since 2013, and the boundaries between what is ok and not to express in public, are rapidly changing (Zhang, 2015) and many activists, lawyers, and dissidents have been purged by the secret police in the years that followed Xi Jinping’s transition to power (Philips, 2016). For me, when I was in Kunming, my biggest fear was that someone would steal my research, claim it as I was exiting China in the summer of 2013. That someone in the custom would take the paper questionnaires and the recordings of the interviews. My anxiety for this scenario had been triggered by the apparent surveillance of my internet connection that started in the summer of 2013 after I, in an emotional outburst, posted a slogan on WeChat (an online social media platform) that proclaims the hardship endured by the rural migrant workers. This slogan, “the weight of the three mountains” (the burden of levies and costs for education, health care and housing - *sanwandaxian*), is apparently not welcomed and I fear that I hit against the filters designed by the CCP to track down dissident slogans and concepts. After I had done it, my internet started having troubles that the family had not experienced during our stay, and I was wondering whether someone had started tracking my movements as well. I made sure to hide the papers and the recordings soon afterwards. I considered deleting the papers, to only keep an electronic copy, but I felt the risk would then be that someone at the printing office would make a copy of their own. Thus, I placed the papers in several bags (there are some great perks when traveling with kids, one is that you have more baggage and quickly comes through the security checks) and hoped for the best. Fortunately, no one stopped us at the airport. I tell this story to illustrate some of the ethical considerations, also when handling the data, one needs to take into account when doing research in contemporary China.

2.6 Data, Analysis and Coding

Data analysis has been central for the interpretive project I have been committed to carrying out. In total, we interviewed 32 migrant workers and did 52 household interviews. The age of the interviewees from the household interviews ranged between 24 and 74 years, and the average age was 43 years. We interviewed 29 men and 23 women, of whom 15 had worked outside their village in the past or were currently working outside for parts of the year. The migrant worker interviewees' ages ranged between 16 and 47 years (see table 1 and 2) and the average age was 27 years. These interviewees comprised 18 men and 14 women. Some had worked outside for only one year, while those with most experience "working for the boss" (*dagong*) had worked outside for at least parts of the year, for more than 30 years.

The information from the household interviews is compiled from the questionnaire (see appendix 2), field notes that I wrote down at the end of the working day, and if available, photos I took of the places we did interviews. The data from the migrant worker interviews is compiled from the questionnaire, the transcribed interview from the recording, my field notes and, if applicable, photos taken from the places we did interviews. To avoid conflicts of interest (Heimer & Thøgersen 2006), I had one person transcribing the taped interviews and who translated them from Mandarin to English. I did this because I felt it would be a good way to validate the work of my research assistant from the start, and to get someone else's opinion on the meaning of the phrases and words that had been spoken. Additionally, one of the research assistants felt that it was embarrassing to listen to their own voice on record, which added to my sense that hiring a third party to do the transcribing and translations of interviews was valuable. More importantly, the person I hired for the job of transcribing and translating was a woman from Yunnan, who herself had been brought up in the countryside. Thus, we often discussed the content of different expressions and words, that she would clarify. Moreover, she would often add a note in the translated interview if particular expressions came up or things she felt needed contextualization. In the translated interviews both the Chinese text and the English translation would be present, which became important later on in the data analysis (see below).

Table 1: Basic information about interviewees and interviews from the post-Deng Generation

Informant (age, gender, education, occupation)	Where the interview took place	Research assistant and access	Code
Liu Huafei 17 years, male, upper middle school – in a university canteen	In his room in an urban village outside Kunming	WJ, Ru Chen set us in touch, also got number from father <i>From Baicai</i>	SL11 son
Cia Zhen 18 years, woman, middle school – grocery store attendant	In the shop where she worked in an urban village within Kunming proper	WJ, Ru Chen set us in touch, they were acquaintances <i>From Guizhou province</i>	MW5
Ah Huafei 18 years old, male, upper middle school – sales/service	In the auto beatification shop he and his mates worked in north Kunming	WJ Ru Chen set us in touch, acquaintances <i>From village in same district as Kaoyan and Baicai</i>	MW11
Wang Xiaolin 19 years old, woman, middle school – sales	In the stall of her parents in a market in the east of Kunming	WJ, Ru Chen set us in touch, friends <i>From Jiangxi province</i>	MW7
Lin Liu 19 years old, woman, vocational school (pre-school teacher) – kindergarten	In a bubble tea bar (boba) in the urban village where she lived and worked accompanied by two friends in Kunming	WJ, the father gave her number to us <i>From Baicai</i>	SL14
Sun Bao 19 years old, woman, vocational school (sales) – Sales	In the canteen of the shopping mall where she worked in Kunming	WJ, Ru Chen set us in touch <i>From Baicai</i>	SLW2
Xi Ran 20 years old, male, middle school dropout (completed primary school) – Excavator driver	In his parents living room with tv, drinks in Kaoyan	SF, met by when walking in village <i>From Kaoyan</i>	DM27
Ning Xing 21 years, woman, middle school – unemployed	In her parents' house while watching television, accompanied by mother and spouse in Kaoyan	SF, her mother <i>From Kaoyan</i>	DM17daughter

Informant (age, gender, education, occupation, salary)	Where the interview took place	Research assistant and access	Code
Zhang Fei 21 years old, male, middle school – water and electricity installation	In a restaurant, accompanied by my RA friend in Kunming	SF, his father gave us his number <i>From Kaoyan</i>	DM18 Son
Bai Chao 21 years old, male, upper middle school – Sales	In a restaurant in Kunming	SF, Zhang Fei gave us his phone number <i>From Kaoyan</i>	DM28
Mei Lin 22 years old, woman, vocational school (nursing) – nursing clinic in vicinity of Kunming	Outside her parents’ house in Kaoyan	SF, we stayed in her parents’ home – did not want to use a recorder <i>From Kaoyan</i>	DM11
Li Mei 22 years old, woman middle school - grocery store attendant	In the store where she worked in Kunming – interview interrupted by her boss	WJ, Ru Chen set us in touch, friends <i>From village in north in Yunnan</i>	MW6
Zheng Xiaoting 22 years old, male, middle school – unemployed	In the urban village where he stayed at a friend’s apartment in south of Kunming	WJ, Ru Chen set us in touch <i>From Baicai</i>	SL17
Chen Li 22 years old, male, vocational school (assembly line work) – tea processing factory 2000 Yuan pr month	In the urban village in the south of Kunming in a park where he lived (same as Zheng and Lin)	WJ, his father in the village gave us his number <i>From Baicai</i>	SL18
Shi Tu 23 years old, woman, vocational school (law) – administration	In a park near where she worked after having dinner in downtown Kunming	WJ, her father gave us her number, <i>From Baicai</i>	SL31
Wei Ru 23 years old, woman, middle school – supermarket 1800 Yuan pr month	In a park in downtown Kunming accompanied by her friend	WJ, Ru Chen gave us her number, <i>From Baicai</i>	SLW

Informant (age, gender, education, occupation, salary)	Where the interview took place	Research assistant and access	Code
Ru Chen 24 years old, male, vocational school (hairdresser) – hairdresser	In a bubble tea bar in an urban village in the east of Kunming (same as Cia and Li)	WJ, met him when working in Baicai, <i>From Baicai</i>	SL10
Xia Wei 24 years old, woman, married with one child, middle school – care maker and farmer	In her parents' in-law house in Baicai when she was watching her son and cleaning the floor	WJ, met her while working in Baicai <i>From a village in Yunnan</i>	SL12
Na Min 24 years old, woman, vocational school (accounting) – accounting	In her parents' home as she was home relaxing in Baicai	WJ, met her when we looked for household members <i>From Baicai</i>	SL21
Ma Ting 28 years old, male, middle school – construction	In the construction site where he was working in Kunming	WJ, our driver introduced us <i>From village in north eastern Yunnan</i>	MW9

Table 2: Basic information about interviewees and interviews from the post-Mao Generation

Informant (age, gender, education, occupation)	Where the interview took place	Research assistant and access	Code
Bo Mu 30 years old, woman, middle school – care maker and farmer	In the kitchen of her in-laws as she was doing dishes in Baicai Did not want to use tape recorder	WJ, met her while we were doing household interviews in Baicai <i>From a village in Yunnan</i>	SL3
Chang Lu 32 years old, male, middle school – construction/demolition	At his workplace in a demolition site in Kunming	WJ. Our driver introduced us. <i>From a village in Yunnan</i>	MW10
Lu Min 33 years old, woman, primary school – care maker and farmer	Outside her house in Kaoyan as she was watching her son	SF. Met while we did household interviews in Kaoyan. <i>From a village in Yunnan</i>	DM24
He Xian 34 years old, woman, no formal schooling – care maker and homemaker (preparing food, laundering, cleaning for workteam of her husband, in construction site)	At the construction site in Kunming	WJ. Introduced through the network of our driver <i>From a village in Yunnan</i>	MW3(2)
Guo Ting 34 years old, male, middle school - construction	At the construction site in Kunming	WJ. Introduced through the network of our driver <i>From a village in Yunnan</i>	MW8
Yan Zhou 35 years old, male, middle school – ticket collector	Outside his workplace in downtown Kunming accompanied by his wife	WJ. An acquainted of WJ <i>From a village in Yunnan</i>	MW2
Ling Bai 36 years old, male, primary school – team leader at construction site	At the construction site where they work and live in Kunming	WJ. The brother of our driver. <i>From a village in Yunnan</i>	MW3(1)
Bing Zhan 41 years old, male, primary school – driver and demolition	Outside the apartment block where I lived in Kunming	WJ. I recruited him as our driver <i>From a village in Yunnan</i>	MW1

Informant (age, gender, education, occupation)	Where the interview took place	Research assistant and access	Code
Ning Ah 43 years old, male, primary school – fertilizer plant (manual work)	In the kitchen/living room of his home. Accompanied by his eldest daughter, wife, and father	SF. Met when we worked in Kaoyan <i>From Kaoyan</i>	DM17 father
Liu Chang 45 years, male, primary school – Part time sales, part time farmer	In his living room, in Baicai	SF. His wife introduced us after meeting her in Baicai <i>From Baicai</i>	SL11 father
Zhang Bo 47 years old, male, primary school – part time farmer and part time in electricity and water installation	In his living room, in Kaoyan accompanied by his wife	SF. Met while we were working in Baicai <i>From Baicai</i>	DM18 Father

In terms of how I analyzed the data, I started out with all the translated interviews in separate word files, before I started using the software program *Scrivener*, where I could add all the information into one single format. In *Scrivener* I could easily jump between different interviews, add more information to the interviews or preliminary coding, and search for keywords that were found in several interviews. It was also useful for writing down ideas after I had read the interviews. The main advantage of using *Scrivener* was that everything was present on the same screen, I could easily search for phrases or words that assembled all the interviews where the word or phrase was present, and I got a result, and could then compare the situation the word or phrase had been used in the different interviews.

I also used Excel for compiling data on the interviewees, such as age, sex, salary, years of migrant working experience, educational attainment, and occupation. I also used Excel for compiling data from the household interviews, which included both numerical and more perceptual primary materials from the field diary and questionnaires. The Excel sheet provided me with an overview of the households in the villages in terms of demography, livelihood mixture, expenditures, aspirations, and material resources (housing, means of transport, agricultural land, and durable consumer goods).

I would often in the beginning of the analysis of migrant workers read the entire interview, and then the next in the same way. As a preliminary data analysis, I, after reading through each interview, made a short story from each interviewee based on the pieces of data I had. While these initial steps of data analysis were something I did more on intuition than former training or from some codified guide, after a while I felt the need to become more systematic. At this point, I picked up Crang and Cook (2007: chapter 8), who recommends a stepwise procedure to how one can work with qualitative data. They include 10 steps, which all deals with data analysis. The first step they recommend is to re-read the primary materials, like translated interviews, questionnaires, photos and field diary. Check. In step two, they recommend the researcher to type up the diary extracts in order to recapture some emotional flavor. Thus, I started adding the diary extracts to the interviews with the migrant workers in Scrivener, so that I could read it together. I also did this with the household interviews in Excel. In Excel, I also started listing what kind of different materials I had on each household, which ranges between migrant interview, questionnaire, pictures, and field notes. Thus, I started to build a comprehensive overview of each “case”, each household and each migrant interviewee, which became an important way for me to start with the preliminary coding of the data.

In step three Crang and Cook (2007) recommends to start thinking about what is said and what the meaning of each statement is, both your own and the interviewees. Try to write down in the wide right margin they (Crang and Cook, 2007) recommend, alongside the text. As the questionnaire had already pre-coded much of the range of responses from the household interviews, the meaning of each statement was not something that needed much probing due to the detailed and non-open ended questions. This is not to say that these primary materials did not involve interpretation, on the contrary for instance, the question of expenditures told me something about both financial burdens for the families in different parts of their life-courses (such as when rearing children in terms of educational costs and for medical care for the elderly in the family), costs for farming, and the difficulties caused by the gap in rationalities between being paid in lump-sums for the produce from the land and running expenses throughout the whole year, which meant that most families had to borrow money from their kin in order to pay for expenses. Similarly, we asked all households about changes in the technology they used for farming, land redistribution, and how the watershed policies affected their families., the women would emphasize the importance of expenditures for food, including alcohol and tobacco, more

than men, while the men generally had more detailed information about the expenditures for farming. For the migrant interviews, I added notes in Scrivener as I re-read the interviews of things that I felt was of importance or that I understood the interviewees meant was important. In the transcripts of the interviewees, I had instructed the transcriber/translator to include pauses, sighs and other sounds that popped up in the conversation (also if background sounds disturbed the quality of the sound on the tape). This became important for the interpretation of the meaning of what was said in the conversation, particularly in the case of expectations for the future for the interviewees, which turned out to be a much more loaded subject than I had foreseen as the future seemed more closed and determined by their present situation than I had anticipated.

Thus, I had already started step four of Crang and Cooks (2007) guide, where they recommend to code the annotations from step three according to similar themes, actions, events, sentiments. They recommend the coding to be done with abbreviations or coded words, and to simultaneously code the context of the remarks and the setting of the interview. I used a notebook to make sure that I remembered what the abbreviations meant, to make sure that I did not forget it. This book was also used for sketching out themes that seemed interesting or flickering of ideas (step 6 and 7 in Crang and Cook, 2007).

Some themes became visible as I worked through the primary materials, however, from different points of views. In article 1 I looked for the correspondence between different practices of the interviewees, such as child rearing and working outside the village as migrant labor. Thus, I had started step five of the list made by Crang and Cook (2007) of how to carry out data analysis, where they argue that the researcher should re-read the materials and “firm-up” one’s codes by noting down all the categories that one’s has invented and that particular care should be given the categories that are used by the interviewees. By systematizing the data, I detected patterns in the mobility of work for the interviewees that varied with gendered life-course transitions and with social generations (article 1). The temporality of the mobility of work became very important to me at this point, and as stated in chapter 4, it also hinted at the gaps of bracketing off either the agrarian/smallholder or capitalist/urban parts of the expectations and practices of the interviewees.

In the second article, I followed up on the topic of generations from a Bourdieusian point of view. The Bourdieusian point of view, made me place much emphasis on the “styles” of each generation; the different narratives they produced, the divergent sets of expectations for being a peasant in liminal shape as both smallholders and urbanite, their different relationship to agriculture, i.e. how they talked about it and what they emphasized (article 2), and how the informalization of wage-labor affected the expectations of the interviewees. In article 3 I intended to bring the lives of the migrant interviewees and the stay behind smallholders, and I struggled immensely to make these connections. They were there in the primary materials, and in the way, I had set out to do the study as I had interviewed both sides, but I did not know how to reconnect them without reducing the issue to studying local livelihoods. That is, I wanted to make an impact on the understanding of work and workers that was prevalent in the literature on rural migrant workers in post-Mao China. At this point I happened to stumble upon the Marxist feminist literature that I illuminate in article 3, which also allowed me to take the totality of the context of the work of the interviewees into consideration. For article 3 I coded according to different agricultural practices to provide an overview of the villages (see also chapter 3), gendered division of labor in the households based on observations written down in the field diary (I took this part out of the article, it is included in chapter 3 here), the work within the households, informalization in wage-labor and its impact of aspirations (which I had “discovered” from the primary materials when writing article 2), and viability of smallholder farming (a theme much discussed among the interviewees) where I particularly highlighted the costs and meager incomes in article 3.

As such, I had already completed step 9 and the 10 and final step of Crang and Cook’s (2007) recommendation of how to code the data, what they call sifting, sorting and making sense of it all. Step 9 in Crang and Cook (2007) points to the need to establish ways of seeing how the materials fit together by making cross reference systems. I am not sure whether I can check the box form step 8 in Crang and Cook, where they state that by now the data is in a manageable form, I still feel that there are untapped potentials that is left unexplored as I reach the end of my dissertation. Due to the amount of data I have struggled to interpret it and manage it in a systematic or coherent way. On the other hand, the second part of step 8 in Crang and Cook related to how the focus shifts (in the data analysis) from individual statements to the ways they relate to each other (sentiments, acts, emphasis), which I feel I have sorted through in the

articles. In the final section of this chapter I deal with the trustworthiness of the data and interpretation.

2.7 Trustworthiness

In a much-cited article, Graneheim and Lundman (2003) discuss the importance of credibility and transferability to the trustworthiness of a research project. In chapter 6 I deal with transferability or generalization, here I will briefly summarize how I strived to enhance the credibility of the research. “Credibility deals with the focus of the research and refers to confidence in how well data and process of analysis address the intended focus” (Graneheim and Lundman, 2003: 109).

Overall I have tried to include a wide variety of interviewees from within the targeted group of smallholders. Both in terms of the age-range and gender I have tried to enhance the credibility of the final results of this thesis by making sure that the research did not skew too heavily against the young or old, or women or men. This is not to say that I have aimed for representativeness in a larger population, but that within the sample population, smallholders, I did not exclude information solely based on my own unwarranted bias or misconduct in the field. Of course, it is not unproblematic that I have not included more interviewees from ethnic minorities as I was working in Yunnan, as they make up c. 38 percent of the province’s population (Wikipedia). The reason for this skewed sampling on my behalf is partly to blame on the choice of study villages, which are both Han ethnic, the majority of Chinese are defined as Han (c. 92 percent of the population), and partly because when I expanded the net of migrant interviewees beyond those from Kaoyan and Baicai, I did not make an attempt to target ethnic minority interviewees specifically. Thus, I ended up with less smallholder interviewees who are ethnic minorities than what would be ideal. There is no true justification I can make for this omission, rather, I argue that it poses limits to the credibility of the interpretation here. However, as I did not aim to study expectations of urbanization in terms of work for ethnic minority smallholders I do not see this as a major inadequacy to the research design of the thesis. Moreover, I have tried to include a wide range of migrant workers with different occupations, educational attainment, and different intervals of migrant working experience to enhance the internal consistency of the interpretations of varying and possibly changing expectations for urbanization in terms of work for the interviewees.

3 Study Area in the Context of the Rural-Urban Political Economy of Work for Smallholders in post-Deng China

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will contextualize two of the primary sites of work that smallholders actively relate to through their being in the world, the smallholding and the workplaces of the urban, within Deng and post-Deng China. Subsequently, I position my work alongside the typical representations of rural migrant workers, stemming from the body of work I call Chinese working class studies, to contrast and make the reader see how I extend my own case in dialogue with this scholarship. Thereafter I will make a description of Kunming and the study villages. However, I begin this chapter with a brief sketch of the changes in work and life with the change from Maoism to Dengism to contextualize the wider political economic landscape that smallholders navigate within.

3.2 From Maoism to Dengism

The backdrop of the massive rural-urban mobility of rural migrant workers in China, now totaling somewhere between 150-280 million workers, is the reform era, starting in 1978, and the withering of Maoist ideology and the remaking of its institutional pillars of collective farming and geographical mobility controls. With the reforms introduced by the Deng Xiaoping administration (1978-1992), the countryside became the first site of liberal policies when collective farming was dismantled and the household again became primary producers (Unger, 2002). As a result, peasants are now entitled to use-rights over the land, though the ownership of it remains in the hands of the state (Huang, 2011b). Moreover, the Deng administration abolished the Mao-state's institutionalized welfare for rural citizens, organized through the People's Commune, with the effect of dwindling state-organized support for welfare (Lee and Selden, 2007). However, due to increasing prices for grains from agriculture, improved yields from the land and newfound employment opportunities within both Town and Village Enterprises in nearby townships and as migrant labor in cities, incomes generally increased for the rural population during the first half of the 1980s (Day, 2013a).

Yet, in the late 1980s rural incomes stagnated as yields from the land levelled off and farmers faced increased taxation to agriculture (Zhang, *et al.*, 2015). For smallholders, farming

gradually became a means for social security, for absorbing the sick, the unemployed, and reproducing the next generation in the face of increasing costs of living in urban areas (Yan, 2003). In addition, with increasing prices for farm inputs, illustrated by the double-digit growth in prices for fertilizers in the late 1980s, this made smallholder farming increasingly difficult to sustain (Yan, 2003). Moreover, the land to human ratio partly contributed to the increasing need for smallholders to find alternative outlets for their “overcapacity” in terms of workers on the farm. Illustratively, in 1952 there were 12.5 *mu* (one hectare corresponds to 15 *mu*) on average per farm laborer available, while in 1995 only 2 *mu* were available per worker.⁶ The amount of arable land dropped from 107 million hectares in 1957 to only 99 million in 1977 (Solinger, 1999: 154). The number of farmers had in the same period grown with 60 percent. Hence, in the mid-1990s officials estimated the number of redundant or labor surplus to be anywhere between 100-200 million people (Solinger, 1999: 155). In fact, the rural population in general in China by the mid-2000 was often represented as left-behind. This leftbehindness was ascribed the fact that more than 200 million rural migrant workers had left to work in the cities while married women, children and the elderly often stayed behind (Biao, 2007; Yan, 2003, p. 586). However, in times of crisis such as unemployment, sickness or injury and for the socialization and care for their children and elderly, migrant workers still rely on the land and the unwaged labor of their family members back home, illustrated by the more than 60 million children “left-behind” in the countryside (Jingzhong and Lu, 2011).

What is more, many migrants return during the busy season in agriculture to assist their families (Fan, 2008; Murphy, 2002; Ren, 2013). The split household living arrangements, are exacerbated by the rural-urban citizenship scheme, the *hukou* system, as rural citizens are not entitled to socialized goods such as unemployment insurance, public housing, reimbursement of medical expenditures, or pensions when living in the city (Chan and Buckingham, 2008; Ren 2013).

When Deng Xiaoping did his famous southern tour in 1992 as he formally was stepping down

⁶ However, if the current demographic trends continue, which seems likely given the latest forecasts (UN, 2015), the land per worker ratio might change favorably for smallholder agriculture in the future. On the other hand, the increasing dependency ratio per worker also means that new and improved systems for childcare, healthcare, and care for the elderly needs to be introduced both in the countryside and the cities of China to improve the well-being of the population.

from his position as premier of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the state, he strategically visited cities located in the Southeastern parts of the country. This happened after most of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) attention during the 1980s had been on rural reforms. Deng's travels signaled the Party's growing attention towards urban regeneration through infrastructure investments, demolition of the Maoist urban labor system (the iron-rice bowl) and the rise of market driven redistribution where the new ethic was captured in the famous promise of «common affluence will come after some people get rich first» (Lim, 2014: 234). Indeed, China of the 1990s came to be steeped in the image of the urban, driven largely by an informal «joint venture» between public officials and real estate developers, who changed the face of the built environment radically through demolition of former residential areas, which they replaced with shiny skyscrapers, broad avenues suitable for automobiles, and fancy shopping malls.

In contrast to the crisis of the Chinese peasantry of the 1990s, the early 2000s, sparked by protests by rural residents over land expropriations and the agricultural tax, has seen a proliferating academic debate (Day, 2013a) and attendant policy intervention by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to rejuvenate the countryside (Looney, 2015). The CCP woke up from the urbanization craze and realized that the cry from many peasants was not for the “right to the city” but the “right to agrarian livelihoods” (Walker, 2009). Presented as a challenge to the legitimacy of the CCP, the party between 2004 and 2006 abolished the unpopular agricultural tax, and in late 2005 launched a comprehensive policy package under the slogan of “Building a New Socialist Countryside” (Ahlers and Schubert, 2013; Thøgersen 2010). The stated goal of these policies is to raise rural incomes and rejuvenate rural areas by investing particularly in education and healthcare (Ahlers and Schubert, 2010). In short, the recently introduced programs targeting issues such as poverty alleviation, healthcare expenditures and costs of education, partly alleviates some of the difficulties for sustaining smallholder life.

Symbolically, the Deng Xiaoping City has in many ways become what characterizes modern China. As such, it is reasonable to argue that the Deng Xiaoping administration, at a time (1978-) when China was on the brink of national and party-state crisis in terms of legitimacy, managed to change the course of history and throughout the 1990s, creating a new hegemony that eventually emerged to replace Maoism (Mulvad, 2016). The hegemony of Dengism, is built around the vision of Deng Xiaoping development model, which relied on direct investments by

the state in vital infrastructure such as roads, airports, ports, telecommunication, and energy systems, coupled with selected zones to produce commodities for export to the world market (export processing zones). These zones were established in the southeastern and eastern ports, where easy transport to the market was seen as important allocative factors (Chan, 2008). While this growth model crystalized during the 1990s, by 2010 the expectation had become that urbanization itself would spur China into prosperity, within both the CCP (Andreas and Zhang, 2015) and particularly within consultancy and business circles (Chan, 2014). It is in this context, what I call the post-Deng⁷ era (1992-), as two of the main institutional pillars of the Deng Xiaoping administration are now at stake, smallholder farming and wage-labor, that I now move to contextualize the rural-urban mobility of work for smallholders.

3.3 The Mobility of Work Between Smallholding and Wage-Work: The Context of Smallholding in post-Deng China

The contextualization of smallholding and urban based wage-work within post-Deng China takes place amid implementation of policies that are meant to gradually consolidate landholdings in the countryside (Andreas and Zhang, 2015) in the “post-taxation era” (Day, 2013b). Reimagining the countryside in the post-taxation era, which set off between 2004-2006 depending on when the government in each province phased out the agricultural tax that used to be their main source of income, has become a major area of symbolic contestation within the CCP and the Chinese and foreign China scholars (Day, 2013a, 2013b). In the midst of this debate, dwells the question of whether the smallholder farming has any future in the post-taxation era. Two main points of view are set forward in the debate, one arguing for the abolishment of smallholder farming due to its inability to deliver enough food for the rising demand for nutrients by the increasingly well-fed urban population. Particularly the mainstream within the CCP has made this argument, where larger landholdings managed by agribusinesses and entrepreneurial farmers are deemed to be the main actors of this transformation (Andreas and Zhan, 2015; Huang, 2011b). This orthodox point of view on the future of smallholder farming, either implicitly or explicitly take the Western historical experience as its baseline, where the abolishment of family-run smallholder agriculture is interpreted as both necessary

⁷ With the pre-fix “post” I am not implying that China has moved beyond Dengism, rather that the continued direction of the Deng Xiaoping development vision is at stake. Arguably, the peasantry plays a key role in these debates (Day, 2013a).

and inevitable (Huang, 2011a).

Scholars and activists forwarding the second point of view in the debate over the future of smallholder farming in the post-taxation era, argue that the path towards the future should bring with it the cornerstone of Chinese agriculture for a millennium, family run smallholder agriculture (Huang, 2011a). Some used historical documentation to argue for the versatility and resilience of smallholder agriculture (Huang, 2011a), others argued for the futility of a utopia built around the desire to move more than 600 million smallholders off the land and into the city as this would create insurmountable challenges for employment, sanitation, housing and food (Wen, *et al.*, 2011). They feared the “Latin-Americanization” of Chinese cities, where most smallholders would end up as urban slum dwellers. The work of Mike Davis (2006) in documenting the trajectory of urbanization in the global south in his monuments book, *The Planet of Slums*, has thus been influential for this heterodox position on the future of smallholder farming in the Chinese discourse on urbanization (in Day, 2013a).

The scholars and activists around the “New Rural Reconstruction” movement, combine a critical discourse against the inevitability of urbanizing smallholders and activist work in smallholder villages. The “New Rural Reconstruction” movement, which set off during the mid-2000s, works to rejuvenate the countryside after two decades of public disinvestments by establishing social and education programs for smallholder communities based on the notion that enhancing popular participation within the countryside is the key to revitalization and building an alternative future (Jacka, 2013). Thus, in the debate over the future of smallholder farming, there are divergent points of view, which I here term the orthodox point of view that sees the demise of smallholder farming as either inevitable and/or desirable, and the heterodox point of view that argues for the continued importance of smallholder farming, its versatility faced with a rapidly changing economic and ecological situation, and for China to take an alternative path towards the future different from the West.

Actually it is particularly the British experience that is taken as the “prototype” of the historical decline of the family farm in many development theories, either implicitly or explicitly. While the extent of smallholder family farming has historically declined in Europe, Australia and North-America, even in these parts of the world there is still a considerable number of farms that are family run and defined as small-scale (van der Ploeg, 2009). Looking beyond “the

West”, one finds that small-scale farming is the predominant form of farming in the world, even in countries that have experienced considerable economic growth and urbanization (Graeb, *et al.*, 2014). For East and South-East Asia, Jonathan Rigg and his co-authors document the high persistence of smallholders in this region after decades of urbanization and economic development (Rigg, Salamanca and Thompson, 2015). Philip Huang and his co-authors documented recently that only 3 percent of those employed in farming in contemporary China are hired by others, while the remaining percentage remains family farmers (Huang, Yuan and Peng, 2012). Moreover, while China’s urbanization has surpassed the 50 percent mark, 17 percent of these urbanites are rural migrant workers who are registered with an agricultural *hukou*, i.e. their citizenship and social welfare entitlements are rural based (Chan, 2009; 2012). It might be inferred, that most these workers continue to depend on the smallholding also after they move to the city (Chan, 2012; He, 2007). Thus, despite the orthodox view of the inevitability of the demise of smallholder agriculture and a transition in terms of the world of work towards wage-workers, the existing reality at least begs the question of how smallholders are relating to their smallholdings, also those who are on the move. It is this proposition that I intend to take seriously, when in research question 1 I ask how peasant-workers and their kin relate to the smallholding. This is researched in paper 1, 2 and 3.

3.4 The Mobility of Work Between Smallholding and Wage-Work: The Context of Wage-Work in Post-Deng China

Meanwhile, in terms of wage-work peasant-migrant workers, the global financial crisis of 2008 represents a watershed moment in the post-Deng era, as millions of workers were laid off. It has been estimated that more than 20 million rural migrant workers lost their work in 2008, and more than 14 million returned to their smallholding and did not go out to work after the Chinese New Year (Cai and Chan, 2009; Chan, 2010). This represents the first major blow to the national labor market, since the abolishment of the “iron-rice-bowl” in the mid-1990s, which at that time most directly affected industrial workers who were still employed in state owned companies after the Maoist period (Lee, 2007). The global financial crisis seems to have affected how smallholders think about *dagong* work (literally meaning working for the boss) as well, though this is not researched to date, as the increase in new migrants in urban areas has dropped from 5.5 percent per annum in 2010 to 1.3 percent in 2015 (CLB, undated).

In terms of the situation of work for peasant-workers, more than 65 percent of all rural migrant workers have no working contract, their wages are too low to allow them to settle with their families in urban areas, and they often work overtime with little or no extra compensation as their working hours are unregulated (CLB, undated; World Bank, 2014). Furthermore, though rural migrant workers make demands on their employers, either through direct negotiations or through collective mobilization, the lack of independent labor unions that can represent them thwarts their bargaining power. Added to this, last year the government added a few more million workers to the unemployed, the “reserve army of labor”⁸, as part of its plans to restructure state owned companies within the steel and coal industries (Philips, 2016; Reuters, 2016). Additionally, salaries received by migrant workers are often too meager to support the living expenses for a whole family living in the city (Gaetano & Jacka, 2004; Pun, 2005: 49-77). Most of these workers, live within so-called “urban-villages”, housing estates that are run by former smallholders who have become landlords for current rural migrant workers joining the ranks of the urban workforce (Liu, *et al.*, 2010).

In terms of occupations taken on by rural migrant workers in cities, there has been a marked decline of peasant-workers employed in manufacturing since 2010. For whereas 36.7 percent of rural migrant workers worked within manufacturing in 2010, this had declined to 31 percent by 2015. Commentators have argued that it is the increasing prices for Chinese labor that has made investors turn their eye towards other parts of southeast Asia in recent years when they look for new sites of commodity production (CLB, undated). During the same time span, the amount of migrant workers employed within construction work increased from 16.1 percent to 22.3 percent. The government has heavily invested in infrastructure and particularly housing after the economic crisis, as a means of jump-starting the economy after the crisis in 2008, and this has generated new employment possibilities for rural migrant workers (CLB, undated). Thus, the working life of rural migrant workers generally involves low-wages, precarious employment, and a difficult bargaining position, which makes settling permanently in urban areas difficult if not impossible for most smallholder families.

In terms of the sector now employing most of these informalized peasant-workers, the statistics reveals that while 13 percent worked in services in 1980, by 2015 roughly 35 percent worked

⁸ The expression “reserve army of labor” refers to those who are unemployed or underemployed within the Marxist vocabulary (Jonna and Foster, 2016).

within services (CLB, undated; Zhou, 2012: 2). As such, it is reasonable to argue that most peasant migrant workers work within the informal service economy characterized by transience, discontinuous employment and unregulated working conditions and hours (Zhou 2012). These workers hire accommodation on their own and often work within petty-capitalist workplaces who are not easily singled out as class adversaries, which stands in contrast to the rural migrant workers typically featuring in popular and scholarly representations of these workers, i.e. those who work within the subsidiaries of transnational corporations within the export processing zones. Thus, as I worked with the question of rural-urban mobility of work for smallholders in Yunnan I tried to extend “the case” of rural migrant workers into another setting than what is normally presented in the literature, through interpreting the interviewees’ expectations and rural-urban movement of work in conjunction with the historicization of Chinese working class studies with my own findings. I particularly asked what experiences and expectations the migrant-interviewees had to wage-work and how these were differentiated by generation, in research question 3 (article 2).

3.5 Chinese Working Class Studies

What I call Chinese Working Class studies is not a self-defined body of scholarship, but rather defined here by its ‘object of study’, rural migrant workers toiling the floor of the subsidiaries of global manufacturers (Pun, 1999). This body of work takes the category of class as its central foci, where issues of class situation (working conditions and class antagonism *vis-à-vis* the state and capital), praxis (strikes, legal actions) and the changing identities of the class itself remain central concerns. In short, class formation is the central question for this body of scholarship. Inspired by the cultural approach to class championed by English historian E. P. Thompson, scholars working within the Chinese working class studies approach class less as a social location and more as a contingent-making of class as culture (Pun, 2005). Maybe due to the resemblance, even of the familiarity of the manufacturing landscape found in the Pearl River Delta with the imaginary of the British industrial revolution, these cities and assembly line workers have come to occupy a particularly prominent place in the literature on rural migrant workers in post-Mao China (C. K. Chan, 2012; Chan and Pun, 2009; Chan and Selden, 2014; Chang, 2009; Lee, 2007; Pun and Lu, 2010).

The manufacturing workplaces found in particularly Guangdong Province are characterized by the dormitory labor regime in which workers live and work in the same location next to each other, often for prolonged periods, which is either implicitly or explicitly defined as one of the main ingredients for the formation of a working-class consciousness (e.g., Solinger 2012, 1018). Furthermore, the formation of a working class is arguably achieved through class struggle against identifiable adversaries (Guo, 2012). This precondition for working-class formation is arguably present in the Pearl River Delta, where large multinational corporations and their supply chains are located.

A generational perspective has recently become the main analytical plot of scholars investigating the possible formation of a working class in the manufacturing stronghold of the Pearl River Delta in contemporary China. Scholars working within the south-eastern corner of China have pointed to the emerging working class consciousness awakening within the post-1990 generation of migrating peasants (C. K. Chan 2010; Pun and Chan 2013). The explanation is found within the “structure of feeling” of this cohort itself:

since the post-1990 generation of migrant workers is better educated than the preceding generation, this generation is more likely to demand better living and working conditions ... in terms of occupational achievement, income rewards, social status, and rights of citizenship. (Pun and Koo 2015, 412–413).

Despite the important insights, scholars drawing on ethnography within the Pearl River Delta have brought to the debate on the yearnings for urban life on behalf of the post-1990 cohort of peasant-workers and the working life of rural migrant workers more generally, there is a danger in omitting the experiences and political economy of those working in other urban contexts. Thus, in this dissertation I attempt to investigate the work and depicture the situation of another “type” of smallholders, who stay at the smallholding or venture closer to home for *dagong*, within an old city yet with a new “face”, and who work within petty-capitalist workplaces as they work to maintain the smallholder way of life back home or remain undecided regarding the future, seen with the young generation.

3.6 Study Area: Kunming

Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan, was in 2015 the home to more than 6.67 million residents, though rural migrant workers were not counted (Sally, 2016). Since the mid-1990s, Kunming has undergone extensive demolition of old housing and redevelopment with construction of high-rises, wide-boulevards, shopping malls and office buildings (personal communication, Ragnhild Lund, 2012 and own observation, 2013). Li Zhang (2006: 461), an anthropologist and native of Kunming, depicts the change in Kunming's cityscape in the following way:

the old narrow alleyways and traditional residential houses with their dark-blue tile roofs are quickly disappearing, giving way to multilane boulevards, gigantic shopping plazas, up-scale housing compounds, luxury hotels, and neon-lighted entertainment centers, all powerful physical markers of modernity in today's China.

This "urban bias" in symbolism is matched by the investment priorities of the provincial government. This illustrated by how this period of redevelopment of Kunming, coincided with a period of rapid economic growth for Yunnan province. Moreover, most of the gains from this growth were redistributed to urban areas through public infrastructure development. Meanwhile, between 1990 and 2008 the share of the provincial GDP coming from agriculture dropped from 37 percent to 18 percent, while the contribution from the industrial sector rose from 35 percent in 1991 to 43 percent in 2008. Simultaneously the share of the service sectors contribution to the provincial GDP grew from 28 percent in 1991 to more than 39 percent in 2002 (Donaldson, 2011: loc 3562 of 5276). Taken together, these numbers reveal the urban bias of the provincial government of Yunnan in its development strategy, as the pillars of infrastructure investments, tourism, natural resource extraction and tobacco/rubber processing industry all were heavily located in urban areas (Donaldson, 2011: Loc 3562 of 5276). Additionally, the high rate of taxation suffered by agriculturalists in Yunnan during the mid-1990s, only matched nationally by the few farmers left in Shanghai at the time, contributed to making smallholder agriculture increasingly unsustainable at the time (Donaldson, 2011). The Provincial government added to the burden of smallholders in Yunnan during the 1990s and first half of the 2000s, as Yunnan became the last province nationally to drop the agricultural tax in 2006.

Beneath the skyscrapers and outside the up-scale housing compounds one can observe the multitude of petty-capitalist workplaces managed and owned by small-scale entrepreneurs who in addition to having their own kin working in their establishment, often hire “outsiders” to work for them. All the 32 migrant interviewees for this dissertation have worked parts of their life in Kunming, often because Kunming is conveniently located “not too far away” but also because it allows them to live closer to home and within a hospitable climate. Yes, while the branding of Kunming as “the spring city” might seem like merely another gimmick by the tourist-industry of the province, the interviewees often mentioned the bad climate elsewhere (such as in Guangdong, which was too hot) as an important consideration why they had gone to Kunming to work. In Kunming, they work or have worked within sales, car-beautification shops, grocery stores, family restaurants, construction work, cafeterias, the police department, and other petty-capitalist or public small-scale workplaces. All but three interviewees worked without a working-contract, often without regulated working hours, and several had experienced that their employer withheld parts of their salary as a ‘deposit’, which the workers would be paid if they worked there for a certain amount of time – a strategic move to make sure that they did not quit their job after a short period. Quitting their work is often the only way for the interviewees to increase their salary, though even then it is difficult because they either “feel stuck” in the labor market due to their lack of educational diplomas or the anxiety that comes with getting to know a new workplace, tasks and colleagues. However, most of the interviewees who have worked some time in Kunming, tends to change jobs whenever they feel that they are underpaid or treated unfairly by their boss.

The cost of living in urban areas has increased steadily over the last decade and this is a common theme among the interviewees when they tell us about the lack of aspirations and chances of becoming an urban resident. Coupled with low-wages and a highly competitive labor market, the insecure wage-flows and the cost of living is the de-facto reasons for why the interviewees see it as unrealistic to move permanently to the city. Thus, while the distribution of goods from the state, particularly housing, healthcare, education and the basic income from the minimum living standard guarantee program (*di bao*) favors urban citizens over rural migrant workers as these are allocated through the *hukou* system, the low-pay and insecure work arrangements most migrants needs to endure is often the main everyday issue influencing the aspirations of the interviewees in terms of work and life.

Kunming is rapidly expanding, and its northern and southern frontiers have encapsulated many former villages since the early 1990s. These former rural-villages have transformed into urban-villages, where the former farmers still hold land tilling-rights to the land. On this land, the inhabitants have built housing to accommodate the many migrants from the countryside who need accommodation in Kunming. While I am not aware of any official records on where and the living conditions of rural migrant workers in Kunming, there is reason to believe that most live in urban villages as they are relatively cheaper than other alternatives. However, while Kunming and other cities of the province are expanding, both in symbolism, population and physical extension, most the 47,368,000 million living in Yunnan in 2015 are still smallholder farmers (Scally, 2016).

3.7 Study Area: Kaoyan and Baicai⁹

The continued importance of the smallholding to the lives of peasants in post-Deng China is often evident in the accounts and practices of the interviewees in Kaoyan and Baicai. The two villages, Kaoyan (tobacco) and Baicai (Chinese cabbage) where most the interviewees are from, are both Han (majority Chinese population) ethnic villages and are located only two hours away from Kunming by bus, nonetheless, none of those who worked in the city commuted. However, the time of the fieldwork (December 2012 – August 2013) coincided with a prolonged period of drought (from 2008 to 2014), that deteriorated agrarian livelihoods, especially stunting the growth of the crops. There crops were corn, tobacco, Chinese cabbage, lotus fruit, barley, potatoes and some vegetables (e.g. chili, beans) used for consumption within the households. These villages are in the uplands of the Yunnan-Guizhou (Yun-Gui) plateau with an elevation of about 1900 meters within two mountainous valleys where agriculture is partly done on sloped marginal land with low yields in combination with more fertile lowland plots. There is both cash crops and subsistence production taking place in combination with rising livestock, though the deteriorating crop size made raising enough fodder for animal husbandry increasingly problematic (interview with local veterinary).

⁹ Kaoyan and Baicai are the study villages for the PhD, while for the master thesis we visited four village groups/working-teams (see figure 2). In article 1 of this thesis there is an overview of the working groups (table 4.1) from the master thesis fieldwork carried out in 2009. Here I will, concentrate on depicting the study villages from the PhD dissertation fieldwork from 2013.

As these villages are located close to one of the most important water reservoirs of Kunming, the prefecture government in Kunming has included the area within its jurisdiction by redrawing the administrative boundaries so that Kaoyan is now a part of Kunming. Moreover, both villages are the site of the prefecture government efforts of instating different policies that are meant to protect the water reservoir, such as expropriating farmland, restricting commodity production and giving the villagers fines if they cultivate greenfield land or cut lumber in the outfields. Yet, while farmers in villages located downstream from the water reservoir have had their land confiscated, the relatively remote locations of both Baicai and Kaoyan means that so far inhabitants can continue tilling their land.

Baicai, in 2013 had 50 households and 190 people had their *hukou* registered in the village (interview with team leader). The average income of the village per capita was 650 Yuan [USD 109] per annum. The main cash-crop of the village is *baicai*, Chinese cabbage or Pak-choy. The village had *c.*444 *mu* (29.6 ha) of farmland distributed to the households and *c.*1100 *mu* (73.3 ha) of forest. The closest primary school (*xiaoxue*) is located 3 km away in the village center, and the closest middle-school (*zhong xue*) is located about 12 km away in the closest township. The two village committee's that resides over Kaoyan and Baicai respectively, have at various points facilitated various skills programs for the inhabitants, programs where the participants go out to work as part of the on the job training. However, judging by the few who participated and those that we spoke to, these programs are not very successful and most migrant workers find their work by themselves or through relatives or neighbors who are already working in Kunming.

Kaoyan, in 2013 had 202 *hukou* registered residents distributed in 46 families. The team leader had no record of the average income earned, however, in 2004 the income was 1118 per person per year (township government records, given to colleague during 2009 fieldwork upon request). The main cash-crop of the village is *Kaoyan*, tobacco. Each family can farm 2 *mu* (0.13 ha) of tobacco, a limit set by the provincial tobacco corporation that buys all the tobacco at a stipulated rate that incrementally increases each year. The village had *c.*240 *mu* (16 ha) of farmland and *c.*2000 *mu* (133.3 ha) of forest. The closest primary school is located about 2km down the road from Kaoyan and the closest middle school is located 10 km away.

While there are differences between Kaoyan and Baicai both lack access to piped and clean drinking water and improved sanitation. In fact, there are few signs of public investment into either infrastructure or agriculture while signs of private investment abounds. Especially noticeable is how families invest in vital sites for the household's reproduction, such as housing, children's education and farm inputs, such as fertilizers, seeds and pesticides. Additionally, the technologies used for farming are currently changing as during the last decade most families have either replaced their water buffalo as in Baicai or introduced new technologies alongside it as in Kaoyan, such as corn grinding (for livestock fodder) machinery and small plowing machines. During the farming season, roughly from March to November, the interviewees grow a variety of crops for subsistence, such as corn, potato, barley, lotus fruit and different forms of spices including chili. In addition, interviewees from Baicai told us that they needed to shift the type of seed for corn into a type that they can harvest earlier but which is more expensive.

Land is held in rural China for 99 years by each household, and 2003 was the most recent year the central government instructed local governments (at county and prefecture levels) to redistribute land, when each family were given land based on family size (Murphy, 2002). Since that time, we are told by the two male village leaders in Kaoyan and Baicai respectively, farmland is only redistributed when someone dies or when there is an increase in family size through birth. Thus, no adjustment happens when a new woman is married into the family. Contrary to the accounts given by the village leaders, several newly established families told us that there had been no adjustment after they had their children and that this restrained their resource base. Thus, while the infrequent land adjustments are meant to be beneficial for the sense of security and stability of landholdings and tilling rights, they seem adversely to hamper the prospects for newly established households for remaining smallholders.

Moreover, as the prices for inputs to agriculture increases each year, hereunder fertilizers, seeds, pesticides and tools (e.g. machinery), money has become increasingly important in the lives of the research participants. Indeed, through the 1990s the government successively abolished its subsidies for farm inputs (Yan 2003, 585), which contributes to the increasing importance of money in the lives of the interviewees. Additionally, the technologies used for farming are currently changing as during the last decade most families have either replaced their water buffalo as in Baicai or introduced new technologies alongside it as in Kaoyan, such as small plowing machines. Due to the different `rhythm` of being paid in lump-sums for the produce

from the land and the everyday costs that incur throughout the year, most families now rely on a mixture of cash-crop production, subsistence farming, and wage-work.

While agriculture remains an important priority for the householders in both Kaoyan and Baicai, wage labor and consumer goods are increasing in importance, this is especially visible when comparing the younger generation with the older generations, as nearly all youth (between 16-30 years old) are working outside, in contrast to the middle aged and elders. These changes notwithstanding, though, there is an unmistakable way life-course transitions interplay with livelihood activities to re-work and reproduce smallholder life. This is seen as those working outside tend to return to live at the smallholding when they get married and particularly when they have children (see article 1). However, because of both economic marginalization but also changing wants and needs since the mid-1980s, more and more families combine farm-work with off-farm work, both local work such as housebuilding, transport of goods and people, and *wai mian* (working outside the village) as *dagong* workers further afield in towns or cities of the province, often in Kunming. Additionally, several villagers are working in government positions within the village committee, such as accountants, rangers, village leaders, and with health care. Moreover, during the past five years some of the villagers in Kaoyan have started working for others within agriculture, this has happened as a company have invested in the village by renting 40 *mu* (2,6 hectares) of farmland from villagers for commercial blue berry production. Those who work in Kunming live there either parts of the year depending on the agricultural seasons or they stay out the whole year. There is a strong generational and gendered differentiation in terms of whether the migrant worker interviewees worked for a few months each year in the city and the rest on the land in their villages of origin or worked and lived the whole year in Kunming.

Thus, while the smallholding retains an important material role for inhabitants in Kaoyan and Baicai, there are also some generational and gendered lines of division in the narratives of the migrant-interviewees on why they returned home. The men in their forties (five interviewees) told us that they had stayed at home during their children's upbringing, before going out to work again now parts of the year. The men and women from thirty years of age and below (twenty five interviewees) who were working as migrant workers at the time of the interviews, often told us about exhaustion and unemployment as reasons why they had returned to their parent's farm to rest during their spell in the city. For the women who had settled within their

parents' in-laws' household in Kaoyan or Baicai that we spoke to (three interviewees), the responsibility for their children was the main reason for why they at the moment of the interview had returned to cultivate the land full-time. Their husbands were also working on the farm and two of them had also previously been working outside.

Those in their forties who are combining wage-labor and smallholder farming, are mostly preoccupied with their children's future when we speak about their aspirations, as they want to raise money for their children to enter higher education and hopefully leave smallholder farming behind. For those interviewed who worked outside the whole year, they often seemed ambiguous regarding their future, some wanting to return to farm after they had worked in the city and others looking to stay in the city permanently.

Kaoyan and Baicai are undergoing a slow transformation of its built environment, particularly of housing, as this is an important area of investment for smallholders. Several one-story houses built by bricks and cement during the 1990s are there, often built after the wedding. From the early 2000s some two-story brick-cement buildings have popped up, even some with colored tiles on the outer walls. However, the majority of the buildings are still mud-clay buildings, built in earlier decades (most in the 1950s I was told by the father of the team leader in Kaoyan).

A change in agriculture in recent years have been the increasing prevalence of consolidated landholdings. Investors have come in and rented 150 *mu* (10 ha) of farmland from some families in Kaoyan to establish a blueberry farm. Several of the household interviewees work at the blueberry farm. Moreover, an investor from another province rents 15 *mu* (1 ha) of farmland to raise pigs in Kaoyan, where people from other villages come in as hired labor. In Baicai the local government supported farmers for a few years with subsidies for planting walnut trees, however, the inconsistency of the subsidies and the difficulties of getting these goods to market makes the interviewees vary of such initiatives. However, it is not only outside investors who are encouraged by the government led campaigns to consolidate landholdings, as these are also meant to spur the initiative of a type of farmers who are called upon by the discourses surrounding "modern agriculture" as entrepreneurial farmers. These farmers, deemed to be particularly industrious and knowledgeable by the discourse, are also to be found in Kaoyan where particularly two families have started renting land from their neighbors and scaled-up their production.

In fact, this development is encouraged by the government who tries to get investors to rent land from farmers to scale up agriculture and to see the move towards more concentrated production of cash crops that are in high demand by urban consumers. These national policies, initiated during the 2005 campaigns of rejuvenating the countryside under the slogan of building a new socialist countryside and which have gained momentum during the present premiership of Xi Jinping who is allegedly more eager than his predecessor to modernize agriculture have had their inroad into both Kaoyan and Baicai as well. Thus, in recent years' smallholder farming is increasingly difficult to sustain in the face of drought, changing officialized discourses of what it means to be a good farmer, and increasing prices for farm inputs.

However, the government abolished its largely unpopular agricultural tax in 2006 and the government is now giving some subsidies to the interviewees, mostly as part of the watershed policies to compensate for the fact that villagers are no longer allowed to use firewood for heating. Moreover, the government has introduced poverty alleviation measures given to sick or infirm smallholders, but also subsidies for education given once per year per student, all part of the campaigns first launched in late 2005 of rejuvenating the countryside under the slogan of building a new socialist countryside. Yet, education is increasingly important for parents and while the norm for education for youth less than a decade ago was middle school, which is basically costless with the educational subsidies though some costs incur due to boarding and transport, upper middle school and vocational schools have ascended as sites of aspirations for parents. Hence, vocational and upper middle school education is quite costly, observed through the way many parents detailed to us how they needed to borrow money from the rural credit cooperative bank or from relatives to afford their children's education. Education in general for parents in the countryside but particularly for parents with children in education above middle school incur costs from the fact that the children board in these schools, and as they grow from school materials such as books, transportation, food and other living costs. As a result, upper-middle and higher education remains economically inaccessible for many families. Indeed, several of the youth we spoke to told us that they had walked out of middle school, meaning dropped out of school, to relieve their parents of the economic burden generated by their schooling but also to work to cover their own cost of living.

The state is increasingly involved in the task of raising children as most live at the school during weekdays from the age of 6 years old. Recently, with the introduction of a kindergarten or pre-school from 4 years old, some children at that age are also living at the school during weekdays. From the parents perspective, having their children at the boarding school frees up time to do farm work but is also seen by several of the interviewees as more favorable for the children in terms of their “learning environment”. As such, learning is increasingly seen as the domain of the school and formal educational system. However, some parents told us that they would have liked to have more time with their children. After a national reform in the early 2000s to centralize schools, initially meant for urban areas but eventually rolled out nationally to also cover the countryside, many primary schools were closed and parents and kids needed to go further away each day with their children. This generated a need for boarding as part of the educational facilities and this has become a normal situation nationally by the early 2010s.

Moreover, since 2008, with the implementation of the new healthcare scheme, the Rural Medical Cooperative (RMC), interviewees are entitled to get more than 80% of their expenditures reimbursed. However, due to the cash they need to pay upfront and the stiff price for medication, illness in the family remains more than an emotional concern (Meng and Xu 2014 takes a national perspective on the RMC).

Thus, questions over the future of smallholder farming remains open-ended and related to by the interviewees in their daily struggles to secure the sustenance, health and long-term future for themselves and their family. The interviewees approach the question concerning the future of smallholder farming as an existing reality in their lives, yet they face it from different positions and as they improvise to realize their diverse life-projects in the face of changing official discourses, changing skill requirements, policies, and the local drought. The question remains whether the youth will eventually return to the smallholding when they have worked in the city for a few years, as the former generation when they underwent transitions in their life-courses, or whether a more permanent change is underway. So far, the youth without family remains undecided or feels compelled to invest themselves both in the smallholding and the workplaces of the urban, while they dis-identify with smallholder farming. The youth who have married and have children, often return, at least during the period when their children are toddlers, to be part of their children’s lives.

4 Practice Theory and the Mobility of Work

4.1 Introduction

As stated in the introduction, the aim of this thesis is to explore the changing contours of work for peasant-workers in the post-global financial era in China. This chapter is an attempt to broaden the perspectives I have taken up in the articles, to place them within a wider context, and to make an outline of the way I have strived to interpret the practices of work for peasant-migrant workers. This necessarily involves asking what guided my choices of theoretical explorations? There is obviously some danger in trying to keenly disentangle the different influences that has informed my theoretical leanings as it can easily become an exercise of rationalization rather than depicting the messy and often improvised way discovery of theory takes place. Indeed, such disentanglement of different influences is to some degree always incomplete as there will always remain some pre-reflexive aspects of what I have been doing that I find difficult or nearly impossible to articulate (Reed-Danahay, 2004; Rose, 1997).

Moreover, depicting how I ended up with the theories I did, can easily end up in some strong version of a representation of self that glosses over mistakes, detours, and insecurities. Yet, from a pragmatic point of view, useful information can be derived from how people narrate their experiences despite it being a form of rationalization and self-representation. Therefore, most qualitative research involves methods that allows actors to reconstruct their practices and to illuminate how they perceive the world (Alvesson, 1994). These partial perspectives can be analyzed in terms of who is uttering them, how they are articulated, and what they are doing or saying. Indeed, as argued by Donna Haraway (1988), the strength of any research is premised upon the researcher's attempt at unpacking their partial perspectives.

Were my theoretical readings taken on just because they were significant for the research "object" or was it the malleable influences of my past experiences, insecurities, parenthood and home making, or my sense of expectations from the academic community of critical geographers that I tried to become part of, or my political yearnings? It was probably a mixture of these issues that left me in the places where I ended up, it is indeed difficult to pin-point where and how the influence reached me. I would say, honestly, that my family situation, of being immersed into the expectations and subject position of fatherhood had a strong influence

on how issues such as work-life, social reproduction and aspirations became important to me. Indeed, it made a huge impact on my perception of work as more than what people do at their workplace. Of course, if I had not learned from Bourdieu about the importance of scrutinizing the boundaries between categories of practice that are often seen as separate and apart (see below), or, had read Marxist feminist literature (see below), I would probably not have been able to make these connections myself.

Thus, as I had just transitioned myself into parenthood, this had a strong impact on my perspective of work and social justice, however, these experiences were not unmediated but something I interpreted through both past experience, yearnings for the future, and critical discourse. In terms of scholarly influence, I had during my bachelor studies taken an interest in Marxist political economy as an explanatory framework, where class is the main analytical category (Sklair, 2002; Wright, 2005). Furthermore, during my bachelor studies in sociology and social anthropology, I also took on a parallel interest in migration, particularly discourses on migrants as “the other” within Scandinavian welfare states. During my master thesis work, I left Marxian political economy behind, and focused exclusively on labor migration from rural Yunnan to Kunming.

At the time when I started my PhD studies, a call came from the field of migration studies by leading scholars for theorizing migration within wider social processes after two decades where migration often had mainly been either studied as a self-contained process or as individual decision making (Castles, 2010; de Haas, 2010; Delgado Wise, Covarrubias, and Puentes, 2013; Portes, 2010; Raghuram, 2009). For me this critique became an important point of departure when I started to navigate the theoretical landscape. In retrospect, it might be argued that during my PhD I have started reconciling some of the previous interest I held in Marxian political economy and labor migration.

In the following I will detail how I worked with theory to interpret the rural-urban mobility of work of the interviewees from different points of view. I start off with how I changed my perspective from class to work. Particularly dealing with the temporal mobility of peasant-workers in article 1 made me realize the difficulties of working with class for the purposes here. Thereafter I ground this move from class to work within my work by outlining some of the features of a practice theory of work, which entails interpreting working practices at the

intersection of social experience and political economy. Subsequently, I put forward the concept *mobility of work* as a heuristic device to understand the working practices of the interviewees situated between smallholding and the workplaces of the urban. In the final part of the chapter, I detail how I worked in each article to elucidate parts of the mobility of work for the interviewees.

4.2 From Class to Work

Standing in the aftermath of the global financial crisis that still lingered on, the increasing inequality between and within countries in wealth and living standards, and as the Arab Spring still was warm, I guess it was no coincidence that class early on became a concern for how I tried to understand the smallholders in post-Deng China. Particularly, given the increasing disparities between rural and urban China in the post-Deng era and the devastating effects of the global financial crisis in 2008 on the employment possibilities of rural migrant workers, drew me to the category of class. Moreover, as stated above, class was early on a central concern during my studies in sociology and now the challenge seemed to be how to theorize migration and class together as a way of integrating migration within wider social processes.

Class is also a central concern for scholars within Chinese working class studies, a body of work centered around the life and travails of rural migrant workers, often drawing from ethnography from Pearl River Delta is much inspired by Marxist scholarship and E.P. Thompsons monuments work, *The Making of the English Working Class*. This body of work has painstakingly worked to re-contextualize class against the context of political economy and working experience of peasant-workers in the post-Mao China (Lee, 2007; Pun, 2005). The difficulty of working in terms of class-analysis is captured by Pun Ngai, in her path creating work *Made in China* (2005: 11), as she states that

It does not mean that class analysis is simply outdated [though it has disappeared from public discourse] as the language of class is now diluted by the hegemonic discourses of state and capital...Restructuring class structures and relationships is a contemporary project for capital and the newly emerged elites in Chinese society. And yet the subsumption of class analysis in order to hide class positions and social privileges is their political strategy. The language of class is subsumed so as to clear the way for a

neoliberal economic discourse that emphasizes individualism, professionalism, equal opportunities, and the open market. Thus the history of class in China is doubly displaced, first by the Chinese state-party and second by the market. The double displacement of class is very political in the sense that it helps to truncate the signification of class experience in rapidly shifting contemporary Chinese society.

As the quote conveys, though the language of class has been displaced within public discourse, the issue of class in China is still present, indeed, it is one of the important struggles taking place within Chinese society whether to represent difference and inequality as individual accomplishments and wrongdoings or structural and relational. The working class is pitted against the vested interest of both state and capital. It is commonly held that the Chinese working class is made up of two distinct groups of workers. The first group is the former and current employees of the state-owned companies, whom during the Maoist reign enjoyed stable employment, social welfare was provided such as housing, childcare and food, and whom were represented as the heroes of the socialist project (Lee, 2007). This employment scheme, colloquially known as “iron-rice-bowl” survived until the mid 1990s, when the CCP abandoned it. As a result, millions faced unemployed (Solinger, 1999). For most of these workers, the post-Deng period has entailed a downward trajectory in terms of esteem and employment security (Notar, 2012). The other group and by now the most numerous in most industries, are rural migrant workers (Lee, 2007).

What characterize the use of class within the Chinese working class literature is the understanding of class as process rather than structural location, which is reasonable given the rapidly changing and social fluidity of contemporary Chinese society (Lee, 2007). Thus, the focus is on how through discourse, institutionalization, and worker praxis class is made and unmade through work and the politics that seeks to improve the conditions of work. While there is agreement about understanding class as something in the making, Ching Kwan Lee in her exhilarating book *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt* (2007) provides a useful corrective to those who understand the linkage between industrialization and the subjectivity of proletarianization as straightforwardly a relationship between class position and class consciousness. In the book Lee argues that (2007: 24-25) “historically, labor studies have documented three potential insurgent identities the modern worker forges in action: proletariat, citizen, or subaltern”. These insurgent identities are forged through discourse and

practice argues Lee (2007).

Thus, Marx's distinction between class-in-itself and class-for-itself has become the point of departure for much of the literature within Chinese working class studies. The former refers to shared class position in terms of the relationship a class holds within production and particularly their ownership of means of production. Class-for-itself refers to when those sharing this class position mobilize around the banner of class to change their social situation, i.e. the awakening of class consciousness (Guo, 2012; Solinger, 2012). Pierre Bourdieu (1987) has usefully elaborated on the relationship between class-in-itself and class-for-itself, by arguing that the awakening of class consciousness happens when workers interpret their predicaments through the perceptual categories of class. Bourdieu argued that the main stake in symbolic struggle over how to interpret social realities, is the struggle to impose interpretations of the main social divisions (e.g. gender, class, race, age, religious) in society (1989). Summarily, Chinese working class studies, while containing several diverging positions, converge in their focus on the rural migrant workers' class situation, identity and politics as formed within the manufacturing workplaces of the urban. They diverge in whether working class identity necessarily is one of proletariat or whether identity is better understood as a stake in the symbolic struggle to impose different interpretations of reality.

I take this as cue that class analysis is still useful in the Chinese context in order to articulate how inequalities are inscribed in social structure and social bodies. However, one of the defining features of the peasant-worker class in China is their *social ambiguity*. Their social ambiguity arises from the observation that peasant-workers are not easily pinned down within the landscape of citizenship or class as they are both peasant and worker, both rural and urban, both part of an agrarian and capitalist social formation. Indeed, the different strands of literature that investigate the lives of peasant-workers as peasants on the one hand, within the field of peasant studies, or as workers on the other hand, within Chinese working class studies particularly, poses very different interpretations of processes of change and social differentiation, and political imaginaries. For me this has been the theoretical challenge of this PhD, how to situate myself within these different strands of literature without betraying the ambiguity of the working practices of the interviewees.

Particularly, as I used a temporal understanding of the work of the interviewees with the concept

of life-course transitions (#article 1), as they moved back and forth along the rural-urban divide, I found it difficult to bracket off either the peasant part of their experiences and positioning or their worker situatedness. Moreover, having worked within the livelihoods framework during my master studies and having done household interviews, the attempt within some Marxist theorizing to separate out the proletarians of smallholder household as a distinct class position separate from the rest of the family members who were categorized as peasants (c.f. Zhang and Donaldson, 2010), seemed dubious. From my limited experience, those working in the city and those who worked the land and raised children or cared for the infirm, though not without conflict within the family that often follow social lines of division such as age and gender, are engaged in a project of sustaining and bolstering the material sustenance of the family. As such, practices of family and work muddled the class boundary between peasants and workers. Thus, this posed a challenge to my use of class, and as eloquently put by political philosopher Nancy Fraser (2014: unpagged)

I was never intellectually satisfied by proposals for a simple division of labour: use Marxism to analyse the economy, use feminism to analyse the family...Economy and family (production and reproduction) are part and parcel of the same capitalist social formation; they develop in tandem and can only be understood jointly, in their mutual imbrication (in Lubrano and Lenhard, 2014).

Thus, the social ambiguity of peasant workers in terms of citizenship and class, also follows from their spatial mobility, moving back and forth across the rural-urban divide and from a household perspective, keeping one foot on the farm and the other in the city. As such, my theoretical explorations yearned for an approach that both understood peasant-migrant workers as a group-in-itself, i.e. sharing similar social situation of work and unemployment, yet with an open-ended gaze towards how I could interpret their practices of work without reducing these to my or other social scientist's constructions of the category of class. Practices of work that I have looked into include aspirations (#article 2), social reproduction (#article 3) and life-course transitions (#article 1). These practices I have tried to juxtapose as taking place between rural and urban subject positions and life-projects. That is, for the peasant-worker interviewees and their household members it is not a choice of investing themselves in either the city or the countryside to realize their life-projects through work. Rather, by following the practices of the interviewees working across the rural-urban divide, who combine smallholder farming with

wage-work, I have tried to keep an open mind toward how to interpret these as a “collective answer” to “a series of collective constraints” (Lapeyronne, 2008: 28 in Garbin and Millington, 2012: 2070). This is not to say that class is irrelevant because of the social ambiguity of peasant-workers, rather, as eloquently summarized by Kathy Weeks in *The Problem with Work* (2011: 20)

So in the end, I am not saying that we should stop thinking about class, but rather that focusing on work is one politically promising way of approaching class – because it is so expansive, because it is such a significant part of everyday life, because it is something we do rather than a category to which we are assigned, and because for all these reasons it can be raised as a political issue

As such, the focus on work for me emerged as an important interpretive category because it centered on practice that connected and surpassed – albeit to a limited degree, some of the theorizing within Chinese working class studies around the move of peasants off the land and into the city – and back again.

4.3 The Practice Turn: The Practice of Work

My reading of work as practice has been largely influenced by what has been called *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, and von Savigny, 2001). This “turn” is an attempt to understand human life by attending to

important features of the world we inhabit as something that is routinely made and re-made in practice using tools, discourse, and our bodies. From this perspective the social world appears as a vast array or assemblage of performances made durable by being inscribed in human bodies and minds, objects and texts, and knotted together in such a way that the result of one performance become the resource for another...a practice-based view of the social also offers a remedy for a number of problems left unresolved by other traditions, especially the tendency of describing the world in terms of irreducible dualisms between actor/system, social/material, body/mind, and theory/action (Nicolini, 2012: 2).

As such, one of the aims of the scholars working within the practice turn, is to shift the locus of study from abstract conceptions of social organization towards how social context (meaning, materiality, subjectivity) is constituted by the doings and saying of people within their everyday lives. Kirsten Simonsen (2007) might be the geographer who most ardently have argued that geographers have much to take from this way of thinking, as she has outlined a geography of practice. Here she has among other things proposed that "...practices should not be seen as isolated, intentional acts, but rather as continuous flows of conduct which are always future-oriented or part of a project (2007: 170). This argument is based on the idea that it is through embodied doings and sayings meaning is created and that subjectivity is constituted. This is not to say that people can make meaning anyhow, this is exactly the point, that practices are here understood as both generating meaning and subjectivity, but as we already incorporate some practical understanding of the situation based on previous or similar experiences, the contexts is not radically indeterminate and we improvise based on our practical or tacit knowledge (Simonsen, 2001). I think one of the reasons why a practice based approach has appealed to me is because it invites one to be both critical of existing conceptions of the context of for labor and to be curiosity driven in terms of interpreting the doings and sayings of the interviewees. That is, it foregrounds interpretation of practices as a central vocation for researchers and asks how this interpretation itself (re)produce meaning and practices.

Davide Nicolini, in a highly elucidating introduction to the history of taking the practices of people as an object of study within the Western social sciences, argues that the early Karl Marx was one of the first to break with the separation between mind and body, between thinking and doing, between practice and theory (2012: 29-33). Marx brand of materialism, i.e. the connection between facts and physical processes (e.g. biology, evolution, historical materialism, etc.), recognized the fundamental of practice theory

"...that man is always an actor and a producer; on the other hand, thinking is only one of the things people do, together with running, fighting, making love, and so on. The object of inquiry...should therefore be *praxis* intended as what men say, imagine, conceive, and produce *and* think while attempting to carry out these activities (Nicolini, 2012: 30).

Thus, while Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty are often put forward as the first to

bring on a practice theoretical program (c.f. Schatzki, 2001; Simonsen, 2007), the early writings of Karl Marx put forward a similar conception of human life. One of the central aims of Marx was to argue that to understand human action one needed to focus on the social and historical context where the doings and sayings were carried out (Nicolini, 2012: 31). Karl Marx also had a clear normative grounding of his work, as he talked about theorizing as a potential weapon and instrument for the dominated and exploited (Nicolini, 2012).

In terms of work, Marx early on (before he wrote Capital Volume I) argued that this is an *activity* connecting humans to each other and nature, while at the same time being an activity *organized* between human beings (Wolf, 1982). Eric Wolf (1982: 73-74), working with Marx's double notion of labor, states with Marx that "...man "confronts the material of nature as one of her own forces...[By] changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature...yet labor is always social, for it is always mobilized and deployed by an organized human plurality". That is, labor is both an object of symbolic contestation and physical appropriation, as well as a subject of doings and sayings that most people are engaged in. Thus, the object of inquiry in terms of labor is therefore praxis, reflecting on what men say and conceive while carrying out work within different social contexts and how this context influence what people say and conceive. For Marx there is a dialectic, i.e. a mutually constitutive relationship, between the doing and saying of embodied people and her context. To take the point further from a practice theoretical point of view, one might argue that "...we are our bodies and all our experiences and the meanings that animate our lives are based in active corporeal involvement in the world. The means by which bodies in this sense possess the world are perception and bodily motility" (Simonsen, 2007: 171). That is, from a practice theoretical point of view we are embodied experiencing beings who within social contexts both constitute and are constituted within context.

However, people face, i.e. conceive and move within, the social contexts of their lives differently. Pierre Bourdieu (1989) took this idea and argued that as people was exposed to the world within diverging socio-economic milieus differently defined by financial and social possibilities in terms of economic resources (economic capital), social networks (social capital), and education (cultural capital), people become dispositioned to interpret the world differently. That is, from the practice theoretical point of view of Pierre Bourdieu, the way we experience the possibilities and limitations of the contexts we are confronted with, tends to vary between

people according to the real possibilities we possess to manipulate the contexts we confront (McNay, 2001). Bourdieu emphasized how the lived experiences of inequality, of exposure to different financial and cultural possibilities, and of the limitations in life makes people come to learn what to expect and what not to expect for “someone like me” (Bourdieu 1990: 63). This practical or embodied sense of what is “for me and not for someone like me” gives rise to a sense of one’s place, *habitus*, a durable set of perceptions, forms of appreciation, and generative schemes of action. Summarily, from a practice theoretical point of view, people through practice produce and possess the social contexts they confront, yet as Bourdieu argues, how we confront these contexts and how we interpret them is socially differentiated.

4.4 The Mobility of Work

The practices of work that I have investigated are smallholder farming and wage-work. I have investigated how peasant-workers relate to these sites of work through how their imagination and motility, as it intersects with life-course transitions, generational expectation and struggles for social reproduction. While work for smallholders is the practice I have investigated, the context of these practices is not easily placed in-situ as the work takes place both at the smallholding and the workplaces of the urban but also the active relating to their future on behalf of the interviewees, takes place in the indeterminate space between rural and urban. Arguably, the interviewees are literally working across geographical space, particularly seen from the perspective of the work of the smallholder household (article 1 and 3). Moreover, they are harboring expectations as subjects situated at the intersection between rural and urban (article 2). Thus, both through imagining and moving back and forth across the rural-urban sites of work, smallholders work across space.

Scholars working within the so-called *mobility turn* (Sheller and Urry, 2006), have argued persuasively that we need to look beyond movement understood as “abstract movement”, i.e. the physical transport from A to B. Rather, mobility is the intertwining of movement on the one hand and the processes that give meaning to it on the other (Adey, 2009; Cresswell and Merriman, 2011; Lund, et. al, 2013; Salazar and Smart, 2011). Hence, mobility is defined by movement + meaning, i.e. movement in context (Flemsgæter, Setten and Brown, 2015). It does not take a leap in imagination to see some points of mutual interest for scholars working within the practice turn and those working from within the mobility turn. This relates particularly to

how both are interested in how practices, hereunder movement, is both producing but also ascribed meaning both by those undertaking it, those that stay put and “spectators”, including the researcher. Hence, mobilities produce and are produced by the context under which it takes place, both by those undertaking them, those that try to manage them (e.g. the state) and researchers, i.e. they have no fixed meaning.

As such, movement can be conceived of as a social practice, undertaken by embodied people who actively relate to the world either they are moving or staying put. Arguably, from a practice theoretical point of view, staying put or moving across physical space, are not dichotomous acts as both are undertaken by people who actively interpret the context they are situated within. However, as people tend to be differentiated by access to symbolic and material resources, so to they tend to be inclined to see the world differently or from different point of views. As detailed above, from the practice theoretical point of view of Pierre Bourdieu, our future oriented flow of practice is differentiated by the tangible and intangible resources we possess, which in turn tends to differentiate the way we conceive and move in socio-geographical space.

Thus, with the concept of *mobility of work* I want to emphasize the situated practice of people actively conceiving, moving or staying put, as part of their future oriented flow of practice of work. From this understanding, people do not conceive of the future of their work irrespectively of their current experienced financial and cultural limitations and possibilities. That is, they actively relate to the future as bodies in context, from a perspective. Furthermore, moving or staying put, is carried out by embodied people who interpret the context of their lives by actively relating to it by staying put or moving across space. As such, the mobility of work is socially experienced by the perceiving and dispositioned subject within a context that is open to various interpretations, within limits, due to its complexity and indeterminacy and the different points of views of people confronted with this complexity. As the mobility of work entails future oriented practice of situated people socially differentiated, this has required much contextualization.

By contextualization I take to mean situating the sites and activities of work for the interviewees, within larger social processes, in order to shed light on the point of view taken by the interviewees on the future of their work. Additionally, the mobility of work is not only contextualized by those who approach work through their conception and motility, but also

communities, states, capital, and cultural producers (e.g. the media, researchers, consultancies) actively relate to these practices. Thus, I have in each article contextualized the mobility of work for peasant-workers and their kin alongside how other vested interests interpret the mobility of work for rural migrant workers.

4.5 Analyzing the Mobility of Work: Life-courses, Expectations and Social Reproduction

Theoretically I started out this project with the intention of theorizing the work of rural migrant workers and their kin within wider social processes. By focusing on the practices of work (acts, expectations and social organization) I attempted to situate the interviewees within the wider debates about urbanization in post-Deng China. This situating was done elucidating the continuities and discontinuities in social experiences and social expectations between two generations of peasant-workers. Moreover, in article 3 I attempted to refocus the practices of work across the rural-urban divide for the migrant workers by also including those that stay at the smallholding within the narrative, which I did through the Marxist feminist perspective of social reproduction. The understanding I had of migrant workers, as both rural and urban, both part of an agrarian and capitalist social formation, came as a result of writing article 1, where the focus on the rural-urban mobility of smallholders over the life-courses unveiled the liminal or in-between situatedness of rural migrant workers flow of practice.

In this dissertation, I have investigated the mobility of work for smallholders in Yunnan, within rapidly transforming rural-urban sites (smallholding and workplace) and activities (farming and *dagong*) of work. Seeing as the interviewees straddle the rural-urban divide in their mobility of work (conceiving, staying put and moving), keeping one foot at the farm and the other in the city, I have situated the way smallholders conceive, move or stay put as they actively relate to their work as part of their future oriented flow of practice, in relation to smallholding and the workplaces of the urban. This has entailed investigating the movement of smallholders across rural-urban space at different junctures of their lives, the expectations they harbor to the future, and the mutual interdependence of the work carried out on the smallholding and wage-work in Kunming for the social reproduction of both migrant workers and their kin. As hinted at above, the mobility of work for peasant-workers is not only keeping an active conception and physical movement for the migrant interviewees, but also other vested interests. Thus, in article 1 I

explore how the mobility of work entangles with expectations within the smallholder households of the study villages. Through the concept of life-course transitions, I tried to elucidate how the importance of family and way the rural-urban citizenship scheme (*hukou*) situate smallholders differently in terms of the mobility of work according to different parts of their lives. In article 1 I worked with the concepts of life-courses and generations, to contextualize the rural-urban mobility of the interviewees. As I looked at the rural-urban mobility of the interviewees from a temporal point of view, of how it involved movement back and forth between the smallholding and the workplaces of Kunming in different parts of the lives of the interviewees yet with some generational divisions in how this mobility became enacted, this contributed to the theorizing of peasant-workers as indeterminate subjects. So, their sense of one's place is ambiguous, both rural and urban subjects, part of both an agrarian and capitalist social formation.

Conceiving the future oriented flow of practice around work is here investigated through elucidating the socially differentiated *expectations* to work across the social generations of peasant-workers. I have in particular explored how expectations for wage-work are influenced by the context of movement or how embodied experience of financial and social limits are differentiated by age, which tends to disposition the migrant worker interviewees to hold different positions on smallholder farming and urban wage work respectively (article 2). From how I interpreted the social experiences of the interviewees, the expectations they can allow themselves within the rural-urban space does not appear as either radically indeterminate nor is it fully pre-determined (article 2). Therefore, when the interviewees are asked about their future, they point to the sense of "being stuck" (article 2) or "living to live" (article 3). Being stuck and living to live in relation to the mobility of work, entails interpreting one's future opportunities in life as curtailed by the current experience of financial and social limits imposed upon "someone like me". To make this interpretation, I attempted to contextualize the mobility of work for the interviewees within the rural-urban of work, between smallholding and wage-work, how this was perceived differently by the two generations of interviewees due to their varying social experiences.

Central to the articles of this dissertation is an attempt to understand how the acts, expectations and social organization of work for the interviewees takes place as a flow of practice across space. Thus, the focus of this dissertation is on movement for work, both physical and

imaginatively within and between rural and urban for smallholders, within an intellectual and policy landscape of expecting urbanization. Though I have hinted at this space in the articles, the rural-urban, I still find it useful to shortly flesh out more explicitly what I think of with this ambiguous category. I understand rural-urban a symbolic and material relational socio-spatial space that encompasses both agrarian/rural and capitalist/urban socio-spatial spaces. This makes it ambiguous and impure, an intense site of symbolic struggle over its interpretation (e.g. expectations of urbanization), state intervention, and appropriation (seen as the interviewees feel compelled to invest themselves in both the countryside and city). As argued by Pierre Bourdieu, (1989: 20), "...it is in the intermediate positions of social space...that the indeterminacy and objective uncertainty of relations between practices and positions is at a maximum, and also, consequently, the intensity of symbolic strategies". As such, the rural-urban mobility of work of smallholders is an interpretive category appropriated or acted upon by the interviewees, symbolic producers (e.g the CCP, media, scholars), the state, capital, and myself.

In this vein, article 3 I try to challenge both how I and other "spectators" to the mobility of work for peasant-workers in contemporary China, interpret and conceive of these practices and subjects by exploring, from the perspective of migrant smallholder households, by locating their practices of work within a wider social context. Thus, I was partly inspired by the argument made by Bourdieu [and the feminist movement], that

The most personal is the most impersonal...many of the most intimate dramas, the deepest malaises, the most singular suffering that women and men can experience find their roots in the objective contradictions, constraints and double binds inscribed in the structures of the labour and housing markets (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 201 in McNay, 2008: 280).

Thus, in article 3 I have attempted to produce a counter-narrative of work by decentering work away from the workplaces of the urban to also throw into relief the importance of unwaged housework for the social reproduction of the migrant workforce in post-Deng China and thus by proxy the urban itself. Social reproduction refers to the attendant mental and physical work (childcare, cooking, cleaning etc.) and materials (food, housing, water, etc.) which needs to be carried out for the laborer to be able to go back to work the next day and for the workforce to

be reproduced on a generational basis (Laslett and Brenner, 1989). With the concept of social reproduction Marxist feminists have worked to unveil the unrecognized labor taking place within households, such as carework and homemaking, and the way states and market actors engage or retreat from the shared responsibility for making sure these tasks and materials are maintained (Bakker, 2007; Katz, 2001; Meehan and Strauss, 2015).

The existing scholarship on work for peasant-migrant workers has taken the cue from Karl Marx of exposing the social dynamics behind the wage-relation of buyer and seller of labor power from the perspective of the “hidden abode” of the workplace within post-Mao China. While I see the benefits of focusing on the workplace as a site of work for the interviewees, I tried in article 3 to de-center the typical terrain of struggle (wages), subjects (proletariats) and place of work (the industrial plant) by reconnecting the unwaged and waged practices of work for the interviewees. For the time being, they return to their smallholding in times of unemployment, sickness, injury or exhaustion, which serves as the base for their material nourishment when rejected or they reject wage-labor. Through investigating practices of work, both unwaged and waged, I draw attention to the relationship between urbanization and social reproduction, and the limitations of a political imaginary centered around wage work in the post-global financial crisis era. As such, in article 3 I attempted to put forward another interpretation of the mobility of work for peasant migrant workers, where the commonly conceived notion of work itself was questioned.

To summarize, I have worked to unveil how I have interpreted the working practices and mobility of the interviewees and how my interpretation has been changing over the course of these years. Of course, no interpretation is ever final, but takes place continuously as one learns new perspectives or discover new details in what one is working with. At best, interpretations are productive starting points for initiating discussions about the present and how one envision something better. In terms of theory, I have strived to be vigilant both to how I approach the object of study but also how others interpret and represent reality. This obsession with interpretation has been spurred both my anxiety of how my interpretations would be received or whether they missed the target, but also by how practice theory in general and Pierre Bourdieu in particular stress how no interpretation happens unmediated. As such, trying to understand the working practices of the interviewees in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, without bracketing off how these are split between smallholding and

workplace, between unwaged and waged labor, between peasant and worker, has been my central concern.

5 Summary of Articles

In this chapter I summarize each article and present the article's and main contribution in turn.

5.1 Article 1: Chinese Peasants in Transition

In article 1 I set out to discuss three related issues that connects to how the mobility of work for smallholders change over the span of their life-course. More particularly I tried to work with the idea that transitions within the life-course, such as having children, getting married or finishing/dropping-out from school are effected by and affects the mobility of smallholders. The article draws upon fieldwork in four villages in Yunnan, the fieldwork for my master thesis (see chapter 2), where I used structured interviews and village mapping.

The first issue raised in article 1 concerns how the life-courses of the interviewees are entangled with gendered practices that set in during transitions within the life-course and how this affects men and women's mobility differently. What I found was that while a considerable proportion of women in working age (between 15-63) worked outside, the duration of their *dagong* (working for the boss) experience was generally shorter than for men. A main finding is that "...the life-course transition from being a single young adult into forging conjugal ties renders both women and men less mobile" (page, 79). Thus, both men and women's mobility is influenced by life-course transitions, however, women's mobility more than the men's.

What I find interesting, looking back at this article now, is that I mainly explained the different mobility pattern between men and women in terms of cultural practices, such as patrilocal marriage customs and moral codes of conduct in terms of tilling the land (see page 79), while in article 2 I focus more on the informality of the urban labor market when explaining the continued importance of keeping one foot on the farm once migrant-workers go to the city to work.

The second issue I investigated in the article is how life-course transitions, particularly as the children grow up and as the health of the elders in the family deteriorates, affects the running expenditures and livelihood options of smallholder households in terms of education and healthcare. The results of the investigation show that the costs of education and healthcare heavily weigh in on the household's budgets. I attempted to contextualize this, by providing

some details about the organization of education and healthcare in the countryside in the reform era.

Having already investigated how life-course transitions affected the mobility options and priorities of working men and women in part one of the article, part two also contextualized why having some family members going out of the village to work became even more important when the children entered upper-middle school and the health of the elderly further deteriorated.

In part three of the article I investigated how rural-urban mobility for work was practiced differently by two generations of rural migrant workers in the study villages, one generation born before 1980 and one generation born after 1980. The year 1980 was chosen as this is a watershed period in the change from Maoism to Dengism. However, the boundaries between the generations are continuous, so that two individuals - one born in 1979 and one born in 1981 do not in reality belong to two different generations. Rather, the point of constructing two categories of generations separated by the year of 1980 is to create contrast to say something about change and continuity in mobility patterns of smallholders. The main finding is that the post-1980 generation go out to work in a younger age than the pre-1980 generation, who mainly went out to work after they had children. For the post-1980 generation going out to work happens straight after completing or dropping out of school.

In this article, the rural-urban was conceptualized as the mobility-immobility continuum (from Thao, 2013) where immobility signaled staying put in the countryside whereas mobility signaled moving to the city for work. This worked for the purposes of the article. However, as I became more aware of the informality of urban employment and tapped into the hesitation and ambiguity of the interviewees in terms of whether to invest (spending time, money, resources) themselves in the city or the countryside (they often felt the urge to do both, across the generations though in different ways), I felt the need to re-contextualize, for my next articles, the rural-urban nexus as the context in which the mobility of work for the interviewees happened.

5.2 Article 2: Learning what to Expect: The Making and Unmaking of Expectations among Two Generations of Peasant Migrant Workers in post-Mao China

In article 2 I set out to discuss the continuities and discontinuities in expectations of engaging in wage-work and smallholder farming between two social generations of peasant-workers in post-Mao China. Wage-work and smallholder farming, the two main forms of livelihoods for the interviewees, also represent two different physical locations of expectations and becoming someone. In this article, I draw upon 32 in-depth interviews with peasant-workers in Yunnan who are working or have been working in the provincial capital, Kunming. In this article, I constructed two categories of rural migrant worker generations, the post-Mao generation (born in the 1970s to mid-1980s) and the post-Deng generation (born from the mid-1980s to the 1990s). I wanted to highlight that the mid-1980s signaled a policy change toward the country's smallholders, as the fortunes of smallholder farming dwindled throughout the years when the post-Deng generation interviewees grew up. With these different contexts in mind, I tried to elucidate how interviewees adjusted their expectations as they experienced the social and financial limits on their range of possibilities.

I found that the post-Mao generation interviewees never intended for their stay in Kunming to be something else than temporary and as a means for securing sustenance and family priorities (such as education) back home. Thus, they would assist the family during the busy season in agriculture and talk about the importance of enduring the hardship as wage-laborers and tilling the land. The interviewees from this generation worked outside the village for a life-project that can be termed peasantization. The post-Deng generation on the other hand, having spent much more time within the formal education system and less time in their upbringing working the land, are expected and expects more acutely to make a living primarily by working for wages. However, in the city they face many impediments to these expectations, and as they come to experience the precarious wage-labor from petty-capitalist workplaces in Kunming, they become more hesitant and indeterminate when deciding where they want to make their future, in the countryside or the city. They still depend much on the smallholding for their survival, in times of sickness, exhaustion and unemployment upon return. Overall, the findings show how learning what to expect and not to expect for "someone like me" happens differently for the two generations and the post-Deng generation feel as if they are stuck; stuck in the city as they are not fit and have learned to be disinclined towards taking up smallholder farming. They are also stuck in the lower-echelons of the urban labor market, feeling disillusioned and undecided

about the future.

5.3 Article 3: From the workplace to the household: Peasant migrant workers and social reproduction between informal wage work and smallholdings in post-Mao China

In this article I set out to work through the question, posed by Ananya Roy (2011: 224) of “what global city can function without relational dependence on seemingly distant economies of ... cheap labor?”. I made this a provocative starting point for looking again at the rural-urban mobility of work for rural-migrant workers in post-Mao China. In this article, I draw upon Marxist-feminist theorizing of the category of work to throw into relief the mutual interdependence of unwaged household work in the countryside and wage-work at the workplace of the urban. I draw upon fieldwork in two villages of Yunnan and interviews with migrant workers in Kunming. The intention here, is to explore the question of the relational dependence of “distant economies of cheap labor”, by zooming in on families in Yunnan who till the land, raise children and care for the infirm, and work for wages in the city. This throws into relief how the migrant workforce, making up 36% of the workforce in China in 2015, depends upon and helps sustain millions of smallholdings in contemporary China.

Thus, one of the most pressing questions facing the contemporary drive towards increasing urbanization in contemporary China, is how to forge livable livelihoods for peasant workers and their families. This question arises from the article as I detail how the informality of wage work, its discontinuous nature and low-wages, heavily contributes to the importance of the smallholding for the sustenance of migrant workers over time. Moreover, due to the increasing cost of living and diminishing returns to smallholder farming, smallholder families are generally unable to live solely off the land. By de-centering the category of work, through including both wage-labor and unwaged work, both smallholding and workplace, both countryside and city, the mutual interdependence comes into view but also the common terrain of struggle between smallholders and rural migrant workers around the question of the future of the distribution of the means of survival (particularly food, childcare and housing).

6 Concluding discussion

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will reflect on the contributions of this thesis to understanding the rural-urban mobility of peasant-workers in a time of intense contestation over the future of work for the Chinese peasantry. I will also make some suggestions for future research on peasant-workers.

6.2 Summary of findings and conclusion

Overall, through the three articles of this thesis, based on detailed fieldwork among peasant-workers and their kin in Yunnan, there are three main contributions that this thesis brings forward to existing scholarship on the travails of rural migrant workers in post-Deng China.

- This thesis details the importance of smallholder farming to the daily and long-term social reproduction and its varied importance at different times in the life's of peasant-workers despite 30 years of rapid urbanization in China.
- This thesis details how the informalization of urban-based wage work is experienced differently for two generations of peasant-workers, who are differently positioned to withdraw from wage-work. While there is a divide in the way the two generations engage with smallholder farming, both generations yearn for an alternative future than working as *dagong* labor, either it pertained to returning to their smallholding or they aspire to become self-employed.
- This thesis adds to the voices who are critical of the orthodox interpretation of the movement of peasants off the land and into the city as a teleological process of movement towards modernity based on the British historical experience. By reconnecting the work carried out at the smallholding and the workplaces of the urban within the lives of smallholder migrant households I attempted to rethink our categories of thought, in this case "work", and expand the interpretive repertoire of scholarship on peasant-workers in post-Deng China.

In the following I will elaborate on these contributions.

6.3 The importance of smallholder farming

I started this thesis by highlighting the narrative of transition as a dominant frame of interpretation for understanding the rural-urban mobility of work for peasant-workers in post-Deng China. Through the superstructure of this thesis and in the articles, particularly in article 3, I have tried to convey that other frames of interpretation are warranted when trying to get to grips with the rural-urban mobility of work for peasant-workers and their kin. Implicitly in my attempts to bring in other ways of interpreting the movement of smallholders into the city, I tried to contrast the lived reality of working between smallholder farming and urban informalized wage-work for peasant-workers, with what Philip Huang (2011a: 460) have termed the "...ideology of modernizationism..." where the perception that smallholders are inevitably transforming into proletarians "...has taken on the force of indisputable truth...it is considered almost too obvious to require conceptual clarification". My interpretations of the rural-urban mobility of work for smallholders is strongly influenced by the practice theoretical point of view, as I have interpreted the movement between smallholding and workplaces of the urban as "movement in context" of people who are relating to these contexts through their physical motility and imagination. From this point of view, the way we represent practice through language, sounds or other means, is not the same as practice in the way it is lived. Similarly, Kirsten Simonsen (2007: 170) argues "...that practices should not be seen as isolated, intentional acts, but rather as continuous flows of conduct which are always future-oriented or as part of a project". Understanding life as the continuous flow of conduct means taking seriously how life is lived with its "...malaise, anxiety, disquiet, expectations..." (Bourdieu, 1985: 729). Thus, investigating the discrepancy between peasant-workers "flow of conduct" and the elite discourses of a transition from smallholding to the workplaces of the urban provides the point of departure for the research questions asked in this thesis.

Based on two stints of fieldwork in Yunnan, a survey conducted in four villages in 2009 for the master thesis (the basis for the data analyzed in article 1) and a revisit of two of these villages for the PhD fieldwork in 2013 (the basis for the data analyzed in article 2 and 3) in the countryside close to Kunming and in Kunming, I have in this thesis attempted to investigate how peasant-worker interviewees and their family members relate to smallholder farming and wage-work as part of their continuous practices of work. It is with this background that I ask in the main research question of this thesis of *How is the rural-urban mobility of work practiced by peasant migrant workers and smallholder migrant households in China?* After writing

article 1, based on the fieldwork from the master thesis, about the way life-course transitions impinged upon the rural-urban mobility of work for the interviewees, I started realizing that I would betray the lived realities of the interviewees if I resorted to the arbitrary categorization that takes place of peasant-workers as either `peasants´ or `workers´. That is, I started realizing how the rural-urban migration of peasant-workers is better understood as a continuous flow of practice to realize their diverse life-projects. Thus, when I ask in research question 1

How do peasant-workers relate to smallholder farming?

part of the answer is that at different junctures of their working lives the smallholding takes on different purposes. For instance, when raising young children, the research participants try to plan so that one or both parents are working at the smallholding to be close to their children. Expectations weigh heavily upon particularly women to be close to their children when they are toddlers, but also men in the study villages from the master thesis (outlined in article 1), are staying at home when their children are young. As such, staying at home is one forceful manifestation of the ways that peasant-workers actively relate to their smallholding as part of their rural-urban mobility of work. In this article, I also bring into the limelight how the costs of human welfare increase as the children grow up, which forces parents to go out to work as a way of supporting their children´s futures. Thus, while smallholder farming provides an important material base for these families, they nonetheless feel compelled to engage in wage-work to pay for their children´s education and health care costs.

In article 1 I also ask how the life-course transitions of two generations of migrant workers differently impinge upon their rural-urban mobility. What I found was the young generation went out to work in the city at a younger age and that rural-urban mobility itself had become a new form of life-course transition with the young generation of peasant-workers in the study villages. Thus, through exploring how life-course transitions of peasant-workers are enacted differently across the generations and between the genders, this thesis points to the importance of understanding the rural-urban mobility of work for peasant-workers in post-Deng China as socially differentiated and performed differently throughout life.

In article 2, based on re-visiting two of the study villages from the master thesis fieldwork I approach the question of how the interviewees relate to smallholder farming from a different

point of view. Inspired by Chinese Working Class Studies, and their generational perspective on changes in aspirations among rural migrant workers within the assembly line workplaces of south-eastern China, I wanted to explore the question of continuities and discontinuities in how two generations of peasant-workers perceive and do smallholder farming. While the post-Deng generation (those born from the late-1980s and 1990s) peasant-workers distance themselves from smallholder farming, they still rely on it for their survival and dignity as the discontinuous and demeaning work in the petty-capitalist workplaces of Kunming makes them exhausted, unemployed, and sick at different points in their working life. The post-Mao generation (those born in the 1970s up until the mid-1980) have worked the land parts of the year ever since they first went out to work in the 1980s and early 1990s. For them, the notion of leaving the land fallow is considered disrespectful. Their way of talking about their movement back and forth between *dagong* work in the city and smallholder farmers point to the way they enjoy the relative autonomy of working for themselves as opposed to “under the bosses’ heels”. Thus, their rural-urban mobility of work is enacted as part of their life-project of sustaining their smallholding and investing in their children’s future. As such, in article 2 by asking how the two generations of peasant-worker interviewees relate to smallholder farming based on interviews with migrant workers, this article goes further than in article 1 in suggesting *how* the peasant-workers relate differently to smallholder farming.

6.4 Informalization and Conveying a Future from *Dagong*

Research question 2

How do peasant-workers relate to urban based wage-work?

is primarily worked through in article 2 and partly in article 3. In article 2 I detail the demeaning and discontinuous forms of wage-work live through by the two generations of peasant-workers. The post-Mao generation migrant worker interviewees relate to urban based wage-work to sustain smallholder life in the face of increasing costs of living for rural dwellers in post-Deng China. Thus, it might be argued that working the land provides for this generation some autonomy from the insecure wage-work found in the petty-capitalist workplaces of Kunming. They keep their expectations mostly centered around smallholder life and all they expect from working for the boss (*dagong*) is to raise money for the family. “Being just farmers”, they

engage with wage-labor to make sure that they can invest in their children's futures, however, and their expectations are centered around the improvement of the smallholding. Thus, they relate to urban based wage-work by securing a future that partly involves autonomy from *dagong*.

For the post-Deng migrant worker interviewees, the situation is different, as they have spent little time in the fields in their upbringing and actively distance themselves from the physical hardship of smallholder farming. As such their expectations from working as *dagong* labor is different than the former generation. It is not that their expectations have lost track with the existing reality of work for "a farmer's son" as they "feel stuck" within the lower-echelons of the urban labor market and they "work to live" because they see the need to "keep their expectations low". Rather, they approach the question of the future loci of their work with hesitation and ambiguity; if they return to the smallholding they see no other options to make a living than engaging in smallholder farming. However, in the city they feel stuck and even unable to perceive a future as working subjects. Yet, they yearn to leave the workplaces of their bosses behind and start their own venture, such as a small shop either in the closest township to the villages of their upbringing or in Kunming. Thus, they relate to urban based wage-work by yearning for a different future, they conceive of withdrawing from wage-work and becoming self-employed in the city or the countryside. Neither smallholder farming or *dagong* work contains a place in the yearning of the interviewees from this generation, yet they know that returning to the farm might become their destination when they have children or their luck in the city runs out.

Thus, although it is important to recognize that class formation is an active process that owes as much to agency as to conditioning (Pun and Lu 2010: 497), it is important to acknowledge that with the differentiated urban geography of post-Deng China there is a need to go beyond the classical figure of the industrial proletariat when discussing the trajectory of change and yearnings of the peasant-worker class. Overall, by investigating the question of how two generations relate to urban based wage-work this thesis contributes to insights about how expectations for both generations are aligned with their current circumstance yet involves different yearnings for securing a future away from wage-work.

6.5 Reconnecting Smallholder Farming and Wage-Work

In research question 3

What is the relationship between urban based wage-work and smallholder farming in the lives of smallholder migrant households?

I attempted to look at the totality of work of the smallholder migrant households in Kaoyan and Baicai, to understand them as "...assemblage of performances made durable by being inscribed in human bodies and minds, objects and texts, and knotted together in such a way that the result of one performance become the resource for another" (Nicolini, 2012: 2). As I detail in article 3, working the land, raising children and caring for the infirm, animal husbandry at the smallholding in combination with *dagong* work outside the village are part of the same smallholder economy of realizing the social reproduction of the family on a daily and long-term basis. Thus, the relationship consists of securing the means of survival as both the smallholding, through drought, increasing prices for farm-inputs and increasing monetarization of daily lives makes living solely off the land next to impossible, and urban based wage-work is informalized making it difficult if not impossible to raise children in the city for peasant-workers. By detailing the interconnection of work performed at the smallholding and wage-work in the city this thesis advance a different conception of work than is normally utilized in the literature. By re-contextualizing the perspective of Marxist feminism in the context of rural-urban work for smallholder households in post-Deng China¹⁰, I attempted in article 3 to reconnect the work and struggles of those "left-behind" at the farm and those working in the city.

This way, I hope to have contributed modestly to a more inclusive understanding of the people, sites and activities of work for smallholder migrant households, and a more expansive notion of social struggle across what I term "the terrain of social reproduction" that spans the life's of peasants working the land and rural migrant workers toiling the workplaces of the urban in post-Deng China.

¹⁰ In the article I use the periodization of post-Mao China while I here use post-Deng China. The reason for this inconsistency is that I have reworked the periodization while writing the superstructure of this thesis, however, as I have submitted the article to a journal the title is unalterable at this moment.

6.6 The Perspective of Practice Theory

I have worked from a practice theoretical point of view, and particularly a practice theoretical point of view inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Despite the interesting body of work that Bourdieu has produced, Pierre Bourdieu only plays a minor role within critical geography in general, and within the subfields of labor geography or development geography he usually plays a second role compared to comparable figures such as Marx, Foucault, Spivak, or Butler. Indeed, Joe Painter in *Thinking Space* (2000: 249) argues that when Bourdieu has been deployed in the field of geography it has been more in passing than a sustained engagement with his body of work. Bourdieu was at first placed within the structuration moment of social science, largely inspired by the work of Anthony Giddens. Joe Painter documents how Nigel Thrift's early categorization of Pierre Bourdieu's work as structuration theory partly contributed to this framing of Bourdieu and as the popularity of structuration theory lost its tract during the 1990s, this also contributed to the declining interest within geography in Pierre Bourdieu's work. Moreover, within geography the relative lack of engagement with Pierre Bourdieu's work might derive from the fact that Bourdieu seldom explicitly treats core concepts of the discipline, such as space, location, or place (Savage, 2011: 512). Painter (2000) also suggests that Bourdieu's work has been more engaged with within cultural and social geography than within economic and political geography. Still, Bourdieu's stated mission with his work was to transcend the material-cultural divide (1989) through concepts such as habitus, capital, field, and social space. Indeed, the ambiguity of Bourdieu's work, too materialist and deterministic for some cultural theorists, and too cultural and subjectivist for some economic and political theorists, might partly contribute to his cool reception within geography.

For me personally, rather than reading his texts as a potential disciple might approach the book of a prophet, i.e. as teleology, I find it useful to approach his work to remember insights by Bourdieu to "translate – de- and recontextualize – these insights into our own times" (Kipfer, 2002: 119). This is in the spirit that Lefebvre and Gramsci read Marx according to Stefan Kipfer's (2002: 122-124), as they read Marxism as an open-ended body work, a starting point rather than a destination. That is, they refused "stifling Marxology" as they perceived this as a scholarly practice that soon turned Marx into "a skeleton of dissected and reassembled parts for the sake of scientificity and formal coherence", rather than as a form of "critical, embodied knowledge" (Kipfer, 2002: 124).

However, despite the spatial metaphors (fields, social space, topography) Bourdieu used for his understanding of how social agents developed their point of view (e.g. expectations, taste, political leanings) through continuous exposure to the social and financial limits to their lives, he seldom (1996; 1999) talked about how this could be understood in terms of spatial space, i.e. physical or geographical space. As such, the theoretical contribution of this thesis is to stretch the field of Bourdieusian theorizing by re-contextualizing it “into our own times” and appropriating it for understanding work for peasant-workers juxtaposed between agrarian and capitalist imaginaries and sites of work.

Through investigating the practices of work for peasant-workers from a practice theoretical point of view, I have attempted to convey how imagining the future of work as part of peasant-workers’ expectations and physically moving or staying as part of the continuous flow of conduct of work brings in the perspective of the interdependence of working between smallholding and the workplaces of the urban. This reality, is arguably lived differently than the from the perspective of an imminent rural-urban transition of work conveyed within orthodox (see chapter 3) perspectives, where it is perceived as “an epochal move in evolutionary time” (Ferguson, 1999: 4). For the interviewees, the rural-urban mobility of work between smallholding and the workplaces of the urban is characterized by malaise and ambiguity, as part of their future oriented flow of practice for securing their means of survival and dignity. In sum, by tracing “...the assemblage of performances made durable by being inscribed in human bodies and minds, objects...and knotted together in such a way that the result of one performance become the resource for another (Nicolini, 2012: 2), I have tried to re-contextualize practice theory within the context of peasant-workers in post-Deng China.

While the issue of what caused the generations to be different in the first place is not the focus of this thesis, whether it was the changing material conditions or change in perceptions, the insights from a practice theoretical point of view imply that one can investigate how difference manifest itself and become inscribed as durable ways of perceiving and acting in the world through practice.

6.7 Extending the “case” of peasant-migrant workers beyond the industrial semi-proletariat

As I have argued in this thesis, while I do not doubt the salience of a narrative linking urbanization, industrialization and (semi)-proletarianization within the sunbelt of post-Deng China, I think it might be problematic if these workers and workplaces come to represent all rural migrant workers as they often tend to. Arguably, the peasant migrant workers I encountered when doing fieldwork in Yunnan, in its metropolis Kunming and those who had returned to the two villages north of Kunming visited here, constitute another «type» of migrants than those who work within the assembly line workplaces of the Pearl River Delta. Those interviewees here work within the informal service work such as family restaurants, grocery stores, car beautification shops, cafeterias and other types of petty capital enterprises or within the construction workplaces still abundant in rapidly transforming Chinese cities. Like those rural migrants who are often portrayed within the popular imaginary of what peasant migrant workers are, i.e. working within assembly line workplaces, these *da gong* subjects passionately go out to work (*qu chu da gong*) and enter the workplaces of the post-Deng Chinese City to realize their diverse life projects. Yet there are no identifiable public or official subject position they can claim as urban or working subjects (such as *nong min gong* - migrant workers, referring to those employed within the assembly line workplaces typically represented in the literature) within the informal petty capitalist workplaces of the provincial metropolis Kunming. They seemed more ambiguous regarding their future, some wanting to return to farm after they had worked in the city and others looking to stay in the city. Most middle-aged smallholders combined working *wai mian* (outside the village) as *dagong* (literally meaning working for the boss) labor with farm-work during the busy season in agriculture back at their smallholding. However, even those youths who saw their move to the city as a permanent shift cared little about formal urban citizenship, increase in social status or held «high» demands in terms of their future work. Their ethos was more constrained, hesitant and ambiguous than certain, unrealistic and ambitious as they proclaimed that they «...just want to live a plain life».

The divergent experiences of work that the two generations of peasant-worker interviewees narrated and how these give rise to different expectations of future work, which I strived to interpret in article 2 based on a Bourdieusian conception of social experience. In article 2, I interpreted the practice of adjusting to a sense of one’s place, i.e. a practical anticipation of one’s aspirations to the experienced financial and social limits and opportunities in life, based

on the difference in social limits and opportunities for the two generations. For me the most interesting part of this conception of experience, is how it tends to give rise to different points of views or expectations and conceptions of what is “possible and impossible for someone like me” (#article 2). Provided that most peasants who go out to work do so without being forcibly displaced from their smallholding changing expectations becomes maybe the most prominent “vehicle” spurring urbanization. Certainly, this is a prominent theme within Chinese working class studies, where the social category of generations has in recent years been deployed to document changes in expectations among rural migrant workers (Pun and Chan, 2013; Pun and Lu, 2010; Pun and Koo, 2016). Bourdieu argued that as people experience the financial and social limits to their lives they tended to adjust their aspirations to what was possible, in terms of a practical sense of what was for them and not for them.

Thus, Bourdieu’s explanation of how the content of aspirations change or is socially differentiated is based on the idea that people living within similar social conditions tend to “cut one’s coat according to one’s cloth” (Bourdieu, 1990: 64), i.e. adjust their expectations according to their interpretation of the social limits of their lives. However, our interpretation of the meaning of the pathways taken on by people to manage their lives, their family life, working life, or education, does not happen unmediated. Thus, the *meaning* of aspirations cannot be reduced to an *immanent* relationship between financial limits and social experience, as this disposes with the important practice of scrutinizing our categories of interpretation. That is, it might be that peasant-workers return to the village not only because they must, but because they desire it, because at home they are not controlled by their bosses (article 2).

6.8 Methodology and Generalization

In terms of the fieldwork and methodology, I have already suggested that the choice of research assistants made an impact on the range of interviews we could do and who would speak to us. Basically, who I worked with made a difference in how we were perceived by the interviewees. However, as I happened to work with two different research assistants with different approaches, sensitivity and positionality in terms of gender, I hope the impact of this did not skew the overall results of the interviewees too much. Of course, having interviewed a broad range of interviewees also decreases the impact of contingency in how we were perceived on the research results. Moreover, I would argue that as I have interviewed both smallholders that

stay behind and those who are working in Kunming, this has added to the ability, I hope, of drawing a more comprehensive context for smallholders. Of course, the research process will always be tainted by the positionality and personality of the researcher, as well as by the (limited) access to the field that makes some research possible and others difficult or impossible (Rose, 1997). The point about generalization of qualitative research approach and data, then, is not so much whether the approach is replicable in other contexts. Rather, the question is whether we can, based on the approach taken, say that the data manufactured is applicable to other smallholders in contemporary China? I hope future work will take the in-between situation of work for peasant-workers as their point of departure, though the empirical findings will certainly be very variegated.

Rather, when it comes to the interpretation of the data, the findings and their level of generalization, I would say that I hope that they "...provides a mental map of the sites to which generalization can, and cannot, be extended" (Payne and Williams, 2005: 310). Some matters are clearly "exceptional" to the study sites as well, particularly as Songhuaba, where the study villages are situated is the target of different policy initiatives aimed at preserving the water reservoir for the benefit of the inhabitants in Kunming and often at the expense of the smallholders in Songhuaba. Another "exceptionalism" for Yunnan at the time of investigation, was the drought that plagued the interviewees and millions of others in south-west China at the time. The conditions for smallholder farming in Kaoyan and Baicai were exceptionally difficult at the time of both fieldworks (in 2009 and 2013), however, the inhabitants of both villages did not possess any immediate plans or even seem to crave for a permanent move to the city. Hence, in terms of interpretation, I would say that it is surprising that the drought did not bolster the yearning of the interviewees for becoming urban citizens or at least, urban subjects. I have made the interpretation that the informality of work plays a key role in the way expectations for the future are thwarted by the interviews or rather, re-interpreted to make their expectations match the current reality. Hence, I have highlighted how the changing world of work in the aftermath of the global financial crisis and the smallholding in the "post-taxation era", at least should make researchers looking at the question of the future of work for smallholders, investigate both the agrarian and wage-work centered imaginaries and practices of rural migrant workers and their family members.

Moreover, I have suggested that the urban context of Kunming is quite apart from the urban context of work for rural migrant in the Pearl River Delta, both due to the lack of any public identity (*nongmingong*) to be claimed for the migrant workers in Kunming and the difference in size of employer (which makes identifying adversaries for class struggle more ambiguous) and workplace (which makes living and working together for extended periods of time less likely to happen in the petty-capitalist workplaces of the interviewees in Kunming than the typical representations of rural migrant workers in the assembly line workplaces from the Pearl River Delta and elsewhere). As such, I have argued that the literature on the work of smallholders in post-Deng China would benefit from developing different “typologies” of urban terrain of mobility of work and migrant worker praxis, which I hope will be more inclusive for the variety of experiences, situations, and struggles faced by rural migrant workers. The generalizations I make are not so much empirical as they are suggestive or hypothetical in nature, as my findings and critique of existing categories of perception (see chapter 4) hopefully points to new direction in research, solidarity, and practical praxis for smallholders, activists and intellectuals. This is an area of future scholarship.

7 Appendixes

1.1 Appendix 1: Questionnaire Households Master Thesis

Questionnaire concerning migration in Songhuaba Watersheed

松华坝流域打工问卷调查

日期：2009年__月__日

__乡 (town) (镇) __村(village)__小组 (team) 被调查人姓名(name of informant) __年
龄 (age)__性别 (sex)_

文化程度 (education level)____ 民族 (minority/nationality): _____ 调查人 (name of
student) : _____ 打工时间 (migrant worker) : _____

I Basic household data (Jichude baogao de yijiaren/hu) 基本家庭信息.

Table of household members家庭成员表

Age年龄							
Sex 性别							
Relationship with informant与被调查人关系							

What kind of agricultural product does your household produce and how much:

作物种类和面积

Type of product作物类型							
How much mu used面积							

1.4 养殖种类和规模 (basic information about livestock):

养殖类型 Animal	猪 pig	牛 cattle	羊 sheep	马 horse	鸡 chicken				
----------------	-------	-------------	------------	------------	--------------	--	--	--	--

规模 amount									
--------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

1.5耐用品: Durable consumer goods

类型 type	新房 (house)	农用车 farming vehicle	摩托车 motorbike	电视 TV	洗衣机 Washing machine	太阳 能 solar panel				
购入修建 时间 When aquired										
花费 cost										
使用情况 how often use										

支出 expenditure :

化肥 total expenditure (pr year)		粮食 food		通讯 transportation	
农药 pesticide		水气电 electricity bill		医疗 hospital/doctor	
种子 seed		肉油 meat		建房 Housing	
耕地 ploghing equipment		烟酒 tobacco		教育 education	
养殖成本 breed livestock		衣服 clothing		人情 gift for wedding etc	
存款 saving		借出 loan		其它 other	

1.7收入 Income :

种植收入 crop		贫困补助 povery relief		商业收入 trade	
--------------	--	-----------------------	--	---------------	--

养殖收入 livestock		生产补助 production subsidy		运输收入 transportation	
打工收入 off-farm work		水源区补助 protect water		加工收入 processing others crop	
工资收入 wage earning		退耕还林 from growing forest		出租收入 lend something to others	
租地收入 lend out land		借入 loan		其它收入 other	

2打工情况 migrant work

2.1打工的基本信息 basic migrant work :

姓名 migrant member	NO.1	NO.2	NO.3	NO.4	NO.5
性别 sex					
年龄 age					
教育程度 education level					
婚否 married					
是否在打工之 前结婚 married before went out					
结婚对象家庭 位置 Wife's household where					
打工地点 where to work					

第一次打工时间 when went out the first time					
总打工时间 how long has the migrant worked in city					
每年打工时间 how many months pr year work out					
每年回家次数 how many months pr year come home					
回家原因 why do the migrant return home					
工作类型 what kind of work					
工作改变频度 how often change job					
月收入 income pr month					
给家里钱数/ 年 how much are brought back pr month					

其它东西（礼品、衣服等） something else brought back					
---	--	--	--	--	--

1.为什么你家人要出去打工? Why did they go to the city to work?

A. 家里没钱 lack of money B.地少 lack of enough land C.没事干 lack of enough to do D.出去学点东西 to get new perspectives E.其它 other _____

2.在他们出去打工之前, 他们认识城里的人或在城里打工的当地人吗? Do they know anyone in the city before they go there to work?

A.认识 yes B.不认识 no

如果认识, 他们认识谁? If they know someone, who do they know?

A.朋友 friend B.亲戚 relative C. 同乡 fellow villager D. 同学 classmate E.其它 others _____

3.谁帮助他们找到工作? Who helped them to find a job in the city?

A.朋友 friend B.亲戚 relative C. 同乡 fellow villager D. 同学 classmate E.其它 others _____

2.2打工对家庭和自然村的影响 effects of going out to work on household and village

4.你认为打工是怎样影响你们家庭收入的? In what way does the fact that one or more members of your household go out to work affect the income of your household?

A. 增加 Increase B.减少 decrease C.没有变化 does not change

如果减少, 为什么? if reduction, why? _____

如果没有变化, 为什么? If it does not change, why? _____

5.你认为打工是否影响你家的农活? Do you think that when some of the members of your household go out to work this affects the agricultural work in your family?

A.影响 it influences B. 不影响 it does not influence

如果是, 是怎么影响的? If it influences, in what way? _____

打工是否影响你家的生活? Does the fact that some of the members of your family go out to work affect the life in your household?

A.影响 influences B. 不影响 does not influence

如果影响, 是怎么影响的? In what way does it influence _____

6. 你认为打工对家里的老人有影响吗? Does the fact that some of your household members went out to work affect the care of the elderly in your household?

A. 有 have affect B. 没有 does not have affect

如果影响, 怎么影响的? In what way does it have an effect _____

给个例子: Please give an example _____

7. 你认为打工对丈夫(妻子)有影响吗? Does the fact that some of your members went out to work affect your wife/husband's work?

A. 有 have effect B. 没有 not have an effect

如果影响, 怎么影响的? If it has an effect, in what way: _____

给个例子: Please give an example _____

8. 你认为打工对家里的孩子有影响吗? Does the fact that some of your HH members went out to work affect your children's care?

A. 有 have effect B. 没有 does not have effect

如果影响, 怎么影响的? If it has effect, in what way: _____

给个例子: Please give an example _____

9. 请选择你认为可能存在的外出打工对你们家的影响: These are examples of effects that going out to work might have on the family, please choose the one's you think applies

教育投入 spending on education () 例子 example
: _____

饮食投入 spending on food () 例子 example
: _____

衣服投入 spending on clothes () 例子 example

: _____

生活环境 surroundings () 例子 example

: _____

经济条件 economic condition () 例子 example

: _____

居住环境 habitation condition () 例子example

: _____

社会地位 social status () 例子 example

: _____

卫生条件 sanitation condition () 例子example

: _____

外界联系 outside relations () 例子 example

: _____

邻里关系 neighbourhood relations () 例子 example

: _____

家庭关系 family relations () 例子example

: _____

风俗习惯 customs/values () 例子example

: _____

传统文化 tradition () 例子 example

: _____

消费观念 ideas about consumption () 例子 example

: _____

生活习惯 life habits () 例子 example

: _____

其它 other :

_____ 例子example

: _____

_____ 例子example

: _____

你认为哪一种影响最大？ what is the most important effect _____

10. 你认为外出打工对村里的生活有影响吗？ Do you think that the fact that some members of the village go out to work affect the village life?

A.有 affect B. 没有 does not affect

如果影响，怎么影响的? If it have an effect, in what way? _____

给个例子 please give example
: _____

11. 你认为外出打工对村里的农业生产有影响吗? Do you think going out to work effects the agricultural work in the village

A.有 have effect B. 没有 does not have effect

如果影响，怎么影响的? If it affects, in what way _____

给个例子 please give example
: _____

12.请选择你认为可能存在的外出打工对你们村子的影响 choose the options that you think applies to this question: what effect does going out to work have on the village? :

风俗习惯 values () 例子 example
: _____

生活习惯 life custom () 例子 example
: _____

生活环境 living environment () 例子 example
: _____

居住环境 Building/yard () 例子 example
: _____

外界联系 outside relations () 例子 example
: _____

邻里关系 neighbourhood relations () 例子 example
: _____

传统文化 traditions () 例子 example
: _____

其它 others :

_____ 例子 example
: _____

_____ 例子 example : _____

_____ 例子 example : _____

你认为哪一种影响最大？ What is the most important? _____

13. 你认为你家人出去打工是否学到一些技术？ Do you think that the workers that go out acquire new technological skills

A. 是 yes B. 没有 No

如果能，举个例子 If acquired, please give example. _____

14. 你认为你家人出去打工是否学到一些知识？ Do you think that the workers that go out acquire new knowledge

A. 是 yes B. 没有 no

如果能，举个例子 if they do, please give example. _____

15. 你认为你家人出去打工后思想是否有变化？ Do you think that the workers that go out have changed (ideas)

A. 有 yes B. 没有 no

如果有，举个例子 if they have, please give example. _____

16. 你认为你家人出去打工后行为（待人接物）是否有变化？ Do you think that the works that go out have changed their way of being towards others

A. 有 yes B. 没有 no

如果有，举个例子 if they have, in what way? . _____

17. 你认为你家人出去打工后对他将来生活的看法有没有变化？ has the member of your household that went out to work changed his/her perspective on the future

A. 有 yes B. 没有 no

如果有，怎么变化. If so, in what way _____

18. 你认为外出打工怎么样？ What do you think of the effects of people going out to work

A. 好 good B. 不好 negative C. 一般 no opinion

如果好，为什么？ If good, why? _____

如果不好, 为什么? If negative,
why?

19. 他们以后的打算是什么? What are your household's plans for the future

A. 继续打工 B. 挣钱后回家 C. 不知道 do not know D. 其它 other _____

3*没有打工情况家庭的问卷调查 : Questions for HH without migrant workers

1. 你的家人会出去打工吗? Would your family have members that go out to work if you had the opportunity?

A. 会 would B. 不会 would not

如果会, 为什么? _____ If would, why would you go out? _____

如果不会, 为什么? If would not, why not? _____

2. 你家以后的计划是什么? What is your household's plans for the future?

3. 你认为社会关系在找工作中有作用? Do you think that social relationships have an effect on who has the opportunity to go out to work?

A. 有 yes B. 没有 no

4. 你认为社会关系在确定工作种类中有作用? Do you think social relationships have an effect on what kind of job one gets when going out to work?

A. 有 yes B. 没有 no

5. 你认为外出打工对村里的生活有影响吗? Do you think that since people are going out to work this affects the life in the village?

A. 有 yes B. 没有 no

如果影响，怎么影响的? If it has an effect, in what way? _____

给个例子 please give example
: _____

6. 你认为外出打工对村里的农业生产有影响吗? Do you think that since people are going out to work this affects the agricultural work in the village?

A.有 yes B. 没有 no

如果影响，怎么影响的? If it affects the work, in what way? _____

给个例子 please give example
: _____

12.请选择你认为可能存在的外出打工对你们村子的影响 choose the options that you think applies to this question: what effect does going out to work have on the village? :

风俗习惯 values () 例子 example
: _____

生活习惯 life () 例子 example
: _____

生活环境 housing () 例子 example
: _____

居住环境 living environment () 例子 example
: _____

外界联系 outside environment () 例子 example
: _____

邻里关系 neighbourhood relations () 例子 example
: _____

传统文化 traditions () 例子 example
: _____

其它 others :

_____ 例子 example
: _____

_____ 例子 example : _____

_____ 例子 example : _____

你认为哪一种影响最大？ What is the most important? _____

8.你认为外出打工怎么样？ What do you think of the effects that going out to work has on the village

A.好 good B.不好 negative C.一般 no opinion

如果好，为什么？ If good, in what way? _____

如果不好，为什么？ If negative, in what way? _____

1.2 Appendix 2: Household Questionnaire PhD

日期：2013年__月__日

Household questionnaire 农民家庭调查

我们是中科院昆明植物研究所，世界混农林业中心与山地系统研究中心的工作人员。我的名字叫托马斯，和我一起的还有 45-60 minutes，我是挪威的一名博士生，想来你们这里做外出务工的研究。我的中文不好，我的中国朋友会帮助我这次做访谈，访谈大约花 时间。访谈期间您可以离开或终止访谈，如果您有别的事情或者您不愿意接受访谈。如果您选择离开，如果可能的话希望您告诉我原因，我们可以选择一个合适的时间再把访谈完成。

我来说一下这次访谈的主要目的，我们主要调查村民外出打工的经历和影响。我们感兴趣的问题包括：您的收入来源主要是什么，您的花费都包括那些，总的来说，家里有一个或多个人外出打工对家庭和家里的经济有什么影响。我们将要访谈尽可能多的外出务工的人和他们的家人还有您们村子的人。

我们要强调的是，这是2009年1月份的跟踪研究，我们对这几年农村政策对您的生活有哪些改变比较感兴趣。访谈的信息会用到托马斯的博士论文和一篇出版的报告中。

我们保证您所提供的信息不会跟您的名字直接联系在一起，您家人和村民的名字也不会以任何方式泄露。您以匿名的方式接受采访，除非您愿意接受深度采访，之前我们也提到过了，您可以随时中断访谈，我们尊重您的决定。

最后，我们非常感谢您协助我们完成这次研究。

家庭 小组

电子邮件：

电话号码：

日期：2013年__月__日

Interviews for farmer households in Songhuaba

We are coming from the World Agroforestry Centre, Centre for Mountain and Ecosystem Studies, located at the Kunming Institute of Botany. My name is Thomas and with me is my friend [name of research assistant]. I am a PhD student from Norway interested in experiences of going out to work. As my Chinese is so bad my friend here will tell you the rest about this investigation and he/she will also conduct the interview, hope this is ok. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes and you are at all times allowed to leave or decide that you want to discontinue the interview. We of course hope that if you chose to do so you will tell us about your reason and if possible, that we can arrange for the interview to be done another day.

Let us tell you a bit about the purpose of this investigation. It is basically an investigation into experiences and impacts of people going out to work. We are interested in things like what kind of activities you are doing to make an income, what kind of expenditures you have, and in general how the fact that one or more family members go out to work effect on the family and the family economy. We will interview many people that have gone out to work and their family members as well as members of their communities. We want to emphasise that this is a follow up study of households visited in January 2009 and we are interested in seeing how their lives have changed after both rural policies and years have passed. The information we receive will be used in Thomas PhD work and published in a report.

To be sure, the information that you share will not be attached to your name in any way, nor will the name of your household or working team be disclosed. You speak under full anonymity. Only if you are willing to participate in the interview we are going to do it. As mentioned earlier, if you at any time want to withdraw that is entirely your own decision and we respect it.

Last but not least, we strongly appreciate that you are willing to assist us in this research.

Belong to household nrinteam

E-mail address/phone number:

Household Survey Songhuaba Watershed

松华坝流域打工问卷调查

日期：2013年__月__日

__乡 (town) (镇) __村(village)__小组 (team) 被调查人姓名(name of informant) __年
龄 (age)__性别 (sex)_

文化程度 (education level)____ 民族 (minority/nationality): ____ 调查人 (name of
student) : ____ Are you or have you been working out (migrant worker) : ____

1.0 General overview of agricultural activities一般的农业生产

1.1 During the last decade, has the amount or type of landholdings commanded by your family changed in any way? What has changed?

过去十年里，你们家里的土地面积和种类有过变动么？怎么变动的？

1.2 Has your farming activities changed during the last decade, meaning, have you changed the way you do farming like invested in new equipment, kind of fertilizers, anything, the kind of crops you produce, or any other things related to this activity?

过去十年里，你家里的农业生产有过改变么？例如，用新机器、肥料，种子等等？

1.3 Has the watershed policies affected your household in any way? If so, in what way? When did this occur?

河流流域政策对你家有影响么？怎么影响的？什么时候发生的？

1.4 What kind of agricultural product does your household produce and how much:

作物种类和面积

宅地面积 (平方米) Household area							
Type of product 作物类型							
How much mu used 面积							

1.5 养殖种类和规模 (basic information about livestock):

养殖类型 Animal	猪 pig	牛 cattle	羊 sheep	马 horse	鸡 chicken				
规模 amount									

2.0 Basic household data (Jichude baogao de yijiaren/hu) 基本家庭信息.

Table of household members 家庭成员表

Relationship with informant 与被调查人关系							
Age							
Sex 年龄							
Level of education 教育水平							
Is currently doing farming work 1) everyday, 2) sometimes (specify), 3) not at all)							
Has been involved in farming in the past? 1) everyday, 2) sometimes (specify), 3) not at all) 1) When did they stop and why?							
Goes to school and which level							
Goes out to work							

Other livelihood activities								
-----------------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

3.0耐用品: Durable consumer goods – have your family invested in something valuable the last five years?

类型 type	新房 (house)	农用车 farming vehicle	摩托车 motorbike	电视 TV	洗衣机 Washing machine	太阳 能 solar panel	Other (specify)	Other (specify)		
购入修 建时间 When aquired										
花费 cost										
使用情 况 how often use it										

3.1支出 expenditure :

What would you say are the four areas/items that your household per year use most money on? 你们家里花钱最多的四个方面是什么?

Do you manage to save any money? If so, what would you like to spend them on?

你有存款么?如果有,打算怎么花?

In what way would you say that agriculture/farming is a prioritized area for your spending? 农业生产哪方面最花钱?

What about other area like education or medical expenditures, how much would you say that you use on them and are these prioritized areas of expenditure? 其它的方面比如教育和医疗, 要花很多钱么,花多少?

Have you invested in housing/accommodation? If so, where did you buy land/house?
 你投资房子么?在哪里买地或房子?

3.2收入 What in general terms is your families total income (pr year) :

Total income pr year					
种植收入 crop		贫困补助 povery relief		商业收入 trade- please specify	
养殖收入 livestock		生产补助 production subsidy		运输收入 transportation	
打工收入 off-farm work		水源区补助 protect water subsidy		加工收入 proccessing others crop	
工资收入 wage earning		退耕还林 from growing forest		出租收入 lend something to others	
租地收入 lend out land - how much		借入 loan		其它收入 other - please specify	

4.0打工情况 migrant work:打工的基本信息 current or last period of migrant work :

姓名 Migrant member	NO.1	NO.2	NO.3	NO.4	NO.5
性别 Sex					
年龄 Age					
教育程度 Education level					
婚否 Married					
Have children孩子					
Is currently working out – if not, when returned现在打工么,什么时候回来的? 的?					
打工地点 Where to work					
第一次打工时间 When went out the first time					

每年回家次数 How many months pr year come home					
工作类型 What kind of work					
给家里钱数/年 How much are brought back pr month					
其它东西（礼品、衣服等） Something else brought back					

Control question: Are there any members of your household who have moved out and not returned for an extended period of time for work or marriage? 因为工作和婚姻的问题，你家有人出去打工很长时间没回来么？

4.2 你们以后的打算是什么？What is your household's plans and aspirations for the future?

5.0没有打工情况家庭的问卷调查：Questions for HH without migrant workers

5.1 如果有机会,你的家人会出去打工吗? Would your family prioritize to send members out to work if you had the opportunity?

A.会 would B. 不会 would not

如果会, 为什么?_If would, why would you go out

如果不会, 为什么?If would not, why not

5.2 Have there been any other changes for your household during the last decade that you would like to tell us about? 过去十年里, 你家里有什么变化?

5.3What is your household's plans and aspirations for the future (living where, doing what, for your children)? 你家以后的计划是什么?

Thank you for giving of your time and sharing with us. 谢谢您的时间很分享!

1.4 Appendix 3: Interview Guide Migrant Workers

日期：2013年__月__日

Interviews for migrant workers 外出务工者访谈

我们是中科院昆明植物研究所，世界混农林业中心与山地系统研究中心的工作人员。我的名字叫托马斯，跟我一起还有__XX__，我是挪威的一名博士生，想来你们这里做外出务工的研究。我的中文不好，我的中国朋友会帮助我这次做访谈，访谈大约花__时间。访谈期间您可以离开或终止访谈，如果您有别的事情或者您不愿意接受访谈。如果您选择离开，如果可能的话希望您告诉我原因，我们可以选择一个合适的时间再把访谈完成。

我来说一下这次访谈的主要目的，我们主要调查村民外出打工的经历。我们感兴趣的问题包括：您为什么选择外出务工，您具体做什么的工作，什么事件让你外出务工和回家等等。这个研究调查外出务工人员和他的家庭生活，打工对家里的收入和支出有什么影响，做什么样的工作，怎么照顾小孩等等。这些基本的动机会有助于我们理解生活是怎么被外出务工和返乡所塑造的。我们将要访谈尽可能多的外出务工的人。访谈的信息会用到托马斯的博士论文和一篇出版的报告中。如果您想收到这份报告，请提供您的电子邮箱给我们。

我们保证您所提供的信息不会跟您的名字直接联系在一起，您家人和村民的名字也不会以任何方式泄露。您以匿名的方式接受采访，除非您愿意接受深度采访，之前我们也提到过了，您可以随时中断访谈，我们尊重您的决定。

最后，我们非常感谢您协助我们完成这次研究。

家庭 小组

电子邮件：

电话号码：

Interviews for migrant workers

We are coming from the World Agroforestry Centre, Centre for Mountain and Ecosystem Studies, located at the Kunming Institute of Botany. My name is Thomas, with me is my research assistant [name of research assistant]. I am a PhD student from Norway interested in experiences of going out to work. As my Chinese is so bad my friend here will tell you the rest about this investigation and he/she will also conduct the interview, hope this is ok. The interview will take 30-60 minutes and you are at all times allowed to leave or decide that you want to discontinue the interview. We of course hope that if you chose to do so you will tell us about your reason and if possible, that we can arrange for the interview to be done another day.

Let us tell you a bit about the purpose of this investigation. It is basically an investigation into experiences of going out to work. We are interested in things like why you chose to go out to work, what kind of work you had, how events in your life have influenced on your decision to go out to work and return home, and so on. This investigation looks into the lives of people going to work and their families, how it affects income and expenditures, what kind of work they do, their organization of care of children, and so on. The basic motivation is that this will assist us in understanding how lives are being shaped by going out to work and return. We will interview many people that have gone out to work and the information we receive will be used in Thomas PhD work and published in a report. If you want to receive this report you can provide us with your e-mail address below, which is up to you.

To be sure, the information that you share will not be attached to your name in any way, nor will the name of your household or working team be disclosed. You speak under full anonymity. Only if you are willing to participate in the interview we are going to do it. As mentioned earlier, if you at any time want to withdraw that is entirely your own decision and we respect it.

Last but not least, we strongly appreciate that you are willing to assist us in this research.

日期：2013年__月__日

Basic data :

Research participant	Participant	Partner (if working out)
被调查人姓名(name of informant)		
性别 sex		
年龄 age		
教育程度 education level		
村子From where (town(乡),village(村))		
民族 Minority		
婚否 Married		
孩子Children		
现在住在Is currently living where		
什么工作Working/doing what currently		

Table of household members 家庭成员表

Relationship with informant 与被调查人关系							
Age 年龄							
Sex 性别							
Goes to school 学历							
Does farming on a daily basis 每天干农活么							
Go out to work 外出务工							
Other income earning activities 其它收入							

打工历史—时间、地点、工作类型

Times (and places if applicable) of moving (back and forth) and reasons for it: Yea, place, type of work



Mobility I: The beginning 流动 I: 开始

When you first decided leave the village to go out to work, how old were you? 你什么时候第一次出去打工的, 几岁?

At that time, why did you decide to move? 为什么决定出去?

How you decided on where you would like to move each time? 每次你是怎么决定去什么地方的?

How was your parents and other relatives involved in your decision(s) to move? 你的父母和其他亲戚怎么影响你的决定的?

At first, when you moved, did you intend to leave the village for good or did you perceive it more as something you would do temporary before moving back again? 开始出去时, 你是打算为了好生活还是只想在外面待一段时间就回来?

What, as you recall it, lie behind this motivation (of staying for a certain period of time/permanent or temporarily)? 是为了什么才出去的 (在外面待一段时间—暂时的一长期在外面生活) ?

In the first time living in.....could you describe or tell us how you felt about living there, like what was difficult and what parts did you enjoy? 第一次住在_____, 你的生活是怎么样的, 有什么困难和欢乐的?

Has living away from your home, your community and village, affected the way you perceive it? 在外面生活的经历让你对自己的老家有什么看法?

How do you perceive your living standard compared to people in your home town/village (accommodation, salary, living environment, experiences, etc.)?

Friends, would you say that most of your friends in the location where you work are from your workplace or they are fellow village members living in the same area/location? 你打工时的同事都是你的同乡么?

In the village, if you experience difficulties in life you might rely on your family and fellow villagers while for most this is not something they can do while working outside, what role does friendship play for you here (in place/location of work)?

During the first year(s), did you return home at times and what motivated you to do so?
刚开始的第一年，你经常回家么，什么原因？

Or in the opposite case, did you want to return but was unable to? If so, what restricted you?

有没有这种情况，你想回家但是回不了？如果有，什么限制你回家？

What kind of work did you try at first? 第一次尝试什么工作？

How was that initiated, I mean, how did you get the job? 怎样得到那份工作的？

Have you tried several types of jobs and were they initiated in different ways? 你尝试过几份工作么？都是怎么开始的？

What motivated you to change jobs? 为什么要换工作？

In what way are friends at work important to you and how do it influence on whether you would like to change jobs or not? 朋友在什么方面对你重要？他们怎么影响你换工作的？

Have you faced any discrimination or unfair treatment from the management at your workplace, if so what kind, and how does that influence on your decision to find other kinds of work?
工作中遇到过不平等的待遇和歧视么？如果有，是怎样影响你换工作的？

Many have told us that they have had to pay parts of their salary as a deposit to the boss, have you experienced this and which arguments did the boss use to justify this practice?

Do you find it easy to change jobs or how is that? 换工作容易么？是什么样的情况？

What do you perceive that you will be doing in two years' time? 两年之内你做什么？

What about accommodation, how did you find a place to stay, what kind of accommodation was it, and did you move around during the first time or you found a permanent place right away?

你是怎样找到住处的，什么样的住处，你经常换住处么还是永久地住在一个地方？

Why did you move around? 为什么到处搬？

How did it affect your quality of life, that is, how did you feel about moving around?
经常到处搬家怎样影响你的生活的？

Was changing the accommodation an important priority for you when you changed jobs or moved around? 当你换工作或到处换地方的时候，住处是你首先考虑的么？

How many people share a room where you lived during your different workplaces/at your current job?

Have you stayed at home for longer periods of time after moving out?
你外出打工以后，有没有呆在家很长一段时间？

What motivated you to do so? 为什么呆在家？

If you were allowed, would you like to stay in the city/the place you work or return back home? Please elaborate. 如果可以的话,你喜欢呆在老家和是城里面或你工作的地方?请解释问什么.

Where is your hukou at the moment registered?

Have you felt the need to register for a temporary residence permit at the location where you work? If no, why? If so, please elaborate.

People without a local hukou do not receive unemployment benefits if they lose their job. Have you been unemployed after leaving your home village? If so, what was the situation then, did you return home or how was that?

What about wages, how much do you approximately earn per month at the moment? 现在每月挣多少钱?

Are housing and food provided for by the workplace? 工作的地方提供食宿么？

How would you say that you use your wages? 你怎么用工资？

支出Expenditures for yourself and other family members living in the city : 自己和家庭在城里的支出

Do you feel that your parents have expectations that you will send them some money from time to time?

How much of your money do you send home each year? Do you send/bring back home anything else? 你每年往家里带多少钱，除了钱还有什么？

Do you manage to save any money? If so, what would you like to spend them on? 你有积蓄么，打算怎么用？

In what way would you say that agriculture/farming is a prioritized area for your spending? 农业生产哪方面花钱最多？

Have you invested in housing/accommodation? If so, where did you buy land/house? 你在房子上投资么？如果是，在哪里买的地和房子？

Mobility II: Marriage 流动II：婚姻

So, when did you marriage? 什么时候结婚？

Where is your wife/husband from and where did you meet? 你的配偶是哪里人？你们在哪里遇到的？

How did you and your husband/wife meet? 你们怎么遇到的？

The time after marriage, where did you live, where did your wife/husband live? 结婚后，你在哪里住，你配偶在哪里住？

Control question: did you and your wife before you got married move back home?

你们结婚前回老家居住了么？

In this time, these years after marriage, what kind of work were you doing and what did your wife/husband do? 结婚后，你都做什么工作？你配偶做什么？

Mobility III: Children 流动III：孩子

So, you mentioned that you have children; how old are they now? 你的孩子几岁？

Where do they live now? 他们住在哪里？

Have your children always lived there? 他们经常住在那里么？
If no, where did they live before and why? 如果不是，他们以前住在哪里，为什么？

After having children, how did that affect your priorities and opportunities for going out to work? 有了孩子之后，出去打工有什么考虑？

During the pregnancy, did you/your wife stay here the whole time or you/she returned back to your home village when the time came to give birth? Could you tell us a bit about how you thought about this issue at that time?

How do you arrange for childcare on a daily basis? 每天都是怎么安排孩子的？

Where do your parents live? 父母住在哪里？

How are they are involved in taking care of your children? 他们照顾孩子么？

Are your children going to school, if so, at what level are they currently enrolled 你孩子读几年级了？

Where are they going to school? 哪里读书？

Have they always gone to school there? 他们经常在那里读书么？

If no, where did they go to school before and why? 如果不是，他们以前在哪里读书，为什么？

What thoughts do you have about where they will be schooled? 他们以后会在哪里读书？

Mobility III: Return 流动III：返乡

- Why did you return home (permanently) 你为什么永久地返乡？

Do you plan to go out to work again (if earlier migration experience)? 还打算外出务工么？

If a good opportunity arises, would you consider going out again? 如果有好的机会，你会考虑外出务工么？

How would that opportunity look like, meaning, what would it take to motivate you to go out to work again? 那样的机会是什么样子的？什么样的条件才能让你出去打工？

Mobility V: Future(s) 流动 V：将来

What are your hopes and dreams for the future? 你对未来的希望和梦想是什么？

Like, where would you like to live, what would you like to do for a living?
例如，你想在哪里生活，想做什么工作？

How would you describe finding a partner is locally as opposed to finding someone when out working? 你怎么看找一个当地的配偶和在外面工作遇到的配偶？

What about your children, what future do you hope they will have (living where, doing what, meeting who, etc.)? 你对孩子的将来有什么希望（生活的地方，工作，婚姻等）？

How would you consider doing (or continue doing) agricultural work – farming, in the future?
你以后还想做农活么？

Have you done farming or agricultural work in the past, like when you grew up?
你以前做过农活么？

Is there anything else you would like to share with us regarding your experiences of going out to work or something you would like to discuss? 你还愿意分享你的打工经历或者别的事情么？

THANK YOU SO MUCH! 十分感谢您的时间和分享！

Thank you for your time!

1.5 Appendix 4: Interviews Team Leaders

Interviews team-leaders Songhuaba Watershed

松华坝流域打工问卷调查

日期：2013年__月__日

__乡 (town) (镇) __村(village)__小组 (team) 被调查人姓名(name of informant) __年
龄 (age)__性别 (sex)_

文化程度 (education level)____ 民族 (minority/nationality): _____ 调查人 (name of
student) : _____ 打工人姓名 (has been working out in the past) : ____

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF VILLAGE: 村子里的一般特点

How long have you been the village/team/woman leader? 做村长/小组长多长时间了?

How many households are there in this team? How many people are living here? How many
women and how many men? 小组里有多少人? 多少人住在村里? 男女各占多少?

How many people are in working age? 劳动力多少?

What kind of minority do people belong to? 都是什么民族?

Basically, what are the most important crops produced in this village? 主要作物是什么?

How much mu of farmland is there in the village in total? How much farmland is there on average for each household?

What is the average income per capita in the village?

Are there any communal resources, like forest or fisheries/pools nearby that can be used by all members of the team? 有没有集体的资源，例如森林、鱼塘等，每个人都可以用？

In general, what are the most important income earning activities of people living in this team?

一般来说，村里主要的收入来源是什么？

Where are the nearest xiaoxue and zhongxue located – how far away from here approx.? 最近的小学和中学离村里多远？

In 2004 a policy of centralizing schools was implemented, how did it affect this village and schools nearby? In other words, have there been any changes in recent years of where schools are located?

2004年实现学校集中，附近的学校有变化么？

What about medical facilities, if people need to see a doctor or need medical attention, where can they go? 生病了，去哪里看病？

How often is land redistributed among the households? Is it done due to people moving out to work for longer periods of time and how is that done? 土地多长时间分一次？跟长期外出务工的人有关系么？

Are there currently laborers being hired from outside to work in agriculture? 这里有雇佣外地人从事农活的么？

- When did that approx. start and has there been any changes in the recent years (like more, from other places, etc.)? 什么时候开始的，最近几年有什么变化么？

What about water shed policies of turning farmland into agroforestry, in what ways has it affected this village? 农田变成森林的流域政策是怎么影响村子的？

When were these policies implemented and are they finished being implemented or it is still in progress?

政策是什么时候执行的，现在停止了么还是依然有效？

Are there any future plans of making changes in the ways land is utilized in this area? 这里的土地以后计划怎么用？

- Like turning agricultural land into forestry, business development, natural resource extraction or other developments? 例如将农田变成森林、商业用地、自然资源开采或者其它发展项目？

How are people losing their land for forestry compensated? 农地变森林的补偿标准是什么？

Has the local government encouraged going out to work? If so, in what way?

当地政府鼓励你们外出务工么？通过什么方式？

What about young people living here and have not gone out to work, how do they gain an income?

没有外出打工的年轻人是怎么谋生的？

MIGRATION: 移民

How many people are currently working out? 多少人在外面打工？

Would you say that there are just as many girls working out as there are boys? 男女打工人数一样么？

Where do they usually go to work? 他们通常都去哪里打工？

What kind of work do most people have? 大多数人做什么工作？

- How do people find information about working opportunities there? 怎么在那里找到工作机会的？

- Do they rely on their fellow team members already working there or how is that? 他们的同乡在那里工作么？还是通过别的方式？

Do you see them return several times a year or how is that? 他们一年回来几次？

Maybe you can tell us a bit about how this affects life in the working team: 打工时怎样影响村子的？

- o Like, distribution of land 土地分配

- – management of communal resources like forest, roads, etc. (if many are working out) 集体资源的管理，比如集体林、道路
- Other: funeral rites etc.? 其它的如丧葬仪式

Do they return during the busy season in agriculture? 农忙时他们回来么？

- Is it similarly for men and women? 男女在农忙时都一样回来么？

- Please elaborate 请解释

- Is it similarly for young and old? 老少都一样么？

- Please elaborate 请解释

What about their children, the children of people working out, where do they stay? 外出务工的子女在哪里住？

- With their grandparents, in the city, or the mother/father is here to take care of them?

跟爷爷奶奶，在城里，爸或妈在家里照顾？

How are money usually transferred between the worker in the city/da gong and the rest of the family (through the post office, rural credit cooperative, mail, by bringing it home, other)?

在外打工的人怎么跟家里寄钱，通过邮局、农村信用社还是带现金回来？

How long do people usually work out, 一般出去打工多久

- Do they return? 他们返乡居住么？

- If so, why do they return? 为什么返乡？

- When they return, do they continue doing farming or they make a living by doing other activities?

返乡后，还继续做农活么还是靠别的方式找钱？

Finally, do people that remain in the village get more opportunity to rent others land for farming or grassland for their livestock/animals when others are working out? 留在村子里的人有机会租外出务工人的地么？租地都做什么？

Thank you for your time! 感谢您的时间！

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9 Part II: Articles

Part II presents the three articles on which the present thesis is based. In the following three chapters the articles are presented as they were submitted for publication.

9.1 Article 1: Chinese Peasants in Transition

Published in Lund, R., Kusakabe, K., Panda, S. M., and Wang, Y. eds. 2013. *Gender, Mobilities, and Livelihood Transformations: Comparing Indigenous People in China, India, and Laos*. Jakobsen, T. S. "Chinese peasants in transition", pp 69-92.

Note that I have had to make some adjustments to the format for including it in the PhD. I hope this has made it more reader friendly. The content, however, remains unchanged from when it was published.

4 Chinese peasants in transition

Thomas Sætre Jakobsen

Introduction

This chapter provides insights into how transitions within the life courses of migrant workers in Yunnan Province, China, involve periods of mobility and immobility that impinge on livelihood resources and illuminates how life-course transitions differ between two generations of rural migrant workers. One of the most visible features of '[n]eoliberalism with Chinese characteristics' (Harvey 2005, 122), commonly referred to as 'open-door' policies or reforms, is the increasing mobility of the rural population as migrant workers (Davin 1999; Solinger 1999; Murphy 2002; Chan 2008). Migration from rural to urban areas has been a strategy for livelihood diversification for rural households in China since the early 1980s and has become a permanent and increasingly important factor in China's economic success by supplying the manufacturing sector, export processing zones, and urbanized areas in general with cheap and unyielding labour (Hare & Zhao 2000; Liang 2001; Pun 2005; Chan 2008). At the same time, due to the household registration system, rural migrant workers have been denied the opportunity to settle permanently in urban areas, access to educational and health services, and basic social rights such as pension allowances (Solinger 1999; Whyte 2010).

What is termed the new generation or second-generation migrant workers, a demarcation of rural migrant workers born after 1980, now makes up 85 million of the c.145 million rural labour migrants in China (Hu 2012). It is argued that the new generation of migrant workers travel further to work compared to the old generation born before 1980, that they do not necessarily return to assist their household in the harvest season because they remain in the vicinity of the factories and urban areas where they work, and that their goals and motivations for migration differ from those of the old generation of migrant workers (Pun & Lu 2010; Zhu & Chen 2010).

This chapter begins with a conceptual clarification of the relationship between migration, life courses, and generations. Thereafter, the reader is led through a description of

the methodological approach to fieldwork carried out within four rural working teams (*zu*)¹ before reaching the analysis. It is argued that household members' mobility and their livelihood resources are structured around transitions within their life courses, especially with respect to raising children, and that the life courses involve continuities and discontinuities between two generations of rural migrant workers.

Migration, life courses, generations, and social change

This study draws upon a branch of literature on migration and the livelihoods of rural households that argues that migration is one component of the livelihood diversification of such households (Massey *et al.* 1993; Skeldon 1997; Ellis 2000). When the 'new economics of labour migration' (NELM) model emerged in the mid-1980s, the household was identified as the primary social agent in decisions of whether to move (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Massey 1988). Households are often characterized, both in terms of NELM and by the literature on rural livelihoods, as risk averse and actively engaged in practices and strategies aimed at managing risk (Ellis 1998; De Haas 2010). An increasingly common way for households to minimize risk is by allocating resources in a diverse portfolio of activities, captured by the term livelihood diversification (Ellis & Freeman 2005).

A steady critique emerged in the mid-1990s, especially from feminist scholars, on conceptualizations of the household as a unitary rational actor (Elmhirst 2002). Objective relations dividing members of households along gender and age hierarchies conspire to make households contested domains. Put differently, rural migrant workers have a will of their own and the relationship between household priorities and that of individual migrant workers involves struggles, remorse, and shared interests in different situations (Pun 2005). In recent years, there has been increased interest in studying how different transitions within the life courses of households and individuals shape the mobile livelihood options and fortunes of rural households and the individuals comprising those households (De Jong & Graefe 2008; Thao 2013). With the concept of *life courses*, in contrast to the concept of life cycle, the focus shifts from analysing a fixed set of stages that families go through to how both the practices and circumstances of families and individuals change throughout transitions within life courses (Bryman 1987). For the purpose of the present study and the focus on life courses, *time* and how we understand migration as involving movement from one place to another and taking place more frequently at certain periods than others, is of particular interest. Thus, we move from seeing migration as a timeless practice as it appears to the observer (Bourdieu 1977) to migration

‘as an “action in time”’ (Halfacree & Boyle 1993, 337).

The shift in perception allows us to conceptualize migration as not just movements to somewhere else, but as involving different degrees of immobility and mobility throughout the life courses of individuals and households. It follows that such transitions within the life course will have important consequences for the livelihood options and outcomes of migrant households (De Jong & Graefe 2008). The term ‘migrant households’ refer to households in which one or more family members are migrant workers. Conceptualizing mobility within different times in the history of a household, i.e. transitions within the life courses of the individuals comprising the household unit at various times and places, enables us to illuminate issues such as how transformation from a single sojourner within adolescence towards marriage and subsequently raising children is situated relatively along the mobility–immobility continuum. It also allows us to understand that transitions transform the livelihood options and outcomes for households, especially with respect to how having children incurs high expenditure for many years, as demonstrated by both this chapter and Chapter 3 by Wang *et al.*

Further, when looking at life courses and the transitions within them in terms of their significance for the immobility and mobility of household members as well as how they shape the material resources of households, we also need to acknowledge that they are taking place within a specific historical time (Pilcher 1994). Thus, transitions within the life courses of rural migrant workers who grew up before the reforms were set in motion in China might have been completely different from those who grew up in the reform era. Whereas the concept of generation is often used to refer to parent-child relations, the concept of cohort is commonly understood within the social sciences ‘as those people within a geographically or otherwise delineated population who experienced the same significant life event within a given period of time’ (Glenn 1977, 8).

Underscoring the importance of conceptual rigour and common ground, Jane Pilcher (1994) argues that we should make a distinction between *generations*, understood as the structural kinship relation between parents and children, and *social generations*, understood as people who grow up with shared experiences in the same socio-historical time, which is how Karl Mannheim defined the concept in 1923 in his seminal essay *The Problems of Generations* (Mannheim 1952). In his understanding of social generations, Mannheim both stresses the continuity of certain social structures such as class relations and how an analysis of social generations could reveal how social change comes about through changed life events between social generations. Hence, for him it was not external time that defined generations (e.g. people

born before or after 1980) but ‘a subjective condition of having experienced the same dominant influences’ (Pilcher 1994, 486).

Moreover, Mannheim recognized that although people that are born in the same year grow up during the same time, live through adolescence during the same decade, and so forth, they do not necessarily share the same history (Pilcher 1994). Recognizing the subjective formation of social generations does not sidestep the factual issue of dealing with generations as quantitative cohorts – people existing within the same time span and qualitative social generation, i.e. people who share experience and have been subject to the same or similar influences through common events. In the case of Chinese rural migrant workers, the decisive year of 1980 is not arbitrary because it refers to the commonly accepted year of the initiation of reforms after more than 30 years of Maoist rule and the initiation of rural and urban market transformation. It could be argued that by looking at life courses and how they are constituted differently between social generations, we are exploring the social spaces inhabited in personal and historical time (Harris 1987). In other words, rural migrant workers experience transitions in their lives and at the same time they are part of a generation that has shared similar experiences and influences. By looking at differences between generations of rural migrant workers it is possible to develop an index of the social transformations taking place.

The study area and methods

Yunnan Province is situated in southwest China, bordering Myanmar in the west, Laos and Vietnam in the south, Guizhou Province and Guangxi Province in the east, and Sichuan and Tibet to the north (Figure 4.1). Yunnan covers an area slightly larger than Japan and has a land size of 394,000 m² and a population roughly the same as that of Spain or Colombia, with 45.4 million in 2008 (Donaldson 2011). Approximately 7 per cent of the land is considered arable, and there is an average of 0.15 ha of arable land per capita. In 2003, the population of Yunnan Province was 43 million people and urban residents had an average disposable income of CNY 7,643.57 (USD 1,226.56),² while farmers had a per capita net income of CNY 1,697.12 (USD 272.337) in 2003 (*Yunnan Statistical Yearbook* 2004). Although the figures for the respective incomes are not directly comparable, they are the closest comparable numbers available for rural and urban households in Yunnan. Yunnanese farmers earned less than the national average for farmers in 2003, which was CNY 2,622 (USD 420.752) (*Yunnan Statistical Yearbook* 2004). According to the *Yunnan Statistical Yearbook* (2004), the agricultural population of the province totalled 36.6 million people in 2003. Although many people in Yunnan are involved

in other income-generating activities in addition to farming, the majority of Yunnanese are farmers.

The fieldwork for this chapter was conducted in the Songhuaba watershed area (Figure 4.1), situated 15 km north of Kunming city, where the activities and the way that farmers carry out their livelihood activities affect the water of residents in Kunming, the provincial capital. For this reason, Songhuaba was designated a special environmental preservation area in the early 1980s (Bureau of Environmental Protection of Kunming City 1988). In 2004, there were 74,382 people living in the area, which spans two counties, Songming and Panlong, which come under the administration of the Kunming city government. Due to the special status of Songhuaba, there are heavy restrictions on the kind of local off-farm businesses that can be set up. There are very few local off-farm working opportunities to be found other than in small shops, restaurants in the nearby towns, or within local government offices. Hence, prior to the study it was expected that migration would be an important livelihood option for many households seeking to diversify their livelihood activities.

The Songhuaba watershed area contains five towns and 44 administrative villages. Within each village, there is usually 3–10 teams (*zu*), hereafter referred to as village groups, ranging from 20 to 200 households (conversations with Kunming World Agroforestry Centre staff, December 2008). In 2004, there were *c.*270 village groups in the Songhuaba watershed area and the annual average income per person in 2004 was CNY 1,662 (USD 266.701), according to the local government.³

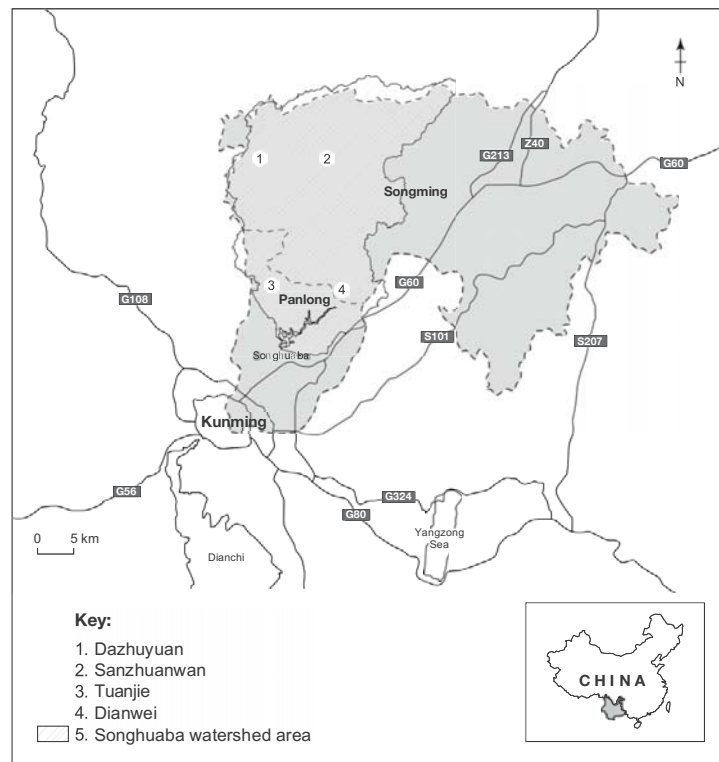


Figure 4.1 Location of the study area, the Songhuaba watershed area in Yunnan Province, China.

Household interviews were conducted in four village groups within four villages: Dazhuyuan, Sanzhuanwan, Tuanjie, and Dianwei (Table 4.1). In order to preserve the village groups' anonymity, they are referred to by their collective village name.

In Dianwei, there are relatively high numbers of migrant workers in proportion to the number of households and the apparent reason for this is that the village group is located close to Songhuaba Reservoir. The government has expropriated most of the land contracted by the Dianwei village group. Since there are few or no local wage labour opportunities, local farmers have increasingly made their living by engaging in migration (household interviews Dianwei, January 2009). The main livelihood activities practised by members of the households in the village group are agriculture and migration. The number of migrant workers within the other three village groups visited is comparable in size relative to the populations of the teams.

Table 4.1 Overview of village groups (teams) visited

<i>Village name</i>	<i>Dazhuyua</i>	<i>Sanzhuanwa</i>	<i>Tuanjie</i>	<i>Dianw</i>
Number of residents in	189	188	200	115
Number of households in team*	41	50	70	26
Average income per capita (CNY) (2004)**	1118	867	—	2311
Average income per household (CNY)*	3430	2000	3000	3300
Number of migrants in team*	27	22	22	35
Number of households with migrant members*	19	15	18	19

Notes: *Household interviews Songhuaba, January 2009; ** See endnote 2.

Very few households reported that they received government assistance beyond water area assistance, which every household received as compensation for not being able to diversify their livelihoods locally by running businesses. The policy of setting up restrictions on business activities and expropriating farmland was reputedly implemented to avoid pollution and further containment of Songhuaba Reservoir. The assistance is provided as part of the national government policy of restoring 40,000 mu (1 mu = 667 m²) of farmland to forest (Bureau of Environmental Protection of Kunming City 1988). Only one household informed that they ran their own business. Other households reported that government transfers accounted for part of their income, which they received as part of the government's fight against poverty through poverty assistance to poor households (household interviews, January 2009). Overall, the stock of crops being produced between the teams were similar, and consisted of *cai* (Chinese cabbage), *gu* (corn), *tu dou* (potato), *mai* (wheat), and small amounts of different kinds of fruits, with *ping guo* (apple) being the most common (household interviews Songhuaba, January 2009). The village groups were chosen after we had made some phone calls to village leaders in order to find villages with substantial numbers of migrant workers. Knowledge of the area possessed by my colleague, who was conducting his doctoral research in the area at the time, was crucial for deciding who and where it would be beneficial to visit. We wanted to conduct household interviews within households with migrant workers and households without migrant workers at the time of the study. In addition, to ensure representativeness within the village groups visited, at least two-thirds of the households in each village group were targeted for interviews and in total 85 out of 91 interviews were completed.⁴ Thus, the sizes of the village

groups were also important to allow for the target number of interviews to be reached.

Household interviews were carried out to identify characteristics of demography, assets, livelihood activities, and migration. In addition, the interviewees were asked for their perceptions on why migration was initiated, how it affected work relations within the household with respect to gender and age, the role of networks, and their plans for the future. After the initial phone calls, we identified six villages that we considered suitable in terms of the numbers of households and migrant workers that we wanted to visit. In two of the villages, no one was at home and therefore we ended up holding household interviews in four village groups in four different villages; one member of each household who was above the age of 15 years was interviewed.⁵ We used a snowball method during the interviews to ensure that we targeted households with migrant workers especially, and to ensure that we visited houses where people were present. Moreover, when we arrived in the village groups, we gathered members of the community to make a participatory map of the village to enable us to identify households with and without migrant workers, the location of water supplies, agricultural land, grassland, and nearby institutions such as schools, post offices, and stores. The mappings were done to make the purpose of our visits known to the community members and to prepare them for the possibility that we might knock on their doors to ask some questions, and to ensure that we could return to specific households at a later time if we had any follow-up questions. The method was also a means of validating the numbers of migrant workers in the village groups at the time of our visit and the number of members in each household.

During the interviews we used a semi-structured questionnaire and during the participatory mapping we gathered either in an open space or in the home of the village group leader. I was accompanied by four research assistants who were trained in fieldwork and a colleague who was writing his doctoral thesis on the quality of the soil and water in Songhuaba. Some villages were difficult to access due to limited public transportation and poor quality gravel roads, which meant we had to hire a car and a designated driver to reach them. Hereafter, the household survey is referred to as the Yunnan household survey and the participatory mapping is referred to as the Yunnan participatory mapping.

The reason why this chapter focuses on migration solely undertaken for work is to explore the impact of migration on the livelihoods of the households interviewed.⁶ At the time of the household survey, a considerable number of rural migrant workers had returned to their village group, either with the intention of remaining permanently or to stay temporarily with their family during the Spring Festival (the Chinese New Year) celebrations. All except one of

the households visited identified themselves as belonging to the Han majority. Of the 54 migrant worker households that we visited, 43 told us that they had left to find jobs in Kunming city (15 km to the south) because it is situated close to the Songhuaba watershed area. It is almost impossible to commute on a daily basis between Kunming and most destinations within the Songhuaba watershed area due to poor quality roads and fixed working hours. Most of the informants said that the fact that they knew someone in Kunming, either from the family or from the same village group, was an important consideration when taking up work in the city. Hence, social networks and physical distance, as well as financial and personal costs, are important when deciding where to become migrant workers (Lee 1966).

Rural migrant workers in the reform era in China

Any analysis of internal migration in China should take into account the specific institutional mechanisms that regulate mobility in general and settlement in particular. Following the culmination of the present *hukou* system at the end of the 1950s, in 1958 the government established the current mobility regime (Cheng & Selden 1994; Whyte 2010). Under the system, at birth every person inherits their mother's or father's agricultural or non-agricultural registration status, which in practice means they have either a rural or urban citizenship. Although the *hukou* system was reformed at the beginning of the 1980s, provisions from 1985 to allow for temporary residence permits in cities were especially important, and the *hukou* system remains integral in constituting settlement opportunities, work relations between urban employers and rural residents, and welfare provisions for both rural and urban residents (Chan & Buckingham 2008; Xu *et al.* 2011; Solinger & Hu 2012).

There were *c.*100–115 million rural migrant labourers (*minggong*) in China at the beginning of the 21st century (Chan 2008), and the most recent official data suggest that the number had surpassed 200 million by 2010 (Sun & Fan 2010). Most of the migrant workers are not able to retain their urban registration, despite certain reforms to the *hukou* system since the turn of the 21st century to allow some privileged groups, such as overseas entrepreneurs, to settle permanently in urban areas and hold temporary residence permits in urban areas (Chan & Buckingham 2008; Sun & Fan 2010). Rural migrant labour refers to 'the working population without local *hukou* in the destination and from the countryside' (Chan 2008, 97). Traditionally, rural migrant workers in China have been characterized as seasonal workers returning to the countryside during the most intense periods in the agricultural cycle, but their mobility seems to have become characterized by long-term circular movement, whereby they return to their

place of origin once or twice a year. Their circular movement should also be understood in relation to the limited settlement opportunities in urban areas created by the *hukou* system. Moreover, rural migrant workers retain links to their place of origin by sending money and commodities, and by returning to their farm at busy times of the year, as well as during the Spring Festival in January or February (Murphy 2002). The main reasons why rural migrant workers retain strong links with their natal community are social exclusion in the cities, the search for social acceptance at home, their upbringing and a continued sense of 'belonging' to the land through the *hukou* system, diversification of risk by having land as a livelihood safety net, and the expectation of benefits upon return (de Haan 1999; Murphy 2002).

Cindy Fan (2008) implies that the transitions over the life courses of women are important in constituting the livelihood options available for rural households. Young, single women have become an important group of rural migrant workers over the years in China, and have given rise to the concept of *dagongmei* (working girls) (Pun 1999). Whereas adolescence may constitute a time of much mobility for many young women from rural areas in China, the time after marriage often involves long periods of immobility as they are left with the task of managing farm work, childcare, and taking care of their parents-in-law (Fan 2008).

Pun Ngai and Lu Huilin make a distinction between what they name first- generation rural migrant workers, born before the reform period was initiated in the beginning of the 1980s, and who migrated for work during the 1980s and 1990s, and second-generation rural migrant workers, born in the reform period, i.e. after 1980, and who ventured out to work during the late 1990s and in the 2000s (Pun & Lu 2010). Others have made a distinction between new-generation migrants and old-generation migrants (Liu *et al.* 2012). The division between migrant workers born before and after 1980 has thus become commonly accepted within Chinese scholarship on this issue, as ardently argued by Wang Xingzhou (Wang 2008). The concept of a newly emerging generation of mobile rural populations was coined as early as 2001 by Wang Chunguang (cited in Wang 2008). Despite being unsatisfactory, the conceptual couple of new-generation and old-generation rural migrant workers is used in this chapter because it avoids the confusion arising from the use of the terms first generation and second generation.

Yan Hairong makes the case that perceptions concerning personhood have changed dramatically from one generation to another between those that grew up before the reform era and those that grew up within it (Yan 2003). She found that young women interviewed between 1998 and 2000 were impatient to escape their rural origins in Anhui Province and they anticipated that their goals and desires would be achieved in urban areas in the future. Yan

Hairong traces the process of change in the perceptions and outlooks between two cohorts of female rural migrant workers to the discursive violence that the countryside has been subjected to in the post-Mao (1976) era (Yan 2003). Similarly, Pun Ngai and Lu Huilin argue that not only do the new-generation migrant workers lack opportunities to take up permanent urban residence, but also, due to rural-urban inequality, they cannot envision fulfilling their goals and desires by returning to the countryside (Pun & Lu 2010). Not being able to settle in the city due to the *hukou* system and not being willing to return to the countryside and work as farmers gives rise to a sense of quasi-identity among the new-generation migrant workers, who are ‘neither *nongmin* (peasant) nor a *gongren* (worker)’ (Pun & Lu 2010, 498). In addition, it should be noted that the new-generation migrant workers seem to be deskilled in terms of farming, which may distance them further from the traditional subsistence type of farming practised by their parents (Pun 2005). In short, we should expect that members of the new generation of rural migrant workers do not necessarily share the motivations or the mobility patterns of the old generation of rural migrant workers when heading to the city to work.

Migration and the life course

When we asked a woman of 28 years, who formerly had worked in Kunming as a waitress, about her reasons for returning to work on the household farm, she replied that she planned to marry (Yunnan household survey, 2009). It is a common notion that many women return to their natal villages when they are to marry and settle down, both in China and elsewhere (Fan 2008; Thao 2013). In China, this practice is related partly to patriarchal values that guide events throughout the life courses of men and women and partly to the low status assigned to rural women in the urban marriage market (Fan 2008). After marriage, men are expected to continue their breadwinning activities, including leaving their village to find wage work and farm, whereas women are expected to stay at home to take care of children and farmland (Fan 2008). Despite the rules and expectations, they do not fully determine, nor is it possible to predict, the practices and interests of men and women over their life course, as this study shows. In total, there were 29 female and 78 male labour migrants in the studied four village groups in Songhuaba (Yunnan participatory mapping, 2009). The households that we visited accounted for 23 female and 52 male migrant workers, and the average age of the sample was 33 years (Yunnan household survey, 2009). We visited 55 out of 69 migrant worker households in the village groups, which comprised 187 households in total. Hence, more than one-third of the households had one family member working away from home at the time of the investigation. Migrant worker

households were defined as those with one or more members working in off-farm sectors.

With regard to mobility during the course of a year, we were often told that members of households working in urban areas returned home for at least a couple of months each year and more often than not their return coincided with the time of the Spring Festival. The proximity of Songhuaba to Kunming, at least geographically, enhanced their opportunities to be mobile in terms of participating in both life back home and wage labour in the provincial capital. They could return home several times each year to assist their household at busy times in the agricultural year, especially during the autumn, and to participate in major life events such as funerals or weddings involving close family.

A closer look at how mobility was practised by men and women in the households visited in Songhuaba revealed that men had longer tenures as migrant workers compared to their female counterparts. Women typically worked as migrant workers for between two and four years, although a few had spent as much as ten years of their lives working in the same place (Yunnan household survey, 2009). It should be borne in mind that for many migrant workers, 2008 was the first year they had worked outside their household and it thus marked the start of their mobility. For example, a father told us that his daughter aged 19 years had started working in a restaurant in Kunming early in 2008 and although at the time of the interview she had returned for the Spring Festival, it was likely that she would migrate for work afterwards. A comparison of the amount of time that migrant workers spent working as an employee revealed that 29 out of 52 men worked away from home for more than five years, while the corresponding figure for women was nine out of 21 (Yunnan household survey, 2009). Thus, the men in the households visited in Songhuaba typically spend longer periods of time as rural migrant workers. A woman aged 39 years told us that her husband, aged 43 years, had been working away from the village for 13 years and that in his absence she had had to take care of their two children, aged four and 12 years respectively, as well as her father-in-law. In addition, their farmland was reduced when her husband went to work in Beijing, because the land was regulated and distributed according to the number of adult labourers in the household. The woman's burden of farming and housework had increased. She stated that she was willing to go out to work if an opportunity arose because the income gained from farming was not sufficient to support the household. Similar stories were told to us by several women who had been left with the responsibility of taking care of children and parents-in-law as well as farming while their husbands were working away from home (see also Chapter 7 by Kusakabe and Vongphakdy).

Typically, men are in the age group 17–22 years when they start migrating to work in

urban areas (Yunnan household survey, 2009). In addition, a considerable number of able-bodied men have their first experience of migration in their thirties. Interestingly, very few men and women first migrate when they are in their late twenties. However, in Songhuaba, men tend to marry in their late twenties, whereas women often are younger at the time of marriage, and these findings are similar to those from elsewhere in China (Fan & Huang 1998).

Thao (2013), who studied how life-course transitions affect mobility and immobility in a rural area in Vietnam, found that after marriage women typically stay at home for several years. There are reasons to believe that there may be a similar pattern in Songhuaba. First, in accordance with the patrilocal marriage custom, women are expected to settle with their husband in his natal home. Second, with an agricultural *hukou* the responsibility for some of the farmland is inherited by the son and leaving farmland idle is considered a criminal offense as well as socially unacceptable in China (Fan 2008). Thus, either the daughter-in-law or the son is expected to continue the agricultural work and be interested in it. Third, following marriage, it is quite evident that many couples soon become parents, which also inhibits women's and men's mobility in different ways (Fan 2008). The study conducted in Songhuaba revealed that women were most likely to be single when they migrated for work and did not marry until they returned to their place of origin. This was mainly due to their young age at the time of becoming mobile (Pun 1999). Men tended to follow a similar pattern, although some of them remain unmarried in their late thirties. One man aged 39 years told us that there was a possibility that marriage or finding a partner would motivate him to leave his farm in the future. Thus, the life-course transition from being a single young adult into forging conjugal ties renders both women and men less mobile.

Whereas marriage may initially alter the mobility practices of both men and women, having children can further alter their mobility in terms of either their ability or interest in being migrant workers (Thao 2013). During the household survey it was discovered that both men and women were more mobile before having children and after their children had grown up, i.e. after their children had reached the age of 16 years. For example, a father aged 40 years and his wife aged 32 years informed that they could not go out to work as they had to take care of their two children who were aged 11 and 16 years. However, 24 out of 52 of the men who were mobile had children at the time of migration, whereas only three women were mobile. By contrast, in response to the question of whether they would want to migrate to work if they had the possibility, both men and women who had reached their sixties stated that they were too old. Hence, the time after children had grown up was not necessarily considered a

transformation towards increased mobility for older villagers, although it often was for their children.

Fewer women who had transitioned from being single sojourners or married without children were mobile compared to men, suggesting that gender plays an important role in terms of mobility practices throughout the different life-course transitions in the study area. A woman aged 28 years said that she had migrated for work when she reached 16 years and had continued the practice for seven years. However, when she became pregnant she had returned to her place of origin and at the time of the study she was settled with her husband and their son, aged five years. In another family, the husband and father, aged 30 years, worked away from home while his wife took care of their two children, aged four and seven years, thus demonstrating that having children does not necessarily affect husbands and wives in the same way. Thus, in Songhuaba, both women and men are most mobile during adolescence and/or before marriage. This is further illustrated by a woman who informed that her husband had left to work in Kunming 13 years earlier, but when their son was born (in 2004), her husband had started working locally so that he could be closer to his family (Yunnan household survey, 2009).

To summarize, while many migrant workers from Songhuaba continue to work in urban areas after marriage, men are more mobile than women following the transition within their life course. Following the birth of their children, many parents opt to stay at home and farm while the children grow up. However, many still go out to work after having children and in such cases fathers are more mobile than mothers in Songhuaba, which points to the gendered formation of different transitions of their life course.

Mobility and immobility – livelihood outcomes

It is to be expected that different transitions within the life courses of families will affect their well-being, livelihood options, and priorities, as argued convincingly by Gordon De Jong and Deborah Graefe (2008) in their study of the economic consequences of life-course transitions for internal migrants in the USA. In other words, household resources, such as human capital, the level of education and number of adult labourers, and social networks, open up or restrict opportunities in the mobility–immobility continuum. At the same time, the ability, interest, and practices of being mobile or staying put affect household resources. In the case of Songhuaba, transitions within a household affect the members' capability and interest for mobility or staying put, as exemplified in the preceding section by the case of the family with two children

of school age. Arguably, the transition from having children of school age to the time when the children become single sojourners, after they have completed their education or have dropped out of school, has the most impact on the mobility–immobility continuum. The process can be understood with reference to the family with two children below the age of ten years, who stated that they might want to go out to work later but for the time being needed to be at home to take care of their children.

However, quite a large number of households with children had one or two family members who were migrant workers. A son, aged 16 years, stated that since his father had started working in Kunming he did not get enough assistance with his school homework. The remittances received from the father, aged 42 years, were used for the boy's education and his sister's education, which in 2008 cost approximately CNY 5,000 (USD 802.350). Households with grandparents in good health had flexibility in terms of mobility because parents could ask their parents to assist with childcare while they worked away from home. It was also observed that children of pre- school age stayed with their grandparents while their parents worked away from home, which meant there were differences in immobility and mobility among the household members. Hence, when the research participants embarked on their life- course transition, they found that raising children affected their practices and interests with respect to their mobility.

Below, I outline a typology of households based on gross income, ownership of livestock, and ownership of durable consumer goods (Table 4.2). The typology serves as an index of class relations in the village groups visited, and was designed to reveal the relationship between mobility and immobility and resources available at the time of the investigation. In addition to these measures, indicators such as receipt of poverty assistance, a large proportion of income derived from borrowing, lending money to others, saving surplus money, and business ownership are included to show the relative status of the households. This typology was inspired by Rachel Murphy's (2002) household survey conducted in Jiangxi Province, based on the recommendations set out by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The latter approach can be used when no longitudinal household data are available, as was the case for Songhuaba. Thao (2013, 87) makes an analogous case when she compares what she terms 'mover' and 'stayer' households with regard to income and ownership of durable consumer goods and livestock.

To a large extent, the size of land allocations and number of adult labourers correspond to the level of resources found at the time of the investigation (Jakobsen 2009). Hence, the study

confirms the findings from Murphy's (2002) study conducted in Jiangxi Province in the mid-1990s, namely that wealthier households consolidate their position by migrating, as they already enjoy the benefits of many labourers, larger land allocations, and access to local, off-farm labour sources. However, both the study in Songhuaba and Murphy's (2002) study found that, in general, migration leads to a better standard of living for households that participate, thus suggesting that both poorer and wealthier households benefit from outmigration (Table 4.3).

Looking beyond the numbers presented in Table 4.3 gives some clues about the relationship between household resources, life courses, and mobility. In several of the households categorized with low resource endowments, all members of the family were above 60 years, which meant they were less entitled to land resources and their mobility was more likely to be halted by both age and requirements in the urban labour market. In the case of a wife aged 50 years and her husband aged 60 years, who were asked about their plans for the future, they informed that they would have liked to have gone out to work but they were too old. Hence, they perceived their transition towards old age as impinging on their mobility.

Table 4.2 Household typology

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number of households</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>
Low resource endowments	13	<p>Net annual income less than CNY 1000* the previous year</p> <p>Own a few animals</p> <p>Own 1 or less durable consumer goods**</p> <p>Receive poverty assistance from the government***</p> <p>More than 80% of the income derived from borrowing money in the previous year</p>
Low to medium resource endowments	18	<p>Net annual income CNY 1000–1300 the previous year</p> <p>Own fewer than 2 pigs and have few animals in general</p> <p>Own 2 or less durable consumer goods</p> <p>Relatively large proportion of total income is from borrowed means, c.50–70% of total income in the previous year</p>
Medium resource endowments	24	<p>Net annual income CNY 1300–2000 the previous year</p> <p>Fewer than 3 pigs and 10 chickens</p> <p>Own between 3 and 4 durable consumer</p> <p>Utilized approximately CNY 3000 on durable consumer goods in the last 10 years****</p>
Medium to high resource endowments	16	<p>Net annual income CNY 2000–3000 the previous year</p> <p>Fewer than 3 pigs, 10 chickens, and have sheep or cattle in addition</p> <p>Own 4 or less durable consumer goods</p> <p>Utilized approximately CNY 4000–5000 on durable consumer goods in the last 10 years</p>
High resource endowments	16	<p>Net annual income more than CNY 3000 the previous year</p> <p>Own more than 4 pigs, 10 chickens, and cattle or sheep in addition</p> <p>Own more than 5 durable consumer goods and utilized more than CNY 5000 on durable consumer goods in the last 10 years</p> <p>Save money due to surplus in household income in the last year</p> <p>Own a business</p> <p>Lent other people money in the previous year</p>

Source: Yunnan household survey, January 2009 (derived from Jakobsen 2009, 16). Notes:

*See endnote 2.

**Some durable consumer goods are scarcer than others and most households in the survey owned a TV and washing machine, while a few owned a motorbike and a solar panel. Few households received poverty assistance and few households save money, own their own business, or lend money to other people.

***In the survey we asked about ownership and spending on housing, TVs, cars, motorbikes, washing machines, solar panels, and additional durable consumer goods.
 ***The average spending on durable consumer goods for the studied households was CNY 3000 in the period 1999–2009.

Table 4.3 Relationship between household resources and mobility (by household)

<i>Household members who were migrant workers</i>	<i>Low resource endowments</i>	<i>Low to medium resource endowments</i>	<i>Medium resource endowments</i>	<i>Medium to high resource endowments</i>	<i>High resource endowments</i>
None	7	9	7	4	4
One	5	7	13	8	7
Two or more*	1	2	4	4	5

Source: Yunnan household survey, 2009.

Note: *Only one household had more than two migrant workers at the time of the survey.

Mobility and immobility thus shaped the livelihood outcomes for the households in four villages in Songhuaba. Remittances are arguably the most direct way that households gain from having someone working as a migrant worker. Some parents in the study area stated that pressure on their household economy was relieved when their children were able to support themselves as a consequence of migrating for work (Yunnan household survey, 2009). Hence, for some families, the life-course transition from having children of school age to the children becoming migrant workers and leaving their parents' home, means that they gain control over more resources than previously. At the same time, some parents complained that they had had to pay for their children's migration, as there had been some initial costs involved, yet they had not received any remittances.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, since the early 1990s, rural families in China have experienced significant increases in the costs of their children's education (Lü 2012). There are several reasons for this, but the reduced transfers from central government to local governments in the 1990s created incentives for local governments to introduce fees and levies on schools. Further, due to the policies of centralizing schools and merging schools in urban and rural areas at the turn of the 21st century, many local schools were shut down and therefore many rural schoolchildren were faced with having to use transportation for long journeys, which proved costly for many parents. In addition, due to the long distances between home and school, many children have to live at their school during the week and therefore their parents need to pay for staff, materials, and other costs at the boarding houses (conversation with World Agroforestry Centre Kunming staff, 2011). Thus, although the government has boosted public spending in recent years, removing most fees paid to public schools, the cost of boarding still remains. The

net result is an increased monetization of daily lives analogous to what structural adjustment policies have done to subsistence farmers in sub-Saharan Africa (Bryceson 2002). In Songhuaba and elsewhere in Yunnan, the policies place pressure on parents to engage in migration to support their household while their children attend school. Thus, we are reminded that mobility and immobility is not just a question of strategic manoeuvring within the livelihood options available but for households it is just as much negotiation between needs and priorities.

Some parents are not content with public schools and spend heavily on private schools or extra private tuition for their children, which are an important priority when it comes to spending remittances and cash income in general (Yunnan household survey, 2009). Most parents said that they valued education for their children highly and one worried father told us that when he went away to work, his children, aged 11 and 17 years, needed to do more work on the farm, which could impinge on their school efforts and results. Another parent, aged 35 years, with two children aged 11 and 17 years, stated that when he migrated for work, the income of the household increased and therefore they could afford to spend money on their children's education. He longed for another life for his children and education was seen as a key to achieving it (Yunnan household survey, 2009). Thus, motivation of earning money to sustain children's education was important for migrant workers. The levels of education shown in Table 4.4 are based on The International Bureau of Education's information about China's educational system (UNESCO 2006). Under the system, primary education is considered to correspond to the age range 6–12 years, secondary education 12–15 years (lower) and 15–18 years (upper), and higher education from 19 years onwards. Only a few of the interviewees told us that either they or their family members had continued their education after they had reached the age of 19 years. The households were asked about their current state of affairs and those in the previous calendar year. In China, the new school year begins in March. Therefore, for the purpose of the study, if a child was aged 12 years at the time of the household survey they were recorded as being a primary education pupil. Ideally, we would have liked to collect data on the socio-economic status of each household in a number of different years, in order to see how transitions had affected their well-being. Nevertheless, the data in Table 4.4 provide an idea of the relationship between having children of school age and a household's resource endowments.

Although the effect on households' resources of the extra costs of children's education varies, there is undoubtedly a link between household resources and both the number of children attending school and the level of education they are receiving (Table 4.4). Some households

were heavily burdened by the cost of education and it was quite common for households with children, especially those in secondary or higher education, to have spent more than 50 per cent of their previous year's income on education (Yunnan household survey, 2009). Evidently, spending as much as CNY 15,000 (USD 2,407.05) on children's education was not uncommon. Most households with children in primary education told us that in 2008 they spent CNY 1,500 (USD 240.705) on their child's education. Parents often told us that in 2008 they had spent more than CNY 5,000 (USD 802.350) on their children's education when they were enrolled in upper secondary or higher education. In addition, grandparents made significant contributions towards their grandchildren's education. They contributed by caring for the children while their parents were working away from home and they helped with farming activities,

Table 4.4 Household resources according to the number of children attending school

<i>Educational status for school-aged children in households</i>	<i>Households with low resource endowments</i>	<i>Households with low to medium resource endowments</i>	<i>Households with medium resource endowments</i>	<i>Households with medium to high resource endowments</i>	<i>Households with high resource endowments</i>
None	4*	2	7	2	6
Do not attend school	1 with 1 child** and 1 with 2 children	1 with 2 children**** and 1 with 1 child	2	0	1
Primary education	2	2 with 1 child and 1 with 2 children	2 with 2 children and 6 with 1 child	1 with 2 children and 2 with 1 child	2 with 2 children and 3 with 1 child
Primary and secondary education	2 with 2 children	4 with 2 children and 1 with 3 children	4 with 2 children	4 with 2 children	3 with 2 children
Secondary education	1	3 with 1 child and 2 with 2 children	1	4	1
Secondary and higher education	1 with 2 children***			3 with 2 children	
Higher education		1	2		

Source: Yunnan household survey, 2009.

Notes: *Unless stated otherwise, the figures refer to the number of households with one child attending school.

**The child worked as a migrant worker.

***The family informed that they had spent CNY 25,000 (USD 4,011.75) on education fees in 2008. Although the amount may have been exaggerated (as was usual when referring to expenditure figures), clearly a large proportion of the family's income was spent on the children's education.

****Both children in the household worked as migrant workers.

most often subsistence farming, which relieved their grandchildren of their responsibilities for agricultural labour. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that education was highly prioritized among parents even though it put a strain on the household economy. Among the expenditures mentioned by interviewees during our household survey, education far exceeded any other costs for households with children attending school. It could therefore be argued that spending on children's education represents a long-term accumulation of livelihood resources (Thao 2013). In general, households with high resource endowments had few children receiving secondary or higher education (Table 4.4). More than one-third of the households did not have any children enrolled at school at the time of the household survey. It should be borne in mind that most of the households had at least one member who worked away from home. Hence, households leaning towards the mobile end of the mobility-immobility continuum were relatively well off and had yet to experience or surpass the stage within their life course of having children enrolled at school. Despite the relationship between mobility, children's education, and household resources, it is also evident from Table 4.4 that a substantial number of the households in the medium to high resource category had children of school age. Furthermore, those households quite often had children who were receiving upper secondary or higher education. Considering the high costs incurred by the households, this reflects their ability, interest, and resources within the community. The relationship between mobility and household resources is demonstrated by how the households in the medium to high resource category were just as mobile as the high resource category in terms of having migrant workers.

By contrast, in the case of households in the low to medium resource category and some households with the least resources, having children enrolled at school was a heavy economic burden on their livelihoods (Table 4.4). Among households in the two lowest resource categories were a couple in their seventies without children and a couple in their seventies with an unmarried son in his forties. They experienced increased daily cash requirements with few sources of non-farm income, while at the same time their ability to earn an income from farming was diminishing because the amount of farmland in the Songhuaba watershed area was rapidly decreasing due to the watershed policies.

In short, the studied families' life-course transition towards having children incurred high costs as soon as their children started school. Households that were well-off often had one or more family members working away from home, who provided remittances to help pay for their children's education. Investing in education was seen as a long-term livelihood strategy to ensure that children would have opportunities to gain an income and a decent life when they

became adults and had to support their aging parents.

Mobility and immobility – comparison of two generations of migrant workers

People inhabit both biographical time, i.e. they occupy a particular position within their life course, and at the same time are part of and shaped by historical time (Pilcher 1994). Between two generations of rural migrant workers there are likely to be differences in their mobility throughout their life courses, which gives an indication of how practices, interests, and perceptions of what constitutes a good life are changing for rural dwellers in China. One qualification needs to be raised, namely the new generation of rural migrant workers has yet to live through most transitions within their life courses. Hence, in this section I only discuss mobility practices that are to some extent comparable. Based on existing knowledge concerning the new generation of rural migrant workers (Pun & Lu 2010; Hu 2012), it can be expected that the new generation of rural migrant workers have other goals and motivations for working away from home compared to the old generation, as they are keen to live an urban life. By contrast, the old generation of migrant workers is often portrayed as motivated by the benefits they expect to gain from living in the countryside while labouring for an urban salary, such as the ability to invest in housing, daily consumption, education for their children, or setting up a business (Murphy 2002). Moreover, the new generation of rural migrant workers that longs to escape current rural life is more likely to comprise younger workers than the old generation when they first work away from home or leave to create a life elsewhere.

The data from the four village groups reveal that 30 of the men in the households visited belonged to the new generation of rural migrant workers, i.e. those born after 1980, while 22 belonged to the old generation. In total, six of the women were categorized as old-generation rural migrant workers, i.e. those born before 1980, while the rest, 13, were treated as members of the new generation. The average monthly salary among the new generation of rural migrant workers was CNY 890 (USD 142.818), while the old generation of rural migrant workers in Songhuaba earned CNY 790 (USD 126.759) (Yunnan household survey, 2009).

The new generation of rural migrant workers in the village groups visited was in general younger when they left home to work compared to the old generation. This finding seems to support the notion that, as Yan Hairong (Yan 2003) ardently argues, the countryside and its way of life offers little for young generations of rural dwellers. Further, the findings validate the perception that with the new generation of rural migrant workers there is the formation of a

social generation with shared/similar experiences and that has lived through the same historical time. That is, as findings elsewhere indicate (Liu *et al.* 2012), they long to escape their rural origins, but are not able to settle permanently in the cities and are unwilling to return to the countryside. The fact that they were similar in age when they first migrated for work – most were in the age range 17–21 years – shows that they had similar mobility practices and shared an urge to leave their natal communities behind. Further, it is reasonable to argue that for the young men and women belonging to the new generation of rural migrant workers it has become an integral part of their adolescence to move to urban areas after they have completed their education or dropped out of school.

In the case of the old generation of rural migrant workers, their first experience of working more often than not came after they had reached 25 years, which indicates their mobility was initiated due to familial obligations (Yue *et al.* 2010). This was demonstrated in Songhuaba by the fact that 25 out of 28 old-generation migrants contributed remittances to the household. For the members of the new generation, responsibility did not play the same role in motivating them to migrate for work, as revealed by the fact that only 20 sent remittances at the time of the survey (Yunnan household survey, 2009). However, as noted above, one should be cautious about finding overly strong connections between generations and non-remittances, as the particular space inhabited within the life course is just as likely to account for these differences, namely that of adolescence; see Rigg (2007), who argues that as people pass through life courses their priorities, vulnerabilities, and positions change, thus, for example, priorities held during adolescence are likely to be different than those held after becoming a parent.

Household members, including some migrant workers, were asked what factors had motivated their move. They were encouraged to name several reasons and to elaborate on them. The responses revealed that both generations engaged in wage labour to earn money. Further, a larger proportion of the old generation of rural migrant workers in the visited households named lack of enough land as an important consideration, while this was less important for the new generation. In addition, members of the new generation seemed eager to acquire new perspectives and experience urban life, but this was not a major factor for members of the old generation, although some of them named it as a central motivation. Moreover, although earning money was the most important reason for migration for work given by households with old-generation migrants, members of the new-generation households told us that learning new skills and gaining new perspectives was most important to their mobile family members. Additionally, many parents complained about the wasteful habits of their children, who spent all of their urban

income on themselves. Their income was not used to meet the need of the household but to fulfil their own wants and desires. The findings presented above at least suggest that there is a quite consistent urge among the new generation to experience urban life.

Both new- and old-generation migrant workers informed that they had left their farms and families because they did not have enough to do. Several families complained that their land had been reduced recently due to the watershed area policies of expropriating farmland for forestry, while members of other families stated that they would go out to work as soon as the government had expropriated their land. In other words, for some there was not enough work on the farm, while quite a few others had found that life at home was too boring.

Examination of members of the new generation's mobility practices within their life courses revealed that the new generation did not initiate their mobility with the intention of keeping one foot on the farm and the other in the city, as members of the old generation did: while the old generation typically intended to *li tu bu li xiang* (leave the land but not leave the village), the new generation intends to *li tu you li xiang* (leave the land as well as the village) (Yang & Guo 1996). Thus, while some members of the households had a joint-family livelihood perspective on their reasons for migration, others had an individualistic outlook on their mobility.

Additionally, the parents' encouragement towards members of the younger generation's education, as evident from the statements of parents and the money spent on education, further enhances the distance of the new generation from agricultural work in Songhuaba. As observed in studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, which deployed a generational lens during investigations into livelihood transformations (Bryceson 2002; Kelly 2011), rural dwellers have a general disdain for agricultural work, and this is most strongly articulated by the new generations (Rigg 2006). The study conducted in Songhuaba confirms that there is an urge among the new generation to live a different life than the old generation; their mobility is initiated due to individualistic aspirations, and they do not contribute in the same way to the household economy through remittances. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that the young migrant workers are in the adolescent phase of their life course and it remains to be seen whether in the future their mobility biographies, i.e. how their mobility is shaped by transitions within their life courses, will be different or similar to those of the old generation.

The mobility of the new generation of rural migrant workers in Songhuaba is starting earlier than the mobility of the old generation. The motivation to migrate for work is shared between the generations in the sense that everyone wants to earn money, but the new generation

is more interested in gaining new perspectives and experiences from their mobility than the old generation seems to have been. With the new generation of rural migrant workers in Songhuaba, mobility seems to have become an integral part of the life-course transition from being part of their parent's household to becoming individual adults.

Conclusions

Through household interviews and participatory mapping in the Songhuaba watershed area, this chapter has explored how transitions within life courses are gendered and shape mobility and immobility. Not only do transitions within life courses of individuals situate them at various positions along the mobility–immobility continuum, they also strongly influence livelihood options and outcomes for the entire household. In particular, the transition towards having children of school age places an extra burden on households with already few resources. The comparison made here between two social generations of rural migrant workers hints at their differentiated mobility practices during adolescence. A comparative perspective on generations of migrant workers shows that we should be cautious about making assumptions regarding the motivations of entire households and their mobility–immobility practices, since they are differentiated by positions within life courses and socio-historical time. The present study shows that while the old generation straddled the rural–urban divide to gain the most from both, i.e. income in the city and consumption in the countryside, members of the new generation are more eager to gain a living and consume in the city, at least while they are single sojourners.

Notes

1 In each village in rural China there are several working teams or groups (*zu*), which often consist of between 30 and 200 households under the same administrative leadership. Each team has a group leader who is assigned tasks by the village committee, such as mediating disputes, improving rural incomes, and organizing labour (Murphy 2002).

2 CNY 1 = USD 0.160470 as of 4 February 2013. All exchange rates mentioned in the chapter have been calculated using this exchange rate.

3 Watersource Department of Kunming, 'Principal Socio-economic Data on Songhuaba Watershed Area', unpublished report, 2004.

4 Some interviews were discontinued due to events in the lives of the agents, such as when children needed to be collected from school. In addition, during some interviews the interviewees decided that they did not want to answer further questions.

5 The age limit was set at 15 years because migrant worker populations are regarded as being in the age range 15–55 years (Murphy 2002).

6 The fieldwork was done for my master's thesis and the research was directed towards the impacts of migration on resource distribution between households. However, much unused data and a different approach to it have provided a rich source of information for this chapter.

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9.2 Article 2: Learning what to Expect: The Making and Unmaking of Expectations among Two Generations of Peasant Migrant Workers within Post-Mao China

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Abstract

The working class in post-Mao China, mainly consisting of the 150 million strong army of rural migrant workers, generally secure livelihoods through a combination of work both in the city and the countryside. Yet, Chinese working class scholarship suggests that the role of the smallholding is diminishing in the life of these workers, with the emergence of a young generation of peasant migrant workers with increased aspirations and expectations for urban life. Inspired by these generational approaches, the author conducted interviews with two generations of peasant migrants with work experience from Kunming, southwestern China. By detailing the narratives of four interviewees from two generations based on a Bourdieusian framework, this paper explores discontinuities and continuities in how these peasant-workers gradually come to learn what to expect and not expect for “someone like me”, involving a different set of experiences and position-takings. Through a focus on lived experience of work the context of low-pay short term work, the author argues that this partly deactivate some of the divide between the generations, as also the interviewees from the young generation come to feel as “peasant children” and long for more autonomy from informalized *dagong* workplaces in the city.

Keywords: China, peasant-workers, generations, expectations, Yunnan

Learning what to Expect: The Making and Unmaking of Expectations among Two Generations of Peasant Migrant Workers within Post-Mao China

Introduction

Much has been made of China's post-Mao (1978-) transformation into the "workshop of the world", linked to the growth of a working class. These workers are mostly made up of the 150-million-strong army of rural migrant workers who enter the city for work. Despite reforms to the *hukou* system, the rural-urban citizenship scheme, these rural born workers are generally judicially barred from urban citizenship. Especially access to social welfare in the city, such as children's education, low-cost housing and unemployment insurance, is limited for non-urban *hukou* holders (Chan, 2009; Solinger, 1999). Moreover, the salary of these workers is often not sufficient to cover more than basic living expenses (World Bank, 2014). Additionally, the lack of any public representation through independent labour unions arguably thwarts the collective agency among workers (Lee, 2007). These factors contribute to make agricultural land important as a source of subsistence security for rural migrant workers and most of these workers retain land tenure rights in their natal villages (Xuefeng, 2007).

Yet, Chinese working class scholarship suggests that a transition is taking place where the role of the smallholding is diminishing in the life of these workers, with the emergence of a young generation of peasant migrant workers who generally hold increased expectations for urban life (Chan & Selden, 2014; Ngai & Huilin, 2010). Indeed, the young generation of peasants in China, those born during the late 1980s and the 1990s (hereafter referred to as the post-Deng generation, after premier Deng Xiaoping, who reigned in the period 1978–1992), has grown up in a period of heightened symbolic and material dominance of the urban field over the agrarian (Hairong, 2003; Zhang *et al.*, 2015). This is contrasted by the changing sociospatial context from the generation of peasant migrant workers born in the 1970s and early 1980s (hereafter referred to as the post-Mao generation, after premier Mao Zedong, who ruled in the period 1949–1976). Still, with limited empirical literature on the rural migrant workforce beyond the industrial heartland of south-eastern China, there is a need for examining of how these worker's expectations are transitioning from a set of smallholder to wage-worker expectations. This article undertakes this examination, based on 32 interviews with two generations of migrating peasants, through a detailed focus on how expectations are made and

unmade as these peasant-workers shuttle imaginary and physically between the countryside and the city in Yunnan Province, southwestern China.

In China, not only scholars, but also the state has taken a keen interest in the aspirations of workers. Central here is the concept of the “China Dream”, popularized by current premier Xi Jinping, who urged “...young Chinese people to dare to dream[and]work assiduously to fulfil the dreams...” (Xinhua, 2013). As argued by others, the “China Dream” is mirrored in an image of urban middle class consumption and lifestyle (Goodman, 2014). Yet, most rural migrant workers are not able to break into the urban middle class echelons of the labour market let alone mimic their consumption (Lee & Selden, 2007). In contrast to the gap between symbolism and reality evoked by the notion of the “China Dream”, I here draw upon a Bourdieusian perspective to examine rural migrant worker’s expectations and how they emerge from the lived experiences of work. Evidently from these peasants-worker’s perspective, there are limited opportunities to “dare to dream”. Rather, these peasant-workers are inclined to engage in what Bourdieu (1990: 64) referred to as people’s tendency to “cut one’s coat according to one’s cloth”. Important here is how the smallholdings retain an important material role for the interviewees in times of crisis (sickness, injuries, unemployment) or transitions within the life course (marriage, child rearing, retirement). Indeed, the need to examine the continued importance of the smallholding to the lives of rural migrant workers across the generations was effectively revealed by the 2008 global financial crisis. Then more than 14 million migrating peasants returned to their smallholdings and many now venture closer to home when going out to work again (Chan, 2010).

Examining the importance of both smallholding and wage-labour to the expectations of migrating peasants toiling at the edge of the post-Mao Chinese economy, I here draw upon fieldwork from the adjacent countryside to - and from within - the city of Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province in southwestern China. In 2010, Kunming had a metropolitan population of 6.4 million, but migrants without a local *hukou* were not counted, which means that the population was probably much larger (Notar, 2012: 284). As in most cities in China, Kunming has been radically restructured since 1978, with extensive demolition of old housing and infrastructure replaced by skyscrapers, luxurious shopping malls, and wide boulevards (Zhang, 2006). Moreover, although the city has factories and processing plants, especially related to tobacco processing, the mainstay of the urban economy of the province firmly gravitated over the period since the mid-1990s towards its service economy (Donaldson, 2011). However, what counts as economy within the official statistics probably reveal only part of the picture as many

migrating peasants work in the informalized petty-capitalist economy in the city. Drawing on interviews with two generations of migrating peasants, currently or formerly employed in Kunming's petty-capitalist workplaces, this paper examines the continuities and discontinuities between the generations in working experiences and expectations. After briefly theorizing the relationship between lived experience and expectations from a Bourdieusian perspective, I contextualize the field area and method. Thereafter, I present details of the lived experiences of four participants, two from each cohort, to illuminate how expectations are acquired and revised as these peasant-workers are exposed to the financial and cultural limits and possibilities imposed upon them.

Making expectations: A Sense of One's Place and social experience

Bourdieu emphasized how the lived experiences of inequality, of exposure to different financial and cultural possibilities, and of the limitations in life makes people come to learn what to expect and what not to expect for "someone like me" (Bourdieu, 1990: 63). This focus on unequal exposure to cultural and financial limits led Bourdieu to argue that over time there tends to be an alignment between opportunities in life and people's expectations and aspirations. This is not a mechanical process, rather an active process whereby actors interpret and come to learn what *is* for them and what *is not* for them, based on social experience embedded within particular sociospatial contexts (Bourdieu, 1989). This practical or embodied sense of what is for me and not for someone like me gives rise to a sense of one's place, habitus, a long-lasting set of perceptions, forms of appreciation, and generative schemes of action (Bourdieu, 2000). In other words, the collective *social* experiences of non-collective actors similarly exposed to economic and cultural limits potentially give rise to similar social orientations differentiated by age, gender, class, and other sociospatial divisions (Bourdieu, 1987; McNay, 2004). From the perspective of acquired expectations, it is perfectly reasonable for one generation to have "practices or aspirations that another group finds unthinkable or scandalous as natural or reasonable, and *vice versa*" (Bourdieu, 1990: 292).

The boundaries between the generations need to be understood as continuous, as they are not separated by any particular date or year. Rather, my rationale for creating such groups is to create contrast (Bourdieu, 1985) in order to explore the question of generational continuities and discontinuities in their "subjective structure of hopes and expectations" (McNay, 2001: 150). To explore this question, the notion of sense of one's place is useful, as it highlights the collective circumstances of non-collective actors, such as migrating peasants who

struggle, at various points in their lives immersed within the workplaces of the city and the agricultural fields of the countryside, to make their current life match their expectations. Taken together, the concepts of social experience and sense of one's place might assist when exploring both expected and unexpected *ways* in which expectations are acquired and revised by migrating peasants within post-Mao China.

Methods and Context

My fieldwork aimed to understand how the deteriorating conditions for smallholder agriculture had impacted upon the way two generations of peasants thought about their present and future life in the countryside and the city respectively, a question accentuated by the local context of drought. However, the choice of Yunnan as a place in which to conduct my fieldwork was wholly guided by the research access provided by my contacts at the Chinese Academy of Science (CAS) in Kunming. Yet, the petty-capitalist workplaces I encountered in Kunming represent a different "type" of workplace than the typical scholarly representations of rural migrant workers, which are often based on ethnography from the manufacturing stronghold of south-eastern China. Hence, by exploring the question of generational change within the rural migrant workforce, yet from a different sociospatial context, this paper contributes with a comparative perspective to explore the differentiation taking place among peasant-migrant workers. Here I have used pseudonyms to preserve the identity of the villages and the villagers as this was a necessary precaution, given the political context (Heimer & Thøgersen, 2006; Turner, 2014).

For the fieldwork I hired two research assistants: a young Han Chinese man assisted me in the first part of the fieldwork (working in Kaoyan, see below), and a young Chinese woman assisted me immensely during the second part of the fieldwork (working in Baicai and Kunming, see below). Both were college graduates, where the man came from a village and the woman from a medium sized city, both growing up in the eastern part of the country. Both helped with logistics, interpretation, and translating questionnaires. Additionally, I hired a third person, a Yunnan local, who transcribed and translated the interviews verbatim.

The majority of the interviewees were from two villages, Kaoyan (meaning tobacco, the main cash crop) and Baicai (meaning Chinese cabbage, the main cash crop), both Han ethnic villages and located only two hours away from Kunming by bus. Despite the short distance to the capital, migrant workers did not commute there on a daily basis due to the traffic-congestion within the city. The villages are located within two mountainous valleys where agriculture is

partly done on sloping marginal land with low yields and partly done on more fertile lowland plots. Cash crops are grown and subsistence production is practiced, in combination with keeping livestock. The time of the fieldwork (December 2012 – August 2013) coincided with a prolonged period of drought (from 2008 to 2014), that had led to further deterioration of agrarian livelihoods, causing the stunted growth of crops.

In Kaoyan, Baicai and in Kunming, we held 32 semi-structured interviews with migrating peasants, on issues ranging from work experience, family relations, education, farming experience, to future aspirations. The main stated reason for working in Kunming rather than in other cities was familiarity and proximity. While some of the interviews took place in interviewees' homes, where they had returned to farm full-time or were visiting, most of the interviews took place in public spaces in the city such as parks, and a few took place in the interviewees' workplaces in Kunming. Using the narratives of four interviewees, two from each generation, I argue that these interviewees exemplify the active process of learning what to expect and not expect for "someone like me", learned through practices of *family*, *informalized employment*, and *agriculture*. These interviewees illustrate both continuity and discontinuities between the generations in how, through embodied experiences of *ambiguity*, *resentment*, *exhaustion* and *consent*, they acquire long-lasting "structures of hope and expectations", continuously adjusted as they confront new experiences.

Acquiring "peasant-worker expectations": Stories from the post-Mao generation

You know, we are just peasants, it is not practical for us to stay outside for a long term, I am married with children, and I cannot always be away from home. I can just go out to work after we finish harvesting each year. (Mr. Liu, from Baicai, 45 years old, 18 years of migrant work experience)

This sense of his place expressed by Mr. Liu through the sentiment that "we are just peasants", captures well the alignment that takes place between expectations and experienced social limits and opportunities for the interviewees from this generation. Among the post-Mao generation, all interviewees except two bachelors had one or more children. For this generation living through a situation with deteriorating returns to smallholder agriculture and little economic capital to draw upon within the city, conferring their aspirations towards their children structures their expectations towards the future. The parents had a saying that captured their

hopes vividly: they aspired for their children to “walk out of the mountains” (*zou chu da shan*), which means changing one’s destiny or fate by leaving the natal backward area behind. They hoped education would assist their children to secure formal regulated employment (*zhengshi de gongzuo*).

There are some differences between the generations regarding years of schooling, occupation and salaries. Of the 12 interviewees from the post-Mao generation (those born during the 1970s to mid 1980s) 1 had no formal education, 7 had a primary school education, and 4 had graduated from middle school. All of the interviewees from this generation had worked exclusively in Kunming or in neighbouring county level cities to their villages. In Kunming they worked as manual labour within construction work and petty commodity sales. It is fair to say that the types of occupations obtained by the interviewees of this generation required few if any formal skills. Salaries ranged between 2000-6000 [300-900USD] per month for this generation, slightly higher than the post-Deng generation interviewees, who ranged between 1000-4000 RMB [150-600USD] per month. The expectations of the post-Mao generation interviewees regarding working in Kunming were directed towards earning wages in order to realize subsistence in the countryside, matched by the slogan of the Chinese Communist Party in the 1990s of encouraging migrating peasants of “leaving the village, but not the land” (Day, 2013).

Notwithstanding differences in expectations after life course transitions between men and women of this generation (Chuang, 2015), a uniform narrative frame structures their representations of peasants within the symbolic rural-urban divide. Indeed, the qualities of people from the countryside, of being hardworking and honest, they see as prerequisites both for village life and for their own relative success in successively securing employment in the lower echelons of the labour market in Kunming. While these workers changed jobs less frequently than the post-Deng generation, and more often due to situations beyond their own control such as closure of their workplace due to demolition or bankruptcy, they nonetheless changed jobs when they felt that they were underpaid.

I next present details of how two male interviewees from this generation actively acquired their set of “peasant expectations” through various practices of family, agriculture, and wage work. The interviewees, Mr. Zhang (47 years, with 30 years of migrant work experience) and Mr. Ning (43 years, with 23 years of migrant work experience), had each started working on their parent’s farm after they had graduated from primary school, and only started to migrate for work in Kunming when they reached late adolescence (17 and 25 years).

Upon marriage, they had stayed at home to take care of their farmland and raise children (*yang haize*) for several years, before migrating for work once again. They normally stayed at home during the busy season in agriculture, roughly from March to September, and worked elsewhere for the remainder of the year. Most of their wages were sent home, where they were mainly used for housebuilding, their children's education, health-care for their parents, or daily living expenses such as clothing, food, cigarettes, and alcohol. Their wives stayed home and took care of the farmland and raised their children while the men were working away. This combination of wage work, unremunerated household work and agriculture has allowed the continual reproduction of the smallholding for this generation to take place.

Family and Seasonal Mobility: Mr. Zhang

Mr. Zhang was sitting in the large combined kitchen and living room with his wife when we sat down to interview him about his life as a peasant working away from home. Mr. Zhang was able to afford a new house with a large courtyard a couple of years ago after having worked away since he was 16 years old. He was one of the first in the village to migrate for work, which was in 1982. Since he had grown up in a family with three sisters and three brothers it was difficult for him to raise enough money for the family, and in the low season for agriculture his labour was not needed at the smallholding. Mr. Zhang started working for a construction company, moving concrete around, which was a job he kept for one or two years before he later started working as a janitor at one of the universities in Kunming. In 1991 he married Mrs. Zhang and two years later they settled in Kaoyan. In 1993 their son was born and in 1999 they had a daughter. Their son is currently working in Kunming while their daughter is attending high school. When we asked Mr. Zhang about how, when he was only 16 years of age, he had decided whether he anticipated his move to Kunming would be temporary or whether he had thought about leaving the village permanently, his wife laughed and replied:

How could it be possible to live outside? We didn't even have a home outside, hah-hah!

Mr. Zhang: Nobody would know what it would be like if I had been working outside instead of returning here, hah-hah! So people cannot make too many detours, [because] they prevent people from succeeding ... [working outside] was pretty good. [pause]. What were other better options? There were none.

Thus, the notion of moving permanently to Kunming even seemed ridiculously foreign to the couple and for Mr. Zhang the long-term plan had all along been to work away from home during the low season in agriculture. Despite turning to the city to sell his labour, Mr. Zhang always returned during the busy season in agriculture, to assist with making the land ready for planting and sowing, and for growing tobacco:

Mr. Zhang: I came home at busy farming season. I came home when my family asked me to go home to help with farm work. We got so much farmland at that time.

Research assistant: If chances are available, would you prefer to live in your hometown or in the city?

Mr. Zhang: Chances? No more chances. I am going to spend the rest of my life here in my hometown, hah-hah!

He explained to us that one of the primary reasons for the importance of farming to him at the present and the future is the insecurity of the labour market, which means that farming remains something to fall back upon in times of unemployment. Thus, the process of acquiring the expectations of peasants for this generation was partly maintained by their continued engagement with smallholder agriculture even after they started working outside.

Expectations of Work and Aspirations for Children's Education: Mr. Ning

Mr. Ning was at home in Kaoyan for the weekend when we managed to sit down with him straight after the family had eaten breakfast. Mr. Ning had been working outside since he was 20 years old in 1990 and was at the time of the interview working in a fertilizer factory outside Kunming, where he did heavy manual work, loading and unloading bags of fertilizers on and off trucks. He started working in construction work in Kunming, a form of work that required no previous skills and for which a young age and good work ethics are considered a virtue. He solemnly explained us that life outside the village was not easy, particularly the work itself:

was hard and bitter, I made no money ... what could be exciting about *dagong* [*working for the boss*]? ... the work itself is tough. Besides, it does not pay well. What else can be on your mind except for earning money when you are working outside ... I have to change [jobs] when I am

not paid well. I will definitely leave for well-paying jobs whenever I get a chance. I have no time to waste.

As “having no time to waste”, his expectations have not moved towards settling in urban areas, apparent from the way he is taken aback by the question of whether he has considered renting accommodation in Kunming:

Wow! If I went to rent a house, how could I afford the utilities fee [water and electricity]?... You have a child in school and all you are expecting from working outside is to earn money to support your family, [but] if you rent an apartment [silence]...

As their youngest daughter was in school and their only source of income from farming comes from tobacco, Mr. Ning’s wage work was needed. The couple’s plot of land, 6 mu (1 mu equals 666 m²) is dispersed: 4 mu is used for tobacco planting and 2 mu for corn, the latter mainly for consumption within the family and for fodder for their livestock, especially their pigs. While the returns from farming were meagre, Mr. Ning was taken by surprise by the question of whether he ever stayed away for the whole year: “Right, we got some fields here. You cannot just leave them barren.” This highlights Mr. Ning’s sense of his place as a peasant, emphasized by the immoral thought of leaving the land fallow, a sense that was further elaborated later in the interview when he talked about his aspirations for future:

Research Assistant: Do you have any plans for the future—any expectations or dreams?

Mr. Ning: My small daughter is doing really well in school, so we are going to support her for education, so we cannot build a house now ... Hmm, peasants have to think this way, but those with a steady [or] real employment cannot think like this...for my youngest daughter...we cannot let her engage in farming again like we do.

Again, by transferring his hopes and dreams to his youngest daughter, he emphasized his sense of his place as a peasant father.

The period when most of the interviewees from the post-Mao generation migrated for work—in the mid- to late 1990s—coincided with a period of rapid economic growth in Yunnan province. However, most of this growth took place in urban areas, where both private and public investments were concentrated. Additionally, the high rate of taxation suffered by

agriculturalists in Yunnan during the mid-1990s up until 2006 contributed to making smallholder agriculture increasingly unsustainable (Donaldson, 2011). The triple pinch felt by lack of investments, many siblings, and heavy taxation contributed to the pauperization that young farmers such as Mr. Zhang and Mr. Ning grappled with at the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Acquiring and revising expectations for urban life: Stories from the Post-Deng Generation

I was so young when I just came out. I found the outside world so exciting and I was so curious, but after working there for just a while I became so tired that I could hardly get used to it. Then I was homesick and sometimes I just couldn't help crying. (Mrs. Li from village in Yunnan province, 22 years old, 5 years of migrant work experience)

The hardship and agony felt by Mrs. Li captures vividly how with experience, she came to learn what to expect from her newfound position as an urban worker after walking out from school. Indeed, migrating from the village for work or to study has become an increasingly normal path towards adulthood for adolescents (in the age group 15–20 years) in Kaoyan and Baicai and the interviewees from other villages in Yunnan, which represents a marked shift from the past when most youths worked on their parents' farms after completing six years of primary school education. Today, most of the youths (i.e. those born during the late 1980s to early 1990s) move towards Kunming. Almost all of the youths were working away from home at the time when the fieldwork was done, and the interviewees were away for the whole year except for occasional weekends or major events such as the spring festival.

In terms of education there is a noted gap between the generations. For the 20 interviewees from the post-Deng generation, all had attended some education beyond primary school, 11 of the interviewees from the post-Deng generation had completed or attended parts of middle-school, 2 had attended upper-middle school while 7 had completed vocational training beyond either middle school or upper-middle school. Whereas construction work continues to be the most popular destination for the men from the post-Mao generation, the young men and women from the post-Deng generation are more likely to find employment within the manufacturing and service sector (Hu, 2012 provides a national overview). Despite being better educated than the post-Mao generation, the interviewees from the post-Deng generation had continued to obtain forms of work where few formal qualifications were

required. The interviewees from the post-Deng generation worked in restaurants as waiters or dishwashers, in car-beautification shops, within sales, or doing heavy manual work. In common with predecessors, their work in Kunming can be characterized as precarious, lacking formalized working hours, low-paid, and with few opportunities for promotion (see Zhou, 2013 for a national perspective).

Only three women interviewees had obtained stable or regulated employment, all of whom had a family background in a household that regularly associated with the elite in their village and had obtained some qualifications beyond middle school level, noticeable from vocational schools (see Koo, 2016 on the role of vocational schools in post-Mao China). Notwithstanding differences that might exist in terms of social or cultural capital among the interviewees, a uniform narrative frame structured their representations of work in the city and agriculture when they narrated their experiences by emphasizing sensations of exhaustion, tiredness, and boredom, unlike the former generation that had emphasized the need to put up with hardship. Moreover, unlike the post-Mao generation interviewees, the members of younger generation described their experiences of *dagong* within petty-capitalist workplaces in terms of resentment and anger, which often drove them to change their jobs. This is not to say that salary was not a matter of concern for them when changing jobs, but rather that they themselves emphasized their reasons for changing jobs as often due to the resentment they felt because of the way their bosses treated them. Whenever they were tired, exhausted, or unemployed the interviewees from this generation would return to their *laojia*, (ancestors' home or natal home) to rest.

In this section I present the retrospective accounts of two interviewees from the post-Deng generation about how their collective situation as peasants working within the non-regularized workplaces of Kunming informed a set of expectations for the future. There are Mr. Zheng (22 years, with 4 years of migrant work experience) and Mr. Liu (17 years, 1 year of migrant work experience) who had completed middle school and migrated for work straight after finishing school. Both Mr. Zheng and Mr. Liu felt that they had not been doing well in school and had therefore dropped out before completing middle school in order to work instead.

Exhaustion, Resentment, and Being Stuck: Mr. Zheng

The generational gap revealed in how the interviewees narrated their experiences of migrant work and agriculture is highlighted by the story of Mr. Zheng, who dropped out of school straight after completing middle school, in common with many of his fellow villagers. At the

age of 18 years he had started working away from home, driving a pumping machine, which was a job he had been introduced to by one of his friends from Baicai. At the time, he thought he would definitely return back to his natal village after working away for a period. This was informed by his work experiences, since when we asked him how he experienced his first month at work, he emphasized: “I felt sort of tired then, because we were almost working twenty-four hours per day.” As workers for a construction company, he and the other workers usually lived within the construction area in temporary work sheds or tents, with meals provided.

Mr. Zheng’s workplace also put his memories of a working day that lasted 24 hours into context, as his bosses could put him to work at almost any time of the day. With no set or regulated pauses and with long working days confined ‘under the heel of the bosses’, Mr. Zheng soon started to aspire to leave his workplace. One day he decided to leave and his boss then required him to compensate them for the losses inflicted upon the company due to his withdrawal. Mr. Zheng’s experience remained with him:

Mr. Zheng: The most unforgettable thing was the argument with my boss ... Up until now, I still feel so ...

Research assistant: So that kept bothering you? Did you pay him?

Mr. Zheng: Of course I did not! I was not supposed to pay him for any reason. We were working for him, if everybody has to “compensate for his losses” just to quit the job, who else would work for him? ... I left without paying him and I came and stayed at home to rest for a few months. Then one day he called to offer me to work for a tunnel project ... I declined immediately.

From these experiences he was gradually learning what to expect. When Mr. Zheng was asked whether he still felt that he would definitely return to his village after working away for a few years, he paused and looked away for a moment before he tellingly projected feelings of ambiguity concerning his future: “Well, we are [pause] kind of stuck. I graduated from middle school [so] I have to keep my expectations low or else I will not be qualified. Anyway, I can take any job that pays well.” Furthermore, when we asked him about his wishes and dreams for the future, he revealed more about what he had learned to expect:

About that, I wish I can live a better life than I do now, and I prefer to stay in my natal village [*laojia*] and if I am allowed to have bigger wishes, I wish to start my own business ... because that is much better than *dagong* in a way.

In common with most of the interviewees from the post-Deng generation, starting a business revealed the socially inflicted limits of Mr. Zheng's horizon of expectations. He elaborated on his desire to start something on his own—a desire shared by almost all of the other interviewees from this generation who lacked education beyond middle school—later on in the interview when he stressed how his experiences of *dagong* had put things in perspective for him:

The biggest difference [between *dagong* and village life] is that I have more control of my life in the village. While working outside, I am working for my boss, [and] I don't have much freedom and control. For example, when it gets too hot back home, I can just take these days off, but that's never possible when I work outside.

After years of hardship from his work experience despite his young age, and having left behind the idea of further education, Mr. Zheng had only two options for carving out some autonomy for himself within the limited opportunities his situation afforded him: he could set up his own business or return to farming. With regard to the latter prospect, he explained, "If I stay here [unemployed and staying in his friend's apartment], I will definitely have to do that." When asked whether he had ever done any farm work before, Mr. Zheng replied "Sure I did!" Even the thought of peasant-children not having farm experience seemed ridiculous to the interviewees of the post-Deng generation.

De-peasantization by 'Dis-identification' and Resentment: Mr. Liu

In common with the other interviewees, Mr. Liu narrated his experiences of having worked on the land as physically tiring, and boring. He is working at one of the university canteens in Kunming and lives in an apartment that his boss has rented to him and three of his co-workers. We meet him there in his sparsely decorated room. He is dismissive of returning to farming, which displays a sharp generational gap when contrasted with his father and others from his own generation:

Research assistant: Have you ever considered returning home for farming again in the future?

Mr. Liu: I won't, because it makes me feel tired just to look at it when I am at home occasionally.

Research assistant: You get tired even when you just give it a look?

Mr. Liu: Yes. The other day my family was slicing some cabbage, about tens of tons of cabbage [Chinese cabbage or pak choi]. Then I went over to help move some bundles of the cabbage, [and] then my waist hurt a lot after I came back, [so]I couldn't do it now ... I did quite a lot [of farm work] actually when I was home in my childhood. But later, after I came out ... it was just too much for me after being away from farm work for such a long time.

After just a couple of months at his first job of working an excavator machine, Mr. Liu he had an accident, which made him turn his fortunes towards the informal service work in Kunming, where he found work at a family run restaurant. However, recurring experiences of being mistreated by his boss prompted Mr. Liu to leave and try his fortunes somewhere else. At the age of 17 years old and with a little more than one year of work experience, he is working out what to expect:

I actually have no big dreams because I am just a kid from a peasant family, after all. It can be wonderful enough if I can have a chat over tea with some good friends ... As for my job, my current job just paid me 900 kuai [USD 130] per month when I started. Now I get paid two to three thousand kuai [USD 300–400] per month, which is not that easy to achieve, and I am thinking to stay here for another few years and hopefully to start a small business.

This highlights how the process of learning what to expect should not be understood as a passive acceptance of one's lot in life, but rather that within economic and cultural limits one improvise to position oneself towards that which is important in life, including securing a livelihood and a habitation. However, to what extent do the stories narrated here display a transition from migrating peasants being content with earning in urban areas and living in the countryside to aspirations mimicking middle-class subjects engaged in careering and consumption?

Making and unmaking expectations: adjusting to a sense of one's place

Indeed, this transition seems to be implied by some scholars who argue that

since the post-1990 generation of migrant workers is better educated than the preceding generation, this generation is more likely to demand better living and working conditions ... in terms of occupational achievement, income rewards, social status, and rights of citizenship. (Ngai and Koo 2015, 412–413).

Thus, part of the narrative shrouding the post-Deng generation's move from smallholding to the workplace of the urban is couched within the language of modernity and progress. From the perspective of modernity as an inevitable force or even a stage in human history, the movement of bodies and expectations from agrarian to urban or capitalist (modern) areas comes to signify liberation and progress (McMichael, 2008). This perspective is voiced by some scholars who argue that contemporary Chinese peasant youth «...embrace modernity and distance themselves from the conservatism of the countryside» (Frenkel & Yu 2015, 276). Yet, what change in the geography of expectations is discernible from the accounts of the interviewees detailed here? Based on the stories of the four interviewees presented here, it would be misplaced to argue that social mobility into the echelons of the urban middle-class is important for their aspirations. Rather, the interviewees were characterized by a highly contingent process of acquiring and adjusting to a sense of their place, within an ambiguous context of both liberation and dominance, between freedom and violence. The post-Deng generation who have lived with a widening chasm between countryside and town their whole life do not remain unaffected by these developments as they place much importance into disassociating themselves from farming. The youths are actively relating to the agrarian field by 'dis-identification' from what they tell about themselves and the way they stay or move across spaces to (dis)engage in farming, education, and wage work at different moments in their working lives. This underscores that exploring the question of how expectations are made and unmade from a Bourdieusian point of view, entails unveiling how people come to learn about and maintain social divisions within contexts of symbolic dominance, assigning importance into that which one expect and denouncing or distancing oneself from that which is beneath or beyond "someone like me" (Bourdieu, 1990: 63-64).

This process was further unravelled through the interviews by the way the members of post-Mao generation were able to give details about expenditures and incomes from cultivating the land, which were absent from most of the accounts by the post-Deng generation interviewees. However, the accuracy of these monetary estimates should not be overemphasized since they are only estimates. Rather, during the interviews, the interviewees

from the post-Mao generation went to great lengths to show that, in contrast to the post-Deng generation, they were familiar with the economy of agriculture, thus underscoring the generational gap between them in terms of the place of agriculture within their structure of hope and desire. In other words, the young generation places importance on not placing importance on agriculture.

While the post-Deng generation aspire to leave agriculture they nonetheless have no illusion of where they come from exposed through sentiments such as “just a peasant child” or “expectations [silence] ... just to live a plain common life” (woman, 18 years, with 1 year of work experience). This reveals an important part of the process of remaking the peasantry. In the urban context of demeaning work and residence while having no recourse to continue engaging with smallholder farming due to their structure of expectations and its present deteriorating state, the young generation feels “stuck”. In contrast, the situation for the post-Mao generation, to borrow from James Scott (1977: 36), “possessed, in his own hands, the means of his subsistence” aligned with their structure of expectations where the smallholding retained an important position, in effect granting this generation some autonomy from working ‘under the heel of the bosses’.

Nevertheless, the interviewees from the post-Deng generation were creatively making do, as illustrated by the way they frequently changed jobs despite several of them feeling that changing jobs was cumbersome, and envisioning and desiring autonomy from the urban-based workplace by starting their own business would be much better than *dagong*. One interpretation of the changing expectations of the young generation who seem willing to leave the security, albeit limited, that the smallholding provides, would be to argue that the risk averse smallholder ethic (Scott, 1977) is giving way to a more risk-prone and entrepreneurial habitus. Indeed, the fact that people living within urban economic marginality are characterized by entrepreneurialism is highlighted by scholars working in other southern urban contexts (Roy, 2011). However, this interpretation potentially erases the history of three decades of disinvestment in agrarian livelihoods and public services, now being reappropriated by the state and private interests imbued with new financial value (Walker, 2009). Rather, I would argue that the youths from Kaoyan and Baicai renegotiate their expectations within a context of deteriorating agrarian livelihoods. Thus, tilting their expectations towards a life in the city, albeit hesitantly, shows how experience makes them adjust their expectations to the new realities they are faced with.

The transformation of expectations, is further exacerbated by the way their parents transferred their aspirations to their children to leave agriculture. However, the post-Mao interviewees embrace of education was partly rejected by several of the youths who perceive their chances in school as minimal and its impact on the labour market as limited. The parents' aspirations for their children to succeed in school can be read as both an interpretation of the declining agrarian livelihoods they live within, intertwined with the state's increasing production of a discourse around aspirational subjects linked to an ideal of human capital and worker-citizen (Anagnost, 2013). However, the youths displayed few ambitions to become reified human capital or consumer-worker subjects, but rather continue to pursue their ambition of autonomy in work through emplacing their ambitions on becoming self-employed. Thus, the newfound expectations of the young generation continue to be informed by a drive for autonomy, although its locus is increasingly fixed to the city.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have explored the question of continuities and discontinuities in the structure of expectations and financial and cultural barriers confronted by two social generations of rural migrant workers in post-Mao China. Particularly I elucidated how expectations change for the post-Deng generation interviewees once they walk out of school and are faced with the hardship of urban based employment. As such, this paper contributes with an interpretative element to the scholarly understandings of the concept of generations by focusing on how *experience* itself is constitutive to the making of expectations as migrating peasants come to experience the cultural and financial limits and opportunities on their life.

In fact, both material and symbolic devaluation of the social space where these rural migrant workers pursue their livelihoods are important for understanding changes in the context of socialization (especially the increased years of schooling and decreased experience from farming), conducive to changed perspectives on the "peasant heritage" of these workers. This is detailed here through how the post-Deng interviewees dis-associated themselves from smallholder agriculture, which represents an active process of dis-identification with hesitation and ambiguity. Moreover, the deteriorating state of smallholder farming has contributed to changing the space of possibilities itself as agrarian lives becomes increasingly unworkable in the face of disinvestments and environmental degradation. Thus, the generations are divided not so much in terms of age as they are by the different space of possibilities and a changing context of socialization.

Yet, as demonstrated here, the context of low-pay short term work, unregulated working hours and demeaning working conditions, partly offset some of the divide between the generations in their sense of their place and expectations towards the future as the interviewees from the post-Deng generation continue to feel as “peasant children” and seek autonomy from *dagong*. However, while the post-Mao generation kept a rather “singular” trajectory of seasonal mobility and expectations of earning in the city while spending in the countryside there is more differentiation within the post-Deng generation in terms of expectations and educational trajectories. By detailing the narratives of four interviewees from two generations, the paper unravelled how the collective situation for each generation involved a different set of experiences and position-takings, involving a subtle change from working in the city while living in the countryside to living in the city while longing for more autonomy from the precarious workplaces of the urban.

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9.3 Article 3: From the workplace to the household: Peasant migrant workers and social reproduction between informal wage work and smallholdings in post-Mao China

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Abstract:

One of the core elements of the post-Mao Chinese economy is the workforce of more than 150 million rural migrant workers, who lack urban citizenship, yet retain land-tenure rights in the countryside. However, despite multifaceted research on peasant migrant workers, the literature has seldom problematized the notion of work itself, but has generally focused on wage-work, workers, and the workplace. By contrast, based on interviews and observations with rural migrant workers and their family members in the countryside, the author examines the relationship between unwaged-work and wage-work among smallholder peasant households in Yunnan, Southwest China. One of the main findings of this article is that due to the discontinuous and demeaning conditions of wage-work in Kunming, the smallholdings remain essential for the social reproduction of migrant workers. Meanwhile, the rising costs of living and changing wants and needs, undermine households' ability to rely solely on their smallholdings for survival. By reconnecting the everyday practices and travails of migrant workers and smallholders through a Marxist feminist conception of work, this paper throws into relief how the terrain of social reproduction potentially constitutes itself as a common ground for struggles within and outside the workplace.

Keywords: China; work; social reproduction; Marxist feminism; peasant-workers

From the workplace to the household: Peasant migrant households working between informal wage work and smallholding in post-Mao China

Ananya Roy effectively draws our attention to a relational understanding of geography when she asks “what global city can function without relational dependence on seemingly distant economies of ... cheap labor?”¹¹ The more than 200 million strong ‘army’ of rural migrant workers (*nongmingong*), who lack urban citizenship yet retain land-tenure rights in the countryside as part of their agricultural citizenship, constitute one of the core elements of the post-Mao (1978–) Chinese economy. The rural–urban citizenship scheme, the *hukou* system, provides different sets of rights and entitlements for rural and urban citizens, and excludes migrating peasants from access to low-cost public housing or unemployment benefits within the cities.¹² Kam Wing Chan captures the relational dependence on rural labor for the urban economy when he argues that

rural migrant workers are not only the backbone of China’s manufacturing sector, but they also form the base – and are “at the bottom” ... of the global supply chain. As a result, the rhythm of the global economy and China’s internal migrant labour are now closely intertwined.¹³

Notwithstanding the massive dispossession of land from smallholder that has taken place since 2000, mostly by the hands of local governments, most peasants still retain tilling rights over their land.¹⁴ Thus, since the mid-1980s, while many peasants have worked away from home, especially after government support for communities and smallholder farming dwindled after the late 1980s, married women, children and the elderly have often stayed behind.¹⁵ However, the global financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 effectively revealed the continued importance of the smallholding for rural migrant workers’ sustenance in China, as more than 14 million migrating peasants returned to their smallholdings.¹⁶ By the early 2010s, there were signs that the Chinese economy was not able to create enough employment for the rural labor force to keep up with the anticipated rise in rural–urban migration.¹⁷ Still, given the limited empirical

¹¹ 2011, 224

¹² Solinger 1999

¹³ 2010, 660

¹⁴ Xuefeng 2007

¹⁵ Biao 2007; Hairong 2003, 586

¹⁶ Chan 2010

¹⁷ Ruan 2015

literature that examines work for peasant migrant households in the post-global financial era, there is arguably a need to trace how these circumstances influence work across the rural–urban divide. In this paper, I undertake such an examination, based on fieldwork in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province in Southwest China, and the neighboring countryside, and I focus on migrant workers and family members practices and aspirations for work situated between smallholding and workplace.

From the perspective of smallholder households encountered in Yunnan, unremunerated tasks undertaken on their smallholdings and wage work undertaken in the metropolis of Kunming more often than not do not represent a choice of either rural agrarian work or urban capitalist work, but rather form a chain of activities carried out as part of the households' ongoing struggles to secure sustenance and autonomy. The highly segmented labor market, which pushes most rural migrant workers into discontinuous and demeaning low-paid and low-skill jobs with little or no employment security and contributes to the prevailing material importance of the smallholding for migrating peasants.¹⁸ Thus, Roy's provocative question of what global city can function without seemingly distant economies of labor requires deeper probing. What work and who do we include when we investigate the workforces upon which cities depend? Marxist feminists have long challenged the conceptions of work that narrowly understand it as wage labor. Seen from this perspective, unremunerated work, which is often carried out by women within households, forms an indispensable amalgam of practices that are crucial for the maintenance of the most basic commodity of capitalism: labor power.¹⁹ Geographer Cindi Katz²⁰ refers to all the countless acts of unremunerated work as the heart of capitalism, by which she means the attendant mental and physical work (e.g. childcare, cooking, and cleaning) and materials (e.g. food, housing, and water) that are sometimes referred to as social reproduction, which needs to be carried out in order for laborers to be able to return to work the next day.²¹ Consequently, perceiving the work of those working at the smallholdings and those working in the city as disconnected and apart rests on a narrow conception of work.

¹⁸ Huang 2009; World Bank 2014

¹⁹ Bhattacharya 2013

²⁰ 2011a, 709

²¹ Laslett and Brenner 1989

On the basis of interviews with peasants working on their smallholdings in the countryside around Kunming and with migrating peasants working within the city itself, this article refocuses the work of smallholder households by reconnecting the seemingly distant geographies of unwaged and wage work in the lives of the interviewees. This is done from the perspective of Marxist feminism and the contribution this body of literature has made to conceptualizations of labor and work. I start by outlining some of the contributions made by Marxist feminism to challenge dominant ideas of work and then ask how the notion of social reproduction is useful for understanding the relational dependence of the city in post-Mao China on seemingly distant economies of labor. Thereafter, I describe the fieldwork carried out in Yunnan, where I conducted interviews and observed the work practices of smallholders in two villages and migrant workers in Kunming. This is followed by a detailed description of the work arrangements and aspirations for work of peasant migrant worker households in Yunnan, in order to investigate the relationship between waged and unwaged work in the lives of the interviewees within a situation of deteriorating returns for smallholders, rising costs of living, and insecure employment within the city.

Factory work in post-Mao China and going behind “the hidden abode of production”

In the existing literature on the working life of peasant workers in post-Mao China, much attention has focused on the manufacturing stronghold of the Pearl River Delta. Inspired by the cultural approach to class championed by English historian E. P. Thompson and French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, these “Chinese working class” studies approach class less as a social location and more as a contingent-making of class through agency and shared consciousness. Possibly due to the resemblance to the British experience of the industrial revolution or even due to the familiarity of the manufacturing landscape in the Pearl River Delta, which is sometimes explicitly acknowledged²², these places and the assembly line workers have come to occupy a particularly prominent place in the scholarly literature on rural migrant workers.²³ The manufacturing workplaces found particularly in Guangdong Province are characterized by the dormitory labor regime, in which workers live and work in the same location, and there are high turnovers and demeaning working conditions.²⁴ Moreover, scholars

²² Ngai and Huilin 2010

²³ Chang 2009; Ngai 2005

²⁴ Chan and Selden 2014; Ngai and Chan 2012

have detailed episodes when such workers have organized collectively to claim their salaries in times of non-payment or in other work-based violations against their rights as workers through strikes or when they have taken their case to court.²⁵

Despite the important narrative scholars drawing on ethnography within the Pearl River Delta have brought to the debate on peasant migrants' work, with an exclusive focus on the workplace when addressing questions of experience and livelihoods for rural migrant workers this shies away from the question of what still lies behind Marx's concept of the hidden abode.²⁶ Kathy Weeks and Nancy Fraser suggest that the shift in perspective offered by a Marxist feminist conception of work is similar to the move made by Marx against the typical political economy perspective on work that focused on the exchange between buyers and sellers within the market place.²⁷ Marx offered to expose the secret of value-making by redirecting the gaze of the observer towards the "hidden abode of production, meaning the factory floor." From this perspective, Marx demonstrated that wage work involved not so much men selling and buying labor within the perceived freedom of the marketplace, but subordination for workers, valorization of capital by owners of capital, and extraction of surplus by not paying laborers the full amount for their work.²⁸ Thus, the expression "behind the hidden abode" entails decentering work—a move from focusing on the workplace as the primary site of experience, livelihood and politics of the working class. While this shift in perspective has been discussed by different authors, it remains to be discussed in the context of studies of the Chinese working class. In addressing this imbalance, I am deeply indebted to decades of Marxist feminist theorizing and activism relating to including household labor as part of our conception of work.

Social reproduction, smallholders and unsettling the category of work

Starting from the premise that in capitalist societies the majority of people subsist by combining paid employment and unpaid domestic labour to maintain themselves and their households ...

²⁵ Chan 2013; Lee 2007

²⁶ Fraser 2014

²⁷ Fraser 2014; Weeks 2011

²⁸ Weeks 2011

social reproduction analyzes the ways in which both labours are part of the same socio-economic process.²⁹

Meg Luxton has highlighted the chain of practices that forms part of the same economy of unremunerated work and wage labor that secures the sustenance of households worldwide.³⁰ From the perspective of social reproduction, the investment of time and energy into tasks such as cleaning, cooking, procuring and producing food, socializing and caring for children and the infirm is interdependent with wage labor, as both types of labor are vital for the reproduction of labor and life itself. Marxist feminists³¹ have used this more expansive notion of work for decades in order to unsettle the categorical divide between household as a private realm of leisure and consumption and the workplace as public labor and production.³² This way of conceptualizing work has been put forward particularly by Anglo-Saxon Marxist and Italian Socialist feminists since the debates in the 1970s on household labor, often referred to collectively as the domestic labor debate.³³ These approaches challenged the Marxist conception of work, as the feminists argued that the pioneering work done by Marx to publicize the central place of work and workers to capitalism, as well as their subordinate relationship compared with the interests, needs and position of capital owners under capitalism, formed a necessary but insufficient critique of dominant ways of perceiving the economy (Weeks 2011). Rather, Marxist feminists started questioning the concept of work itself and particularly the separation often made between the tasks that take place within the home and the labor that takes place within the workplace. Nancy Fraser has eloquently argued that

markets depend for their very existence on non-marketized social relations, which supply their background conditions of possibility ... social-reproductive activity is absolutely necessary to the existence of waged work, the accumulation of surplus value and the functioning of capitalism as such. Wage labour could not exist in the absence of housework, child-raising, schooling, affective care and a host of other activities which help to produce new generations

²⁹ Luxton 2006, 37

³⁰ 2006

³¹ The label Marxist feminist is used as shorthand for feminist approaches that are broadly conceived as socialist, materialist, social reproduction feminism, or Marxist feminist, which goes beyond the second-wave feminist struggle for equality between the genders in terms of work within the household and the workplace to “publicize work, politicizing it, and radically transforming it” (Weeks 2011, 24).

³² Bakker 2007

³³ Costa and James 1975

of workers and replenish existing ones ... therefore, social reproduction is an indispensable background condition for the possibility of capitalist production.³⁴

Thus, the radical point made by Marxist feminists is that the unremunerated work taking place within the household is not an externality or a minor issue but forms the ground or the heart on which the economy moves.³⁵ One of the main aims of this critique is to publicize the often unaccounted for and as such misrecognized forms of work taking place within households and to start imagining other possibilities for the future of work.³⁶ This expansion of the conception and places of work is suggestive because it breaks down the separation between household and/or workplace and unremunerated and/or wage work.

However, despite the affinity between, on the one hand, Marxist feminists' central concern for unwaged household labor and the functioning of capitalism this paper and, on the other hand, the widespread recognition within peasant studies that most contemporary smallholder households combine remunerated labor with semi-subsistence agriculture,³⁷ there has been little dialogue between these bodies of scholarship (however, some worked in the intersection between these traditions).³⁸ Common to both bodies of literature is that capitalism depends upon semi-proletarianized households, as most people "derive a significant portion of their sustenance from sources other than cash wages, including self-provisioning ... informal reciprocity ... and state transfers".³⁹ Seen from this perspective, social reproduction does not merely involve taking account of the conduct and aspirations of work that exist alongside or in opposition to production and/or wage work. Rather, social reproduction is approached in this paper here as a terrain of struggles over the relationship between unwaged work and the means of survival. By means of survival, I refer to the materials that are necessary for the laborer to return to work, such as food, accommodation, and clothing. Moreover, these materials need to be provided, maintained, and distributed, which points to the necessity of both unremunerated housework and wage work. Still, the means of survival are not merely a bundle of biologically defined needs, including food, but a social category in which what count as needs and resources

³⁴ Fraser 2014, 59–60, 61

³⁵ Meehan and Strauss 2015; Mitchell, Marston and Katz 2003

³⁶ Weeks 2011

³⁷ Rigg, Salamanca and Thompson 2016; Van der Ploeg 2009

³⁸ Federici 2004; Tilly and Scott 1978

³⁹ Fraser 2014, 59

are at stake and are continuously struggled over through the aspirations, wants and needs of different groups.⁴⁰ Thus, the meaning and organization of training in skills and the bodily constitution of the workforce is central to the terrain of social reproduction.

On another scale than the household, the conception of work forwarded by Marxist feminists serve to assist my argumentation in this paper by drawing some of the connections I want to make between the countryside and city in post-Mao China, which often are seen as separate realms of work and play. From the conception of work forwarded by Marxists feminists, the common question in terms of the rural–urban practices and aspirations of smallholders of how smallholders turn to either wage labor or to farming (i.e. proletarianization or the agrarian transition) arguably needs to be amended by investigating how the spatial coexistence of unwaged and waged labor involves struggles and opportunities for smallholder migrant households to access their means of survival.

Creating a countertopography of work: methods and context

What does the above-discussed understanding of work entail for us methodologically? While a political economy approach is often deployed to expose the social, political and economic arrangements of social reproduction, there has been a call among scholars working within this framework for more context-specific work to explore “the actual experiences of people in the midst of changing patterns of social reproduction”.⁴¹ Cindi Katz suggests a methodology based on fieldwork combined with “scale-jumping and geography-crossing,” tracing relations beyond the particular place, which she calls a countertopography.⁴² The point raised by Katz is that this countertopography needs to be made, not through a play of words but through tracing and reconnecting the material practices, lived experiences and translocal processes influencing people’s lives, which are often understood as separate and unrelated.⁴³ This is suggestive, as it highlights the practice of drawing connections between places and practices often encountered as discrete and separate, such as unwaged labor in the countryside and wage labor in a city in post-Mao China.

⁴⁰ Katz 2001a

⁴¹ Steans and Tepe 2010, 810

⁴² 2001a

⁴³ 2001b

For eight months in 2012 and 2013, I lived in Yunnan with my family to conduct fieldwork. I hired two local research assistants, whom I worked together with on various parts of the research. Both research assistants were young graduates from eastern China who had learned the Yunnanese dialect and who had considerable field experience of working with marginalized groups in Kunming or the countryside in Yunnan. They assisted me with interpretation, logistics, and setting up interviews with migrant workers' relatives and friends. In addition, I hired a third person to transcribe and translate from Mandarin to English the tape-recorded interviews with migrant workers. At times, we stayed for several continuous days in the villages, while at other times we went back and forth from Kunming in the same day, a two-hour drive each way, to balance the fieldwork with my obligations as a parent as well as my research assistants' social obligations. I hired a driver to take us on to these daily trips, who was a migrant worker from a village in northeast Yunnan.

In total, we held 52 interviews⁴⁴ with smallholder households in two villages on livelihood resources, perceptions on migration, and local policies on turning farmland into forestry. The village of Baicai⁴⁵ (which means pak choi, a type of Chinese cabbage, which is the main cash crop of the village) had 50 households, while the village of Kaoyan (which means tobacco, the main cash crop of the village) had 46 households (interviews with village leaders). In addition to the household interviews, we held 32 interviews with rural migrant workers whom at the time or in the past had worked in Kunming. In total, 20 of the migrant workers came from Baicai and Kaoyan, while 5 migrant workers were recruited for interviews through our driver, 1 interview was held with the driver, who himself was a migrant, 5 migrant workers were recruited through acquaintances of one of the interviewees from Baicai, and 1 migrant was an acquaintance of one of the research assistants. While there was much that differentiated the migrant worker interviewees in terms of age, gender and range of time working outside their

⁴⁴ The age of the interviewees from the household interviews ranged between 24 and 74 years, and the average age was 43 years. We interviewed 29 men and 23 women, of whom 15 had worked outside their village in the past or were currently working outside for parts of the year.

⁴⁵ To preserve anonymity and to avoid any possible negative consequences for interviewees, I have used fictitious names for the villages and interviewees.

village,⁴⁶ the interviewees nonetheless shared the common situation of being casually employed in low-paid and low-skilled work in petty capitalist workplaces.⁴⁷

We conducted the interviews with members of households either in their homes or while they were farming. The interviews with migrant workers took place either in their homes in the study villages or in Kunming, where they were held in different public spaces such as parks and cafés or they were held in their workplaces. In addition to interviews, I used observations to obtain information on farming practices, daily schedules, housing standards, different groups' participation and respective roles in agriculture, especially gendered and generational divisions of labor. I used a field diary to note down what I considered important, noteworthy and surprising, which I then used to ask the research participants follow-up questions, to initiate discussions with them and to become familiar with life in Kunming and the two villages. Somewhat coincidentally, the multisited⁴⁸ nature of the fieldwork made me more attuned to the simultaneity and interconnected work taking place on the smallholdings and within the urban workplaces.

The workplace: wage work, informalization and aspirations

Rural–urban migration has become an irreversible part of the work and life of smallholder communities and households in much of post-Mao China. Each year, more than 150 million rural migrant workers toil in urban workplaces to realize their diverse life projects, some to sustain their smallholder lives and while others aspire to become permanent city dwellers.⁴⁹ Kunming, which currently has more than 6.4 million inhabitants, excluding rural migrant workers, has undergone a rapid physical transformation through demolitions and redevelopment since the mid-1990s and the cityscape is now characterized by eye-catching

⁴⁶ The migrant worker interviewees' ages ranged between 16 and 47 years and the average age was 27 years. These interviewees comprised 18 men and 14 women. Some had worked outside for only one year, while those with most experience “working for the boss” (*dagong*) had worked outside for at least parts of the year, for more than 30 years.

⁴⁷ Three of the interviewees had secured formal employment with fixed terms, such as working hours, salary and tasks. Through kinship, these interviewees were associated with the political elites of Kaoyan and Baicai and all had received some type of vocational education beyond middle school.

⁴⁸ Marcus 1995

⁴⁹ Zhang *et al.*, 2015

high-rises, wide boulevards and high-end shopping malls.⁵⁰ In this respect, Kunming is similar to most Chinese cities. Moreover, while the cities within the Pearl River Delta have developed around manufacturing and finance industries, Kunming is renowned for its trade, services and minerals.⁵¹ However, below this eye-catching surface, small-scale petty capitalist workplaces abound, where many people from the countryside take up work. Many of the rural migrant workers live within “villages in the city” or “urban villages,” which are housing enclaves situated on land that not long ago was farmland, and is generally still owned by the former smallholders who hold the tilling rights to the land but are not allowed to sell the land because all land is government property.⁵²

In one urban village in Kunming, we meet Mrs. Li, aged 22 years. Together with my research assistant, I met her at the grocery store where she was working. The village was inhabited mainly by rural migrant workers, and has some public buildings, including schools, a police station, and a post office, as is common for.⁵³ The store was located on a street bustling with street peddlers, pedestrians, schoolchildren drinking sweet tea, cars and tricycles, and with barbecues, hair salons, small stores, and vegetable and meat markets. The store had been Mrs. Li’s workplace for a little more than one month and she had already had a few different jobs despite her young age, all of which she had left because she was exhausted or had problems with her boss. Regarding her future, she said: “I have no ambitious dreams. I just hope we can have more money to afford a better life for the baby [ages 3 years and living with her husband’s parents in the countryside], and my family can live a better life.” Such aspirations of having a better life through saving money or increasing one’s salary were evident from the interviewees’ information about how they had changed their jobs frequently. Rather than engaging in collective action to further their interests, the migrant worker interviewees were more likely to change their jobs for better paid ones or when their employers mistreated them. However, searching for better paid jobs was not an end in itself for Mrs. Li, as she told us that her work in the city was a matter of preparing herself for what was to come: “I will have to do it [return to do farm work in the future], so I get to earn more money to save up for a tough life in the future.”

⁵⁰ Notar 2012; Zhang 2006

⁵¹ Donaldson 2011

⁵² Bach 2010

⁵³ Du and Li 2010

Mrs. Li's story highlights how the ethos of the interviewees was constrained, hesitant and ambiguous, as they proclaimed that they "just want to live a plain life." Those interviewees engaged in informal service work at, for example, family restaurants, grocery stores, car beautification shops, cafeterias and other types of petty capital enterprises or on construction sites, where jobs are still abundant in rapidly transforming Chinese cities. Those lacking education beyond middle school and who wanted to live outside their village spoke about their need to keep struggling (*fen dou*) to be able to stay. These migrants often talked about their desire to set up their own business rather than continue working for their boss, which none of them saw as a long-term solution for providing a decent life and secure livelihood. Many spoke of the demeaning conditions of work in terms of working hours, having their salaries withheld or being scolded by their bosses in front of their fellow workers for what they perceived were minor mistakes, or having to quit their job because their workplace was being demolished as part of the modernization of the city. Those who had completed vocational training spoke about their desires to become life-long government employees, referring to their aspiration to enter the formal echelons of the labor market, where fringe benefits, paid holidays, and regular working hours with some job protection was expected. Others were more ambiguous and hesitant regarding their future, and wanted to live closer to their peers in their village, yet distance themselves from smallholder farming, either due to the dust⁵⁴ or to the uncertain prospects with regard to income.

When we spoke to the migrant interviewees, we regularly asked if they had stayed in their villages for longer periods after they had started working outside them. This question was intended to reveal the importance of the material role of the smallholding for interviewees, as they shared the experiences of returning home in times of exhaustion, unemployment, sickness, injury or to care for their parents or children. Both the hesitant approach towards the future and the importance of the smallholding to it is illustrated in the narrative of Chen Li (aged 22 years, who completed vocational school and had four years of migrant work experience) from Baicai, when we met him in a public park close to where he was living in the outskirts of Kunming:

⁵⁴ Some young interviewees highlighted how one became covered by dust when doing farmwork, as they explained to me and the research assistant why they did not want to return to smallholder farming in the future.

Research assistant: What motivated you to stay and work here?

Mr. Chen: You have been to my hometown, you know about that place right? My family has paid so much to support me to go to school. They would never want us [my generation] to go back there again.

Research assistant: How [what] do you think about your life back then when you first came out to work?

Mr. Chen: You can tell him [the author] that this person [referring to himself] has seen the immensity of the dark side of society ... To make it simple, I just work to live. Simply speaking, I live to live ... I think we [compared with his peers staying in the village] are at the same level in terms of materials, but psychologically I am not as happy as they are. I think I have been exposed too much to the dark side of the world, which makes me a very pessimistic person ... It's not that I like farming, it's just ... like I told you just now, I will go back to my village for sure sooner or later, when I return there, I will lose my income source, so I can only ...[rely on farming for living].

This sense of certainty of returning to one's village sooner or later was expressed by several of the interviewees, often as an acquired disposition, such as in the case of Mr. Chen after having experienced the hardship of wage work. However, after his parents had invested heavily in his education and with meager prospects for surviving on smallholder farming alone, Mr. Chen was cautious about returning to work on the farm. His parents' smallholding provided sustenance for him when he was exhausted or in between jobs. For the interviewees, the work situation in Kunming highlighted the continued place of the smallholding in the lives of rural migrant workers. This was seen as informalized wage work, symbolic devaluation of smallholder farming and the material difficulties of sustaining it made planning their futures and even just imagining their futures difficult for most of the interviewees. Thus, the often discontinuous, transient and uncertain work they were able to access within the city influenced the migrant interviewees' aspirations. Even perceiving themselves as a working subject ("I work to live ... I live to live") was difficult for some under these conditions.

The smallholding: agriculture, monetarization and aspirations

Attempts since the mid-2000s to scale up agriculture through consolidating landholdings have led to the future of smallholder farming becoming unsettled due to the widespread prevalence of farmland being dispossessed, and this has been exacerbated by the central and some city government's call to spur urbanization through rural–urban migration and city expansion.⁵⁵ However, the reproduction of labor in post-Mao China has a distinctly rural–urban dimension. As He Xuefeng argues, most of the more than 200 million of rural migrant workers who have left the countryside over the last 30 years are “transient guests in the cities who must rely on the rural areas to realize the reproduction of their labor power.”⁵⁶

The continued importance of the smallholding to the lives of peasants in post-Mao China was evident in the accounts and practices of both the migrants and interviewees who had been left behind. The smallholdings have been kept, maintained and worked by those left behind in villages such as Kaoyan and Baicai. The latter villages are located on the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, also known as the Yungui Plateau, which has an elevation of ca. 1900 meters and a landscape characterized by rolling hills. In both Kaoyan and Baicai, the population is Han, the majority ethnic group in China, with a smaller number of in-married ethnic minority women. Households in both villages rely on a mixture of subsistence agriculture, breeding livestock for own consumption or exchange, cash crop production and wage work. While agriculture remains an important priority for the householders in both Kaoyan and Baicai, wage labor and consumer goods are increasing in importance. The latter especially visible when the younger generation are compared with the older generations, as most youths and young people in the age group 16–30 years work outside their village, in contrast to the middle-aged and elderly.

More and more families are combine farm work with off-farm work, not only because of economic marginalization but also because of changing wants and needs since the mid-1980s. Off-farm work includes local work such as house building, transportation of goods and people, and *dagong* work further afield in the towns or cities of Yunnan Province, often in Kunming. Additionally, a number of villagers work in local government positions on the village committee, such as accountants, rangers, village leaders, and healthcare workers. Moreover, since 2010, some of the villagers in Kaoyan have started to work for others within agriculture, and this has happened because a company has invested in the village by renting land from

⁵⁵ Andreas and Zhan 2015

⁵⁶ 2007, 27

villagers for commercial blueberry production. Those who work in Kunming either live there part of the year, depending on the agricultural seasons, or they live there all year round. However, those working outside the village remains officially registered as inhabitants of Kaoyan and Baicai, only one family has transferred their household registration (*hukou*) to Kunming.

While there are differences between Kaoyan and Baicai, both villages lack access to piped water, clean drinking water and improved sanitation. There are few signs of public investment in either infrastructure or agriculture, whereas signs of private investment abound. It was especially noticeable that families invested in vital sites for their household's social reproduction, such as housing, their children's education and farm inputs, including fertilizers, seeds and pesticides. During the farming season, which roughly lasts from March to November, the interviewees reported that they grew a variety of crops for subsistence, including corn, potato, barley, and lotus fruit as well as different forms of spices, including chili. The inhabitants of both Kaoyan and Baicai told us that, following six successive years of drought in the area, in the period 2008–2014, the growth of their crops had been stunted and hence they had experience reductions in their incomes. They had needed to increase the amount of fertilizers each year, and the reduction in the yields from the land had meant less fodder for their livestock. According to the village veterinary in Baicai, most families had had to cut down on the range of livestock in recent years. In addition, interviewees from Baicai told us that they needed to change the type of corn seed they had normally used to a type that they could harvest earlier but that was more expensive. Thus, in recent years, it has become increasingly difficult to practice sustainable smallholder farming in the face of drought and the increasing prices of farm inputs. The pauperization of smallholders in Kaoyan and Baicai needs to be understood against the background of how several decades of disinvestments by the state, trade policies undercutting small-scale production, the increasing prices of farm inputs and the massive prevalence of dispossession of agricultural land, all of which have gradually undermined agrarian livelihoods.⁵⁷

However, in contrast to the crisis faced by the Chinese peasantry in the 1990s, since the turn of the new millennium there has been a proliferating academic debate and attendant policy

⁵⁷ Walker 2009

intervention by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to rejuvenate the countryside, which was sparked by protests made by rural residents in the late 1990s and early 2000s over land expropriations and the agricultural tax.⁵⁸ Between 2004 and 2006, the CCP abolished the unpopular agricultural tax, and in late 2005 it launched a comprehensive policy package under the slogan of “Building a New Socialist Countryside”.⁵⁹ The stated goal of these policies is to raise rural incomes and rejuvenate rural areas by investing particularly in education and healthcare.⁶⁰ Thus, while it is difficult to see many signs of government investment in Kaoyan and Baicai, the provincial government’s abolition of the increasingly unpopular agricultural tax in 2006 and recently introduced programs targeting issues such as poverty alleviation, healthcare expenditures and costs of education have partially alleviated some of the difficulties faced by smallholders.

However, while government investments make it possible for some parents to dream of leaving smallholder farming behind, particularly by investing their aspirations and resources in the education of their children, the existing jobs available to rural migrant workers in Kunming mean that even working to live is difficult. This points to the sustained connection between countryside and city in terms of securing the means of survival through unwaged and waged labor for smallholder migrant worker households in Kaoyan and Baicai. To illustrate the interconnected and spatially coexisting forms of work engaged in by the interviewees, despite the increasing pauperization of peasants who continue to till the land, I highlight below the practices and perspectives on work for the Ning couple, who lived in Kaoyan.

Mrs. Ning, who was 40 years old, was planting tobacco—a highly labor-intensive crop, she both told and demonstrated to us—when we met her out on her household’s dusty 6 mu plot of land (1 mu equals 0,0667 ha). As Mrs. Ning’s husband was working outside the village, she alone was hoeing the land and tobacco seeds in the early days of the spring season. However, with the money earned from Mr. Ning’s salary, they were able to afford to rent some extra help during the busiest season in agriculture, so that Mr. Ning could continue to work away from home throughout the year. Mr. Ning, who was aged 43 years, had been working in the outskirts of Kunming since the early 1990s; he worked at a fertilizer production plant, where he loaded

⁵⁸ Day 2013

⁵⁹ Ahlers and Schubert 2013

⁶⁰ Ahlers and Schubert 2010

and offloaded bags of fertilizers onto trucks. Whenever he returned home to visit his family, which he did at least once per month, his wife prepared food using what they had grown or raised their own smallholding and what they had been able to buy between tending for their hogs (3), bull, and goats (5) and cleaning their house. Mr. Ning sent most of his salary, approximately RMB 2400–2500 (USD 411–428) to his wife after he had deducted his own living expenses to cover food, smoking, utility fees, and rent in the city. Most of the money that he sent home was used for their youngest daughter’s education and on farm inputs such as fertilizers, seeds, labor, and pesticides. Mr. Ning told us that he had stayed at home during the first eight years of his eldest daughter’s life, before starting to work away from home for parts of the year and more recently he had been working outside even during the busy season in agriculture. The simultaneous and interdependent labor of the Ning couple, who worked on the land, raised livestock, were homemakers (e.g. cooking, cleaning, and caring for their girls) and “worked for the boss” (*dagong*), were all small acts of work that together enabled the family to socially reproduce on a daily and generational basis.

Mr. Ning solemnly explained his point of view on the combination of wage work, subsistence farming and cash-crop production for his households’ survival as follows:

You have to pay for everything for tobacco growing, like water and labor fees et cetera. It looks like we can make about twenty thousand, and only ten thousand and a bit more is left after the costs are covered. And working outside [the village] is no easier, [because] everything costs money ... The reason I have been working outside for so many years is to sustain my family, or to support our daily expenses. If we stay home, we have no income sources except for tobacco; and we have nothing to do every year after tobacco is finished. Then we will have no way out except for applying for loans to support our daily expenditure, and [we] cannot repay the loans until we sell tobacco. We have to rely on loans to buy fertilizer. We have no way except for *dagong* outside. If you just stay at home instead, your whole family will be reduced to starvation ... Yet, you can barely survive without farming. My [first] daughter has no job ... What can you eat if you don’t do farming?

Mr. Ning highlighted how the combination of subsistence, cash crop agriculture and off-farm work in Kunming had secured sustenance for his family. The need to combine off-farm and on-farm work for the sustenance of the family is strongly driven by the increasing importance of money in the lives of smallholders in the post-Mao era, when money is used to finance social

necessities such as medical expenses, education, and food. The more general point raised by Mr. Ning is that since expenditure on daily necessities, particularly food and education keeps growing, this puts the access to the means of survival at risk, which deepens the necessity of both unremunerated and remunerated labor for the reproduction of the family.

From the workplace to the smallholding and back again: reconnecting the sites of social reproduction

The perspective offered from the lives of the inhabitants of Kaoyan and Baicai attests to the coming together of rural and urban as sites of work. This is evident in the way the Ning household combined unremunerated work such as subsistence farming, care for their kin and daughters, and all that goes into homemaking (e.g. preparing food, laundry, and cleaning) with wage labor and cash crop production (tobacco), in order to reproduce on a daily and generational basis. The activities and work of the Ning family attests to the important contribution of the concept of social reproduction, as it serves as an antidote to creating “a false dichotomy between migrants and the left-behind”⁶¹, since in this framework “the household takes center stage”.⁶² This serves as an important corrective to the tendency to recognize peasants only as workers when they enter the city, which overlooks the dependence of their reproduction on *seemingly* distant economies of labor. How labor is reproduced then becomes visible as soon as one starts to relink the acts of unremunerated work and paid labor, which together make up “the economy” of smallholder households. This is not to say that within the households themselves relations of harmony, love and an equal division labor always trump conflict, opposed interests, and exploitation based on gender and age. Feminist scholars have long problematized the tendency of treating households as conflict-free domains.⁶³ Rather, from the perspective of smallholder migrant worker households, both unwaged and waged labor are necessary for the materials acquired and maintained, and for the work carried out in order to replenish the workforce. Thus, the interconnected work carried out by different members of smallholder migrant worker households is not reducible to a household matter, as we are reminded by Nancy Fraser, but is one of the background conditions that make wage labor,

⁶¹ Nguyen and Locke 2014, 856

⁶² Douglass 2006, 421

⁶³ Wolf 1990

capital accumulation and commodity production possible.⁶⁴ As such, the focus in most studies of the Chinese working class on factory work in particular and wage work more generally in post-Mao China, has risked naturalizing the separation between working for wages and unwaged work. Rather, from the perspective of smallholder migrant worker households, these forms of labor are mutually overlapping. Moreover, by implicitly classifying these forms of work as separate and apart, the often common processes undermining the means of survival for both those left behind and rural migrant workers are lost from view.

In the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008, journalists and researchers have pointed to how peasants are less willing to change their citizenship from agricultural to urban *hukou* and when they go out to work, they venture closer to home. This has forced many companies to relocate to central and west China, and some are now arguing that China's competitive advantage of an abundance of cheap labor belongs to a bygone era.⁶⁵ Due to employment insecurity, the rising cost of labor and the inability of the Chinese economy to produce enough employment opportunities for rural laborers, any notion of full proletarianization seems like a fading dream.⁶⁶ Inspired by Mike Davis's book *Planet of Slums*, in which he documents the increasing prevalence of urban informality in work and settlement among those newly arrived from the countryside in rapidly urbanizing countries, since the mid-2000s a number of Chinese intellectuals have confronted the idea that the main impediment towards the well-being of Chinese peasants is their exclusion from an urban *hukou*.⁶⁷ In this regard, the argument that by now urbanization in China, has largely been decoupled from industrialization in most cities except in some parts of southeastern and east China, is central. Thus, such scholars argue that the main issue confronting the peasantry in contemporary China is that of maintaining and working towards viable livelihoods.⁶⁸ As seen from the lives of the migrant interviewees, despite the pauperization suffered by most smallholder households, these rural migrant workers continued to rely on their smallholdings. This finding is related to the way most rural migrant workers are confined to wage work within insecure and low-paid petty capitalist workplaces or are self-employed in the fringes of the urban economy, with little or no protection from the state or capital in cases of unemployment, injury or sickness.

⁶⁴ 2014

⁶⁵ Loyalka 2012; Wildau 2015

⁶⁶ Day 2013; Xuefeng 2007

⁶⁷ Davis 2006 as discussed in Day 2013

⁶⁸ Tiejun *et al.*, 2011

Looking at the interconnections of the work and life of those left behind and the migrant workforce has revealed some common threats towards their means of survival. This relates particularly to the rising cost of living for both rural and urban dwellers, coupled with the insecure employment to which most rural migrant workers are confined. If the dream of full employment—proletarianization—is fading from the utopian imaginary following the global financial crisis, it is a matter of urgency to reconnect the struggles of those left behind and migrant workers around the issue of means of survival. Moreover, by reconnecting the everyday struggles of smallholder migrant worker households within discontinuous and demeaning wage work and rising costs of living, which potentially forces smallholders to work for wages, this throws into relief how the terrain of social reproduction potentially constitutes itself as a common ground for struggles within and outside the workplace. Put differently, the relationship between unwaged work and access to food, shelter, and other means of survival and social needs, such as care and education, stands at the heart of the question of the peasantry in contemporary China.

Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have explored the relationship between work for smallholder migrant worker households and their access to a means of survival from the perspective of Marxist feminism. As I have highlighted, smallholders in post-Mao China are not merely laborers when they enter workplaces in cities but are engaged in the production of the most basic commodity of their urbanized economy: labor. Through exploring the relationship between work and access to the means of reproduction for smallholder households, I have traced how householders in the province of Yunnan work to improve the conditions of both types of laborers. I have shown how countless minor acts of unremunerated work that take place on the fringes of the global economy are often unaccounted for. This brings us back to the question posed by Ananya Roy at the start of this paper: “what global city can function without relational dependence on seemingly distant economies of ... cheap labor?” As argued in this article, the combination and interdependence of unremunerated labor, which often takes place on the smallholding, and wage work, which often takes place within informalized workplaces in the city, constitute the backbone of the Chinese economy. However, as I have also argued, too often the categories of work and labor remain unquestioned, with the often unintentional consequence of separating

the realm of wage labor and unremunerated work. I have particularly problematized some of the assumptions behind the literature on the Chinese working class, where the focus on wage labor and factory work unintentionally places the question of how labor is reproduced on the outskirts of its investigation into the politics, aspirations and conduct of work. By contrast, in this paper I have highlighted the relationship between waged and unwaged labor for the reproduction of the smallholder migrant worker household. To make these insights more visible, I have traced the realization of laborers' social reproduction within the lives of the interviewees. In this way, this paper contributes to existing scholarly work on workers and the economy concerning rural migrant workers in post-Mao China, by making visible and publicizing the perspective of the migrant workforces' social reproduction. I have argued that the combination and interdependence of these forms of work constitute the ground on which capitalism moves.

Returning to Meg Luxton's conception of social reproduction as the coexistence of wage and unwaged labor, I have elucidated how the practices and points of view of those left behind and migrant workers are mutually overlapping from the perspective of laborers' social reproduction. From the perspective of wage work for peasant workers, the transient, low-paid and insecure wage flow that characterizes such work renders them unable to harbor long-term aspirations and stock enough resources for a future as city dwellers. Moreover, from the perspective of housework, which includes agriculture and care work, the rising cost of living, local drought and decades of disinvestment into agriculture have all served to undermine the lives of smallholders. Thus, rather than equating reproduction with unwaged labor and production with wage labor, in this paper I have examined the relationship between housework and wage work to raise the question of how the means of survival are secured and at times undermined in the lives of smallholder migrant worker households. In this way, I have attempted to map the common ground for struggles over work practices, which are often encountered as separate and apart as agriculture, childcare, and wage labor, by highlighting how these struggles fundamentally revolve around imagining and practically working through the relationship between work and the means of reproduction for smallholder households.

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