

# ***Institutionalizing Recent Rural Emigration from China to Europe: New Transnational Villages in Fujian***

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The prevalence of irregular migration from a small region in the central parts of Fujian province has associated Chinese emigration with organized crime, exploitation and opportunism in a range of popular and academic writings both in China and outside China. Although migration brokers (“snakeheads”) play an important role in maintaining migratory flows already underway, they should not be seen as the root cause of migration from Fujian. In this article, we report on recently conducted fieldwork in two villages in central Fujian characterized by large-scale emigration to Europe. Emigration from this part of China is strongly embedded in local political, sociocultural and economic institutions and histories. Migration brokers are certainly a part, but not more than that, of these local institutions. We conclude that the local embeddedness of migration renders population mobility from each area in China highly specific, and broad generalizations on the causes, nature and direction of the totality of Chinese, or even Fujianese, migration are bound to misrepresent a highly complex reality.

Since the early 1990s, the colorful language of “snakeheads” (translated from the Chinese word *shetou* assigned to migration brokers) has dominated discussions on the upsurge in Chinese international migration. In these discussions, Fujian province on the southeastern coast of China has played a prominent role. The prevalence of irregular migration from a small region in the central parts of this province has associated Chinese emigration with organized crime, exploitation and opportunism in a range of popular and academic writings both in China and outside China (*see, e.g.*, Kyle and Dale, 2001; Shi, 2000; Smith, 1997).

No convincing evidence, however, exists that well-organized Chinese triads or gangs are the primary masterminds and main operators behind smuggling or trafficking of Chinese migrants. “Snakeheads” are entrepreneurial individuals who cooperate in loose networks on specific shipments

(Chin, 1999:39–40; Zhang and Chin, 2000; Pieke *et al.*:Ch. 2). Although these brokers play an important role in facilitating and hence maintaining migratory flows already underway, they should not be seen as the root cause of migration from Fujian. In this article, we report on recently conducted fieldwork in two very different villages in Fujian characterized by large-scale emigration to Europe.<sup>1</sup> Emigration from this part of China is strongly embedded in local political, sociocultural and economic institutions and histories. Under the impact of sustained migration, local political, sociocultural and economic institutions, in turn, have been created or transformed and have come to play a critical role in mediating the scope and nature of international mobility. Human brokers are certainly a part, but not more than that, of these local institutions.

The local embeddedness of migration renders population mobility from each area in China highly specific, and broad generalizations on the causes, nature and direction of the totality of Chinese or even Fujianese migration are bound to misrepresent a highly complex reality. In this article, we will show that international migration from our two fieldwork villages to Europe belongs to separate migration configurations, entailing different types of transnational connections and histories of previous forms of mobility. On the other hand, the migratory flows from our two study villages are a part of the larger phenomenon of the “new Chinese migration” that commenced after the onset of the reforms in China in 1978. This new migration, in turn, illustrates some of the new opportunities and inequalities produced by specific patterns of Chinese globalization that are part of the rise of the “network society” (Castells, 1996) and “economic globalization” (Sassen, 1996) more generally. Technological advances in long distance transport and the increased professionalization of Chinese migration have greatly facilitated the international movement of Chinese labor. As one interviewee noted: “leaving for overseas has become the same as going to Fuzhou, Xiamen, Beijing or Shanghai” (interview with a migrant family in village A, Sept. 5, 2000).

<sup>1</sup>The fieldwork was part of a project that ran from 1999 to 2001 under the working title *At the Margins of the Chinese World System: The Fuzhou Diaspora in Europe*. The project was funded by the British Economic and Social Research Council under grant number L214252012 as part of its “Transnational Communities” program. In addition to the fieldwork in Fujian reported on here, project field research was also carried out in Britain, Hungary and Italy by Senior Researcher Fellow on the project, Pál Nyíri, and Antonella Ceccagno. A full book-length report on the project was published as Pieke *et al.*, 2004.

The globalization of the Chinese labor market reinforces rather than reduces the cultural division of labor in the receiving countries. Chinese migrants in Europe work primarily in low-paid menial jobs. This may, on occasion, include employment in non-Chinese firms, but usually is limited to the overseas Chinese segment of European labor markets and economies. Migrants from the Fuzhou area where village A is located are found across both Western and Eastern Europe, mainly working in restaurants or workshops owned by Chinese from Hong Kong, Zhejiang province, or Southeast Asia, whose communities in Europe go back many decades (Benton and Pieke, 1998). Some of the more successful migrants from the Fuzhou area have started their own enterprises, thereby gradually establishing a more permanent and prominent Fuzhou presence among ethnic Chinese in countries like Britain, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Germany and Spain. Other migrants from Fuzhou, particularly those in Eastern Europe, operate as traders, vendors, or hawkers, mainly of imported Chinese merchandise. Migrants from the inland area of Sanming and Nanping prefectures where village B is located have similar occupational specializations, but are almost exclusively present in Russia, Eastern Europe, Italy and Spain. Only recently have they begun to make some headway into the countries of northwestern Europe with large and well-established Chinese communities (for a more complete picture of Chinese migratory flows to and across Europe, *see* Pieke, 2002).

The prominence of snakeheads in reports on Chinese migration is not simply a product of sensationalism. Contemporary legal or illegal migration remains politically highly sensitive in China, making it very difficult for Chinese and non-Chinese scholars to gain permission for a direct investigation in China itself of the nature and causes of international migration. Unveiling diverse local reasons for illegal emigration is not in the interest of the Chinese state, which is more content with media reports on crackdowns on human smuggling. Especially in Fujian – from where according to Chinese officials an estimated 80 percent of all illegal migrants originate (“Europe’s Loopholes Encouraging Illegal Chinese Immigrants,” Agence France Press, Feb. 14, 2001) – foreign researchers are not allowed to conduct any systematic fieldwork investigations. By contrast, Chinese researchers are able to conduct interviews and observations in local areas of migration, but only with provincial government permission. For this study, the fieldwork in Fujian was conducted by a local researcher, who first was trained in the methods of anthropological fieldwork and later supervised by e-mail by

Mette Thunø – the primary researcher responsible for the village studies in Fujian.<sup>2</sup>

The project as a whole chiefly concerned Fujianese migration to Europe, which was, compared to Fujianese migration to North America, both distinctive and ill-understood. For the fieldwork in Fujian, we therefore decided on a comparison of two counties with contrasting patterns of migration to Europe. The selection of the two counties took place on the basis of several informal investigations in Fujian itself and interviews with Fujianese migrants in Europe in 1998 and 1999 conducted by Thunø and Pál Nyíri. The first county<sup>3</sup> we selected was coastal Fuqing in Fuzhou prefecture, which has a long history of international migration to Southeast Asia and more recently to Europe. The second county was Mingxi, located in Sanming prefecture in the mountains of western Fujian. Despite the absence of a history of overseas migration, emigration to Europe from here has been significant since the early 1990s. Fieldwork there was immediately approved by the authorities in Sanming. Securing cooperation of the authorities was much more difficult in Fuqing, where human smuggling is more significant and emigration is perceived as a very sensitive issue, which was highlighted by the fact that no less than 28 of the 58 Chinese irregular migrants who suffocated in a truck on its way to Dover in July 2000 were from Fuqing. As a consequence, our information on village B is richer than on village A. In the two counties together, 106 interviews with officials at all administrative levels and with emigrant households were conducted in 1999 and 2000. In June 2000, a questionnaire survey in village B was conducted of a sample of 81 emigrant households in village B, comprising 26 percent of all households or 50 percent of all emigrant households in the village. Finally, two supplementary visits to village A were conducted in late 2003 and early 2004.

### *FUJIAN PROVINCE: SOARING EMIGRATION IN THE HEARTLAND OF CHINA'S ECONOMIC REFORMS*

In 1978, Fujian province ranked nationally as the twenty-third (of 29 provinces) in terms of per capita GDP, which was far below other coastal prov-

<sup>2</sup>Due to the sensitivity of the topic, our Chinese colleague prefers to remain anonymous. We can only thank him here for his work and persistent efforts to understand local processes of migration without which this study would not have been possible.

<sup>3</sup>For the sake of consistency, we refer to all county-level administrative areas as “county,” irrespective of whether or not they, like Fuqing, have been designated a “county-level municipality” (*xianji shi*).

inces (Shieh, 2000:84). However, Fujian's lackluster economic performance during the collective period (1949–1978) had less to do with geography than with politics. Fujian's location at the Taiwan Strait rendered this province a military frontier in the struggle between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on the Chinese mainland and the Nationalist Party (Guomindang, GMD) on Taiwan. As a result, after 1949, Fujian received a mere 1.5 percent of total national capital investment (the fourth-lowest percentage of all provinces) during the period from 1949–1978, forcing the province to focus on agricultural production and abandon its long tradition of maritime trading and coastal development. Furthermore, the limited national and provincial funds available for industrial development were invested in the interior parts of the province, which were deemed less vulnerable to enemy attacks (Lyons, 1998).<sup>4</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s, economic liberalization and opening up to the outside world made the strategy of containment of Taiwan a thing of the past. Fujian's position changed rapidly from a military zone to a key region of economic development in China. Rather than a liability, the province's proximity to Taiwan became an asset as Taiwanese and ethnic Chinese investments began to pour in, particularly in the southern parts of the province that have close historical, linguistic and cultural links with the native Taiwanese population. Along with Guangdong province, which has comparable overseas relations to Hong Kong, Fujian became the first economic experimental zone targeted for modernization. Local authorities were given substantial autonomy to open-up for foreign investment and trade with the outside world. In 1979, decentralization was promoted with the establishment of Xiamen city in southern Fujian as a "Special Economic Zone"; in 1984, the provincial capital Fuzhou followed when it was designated an "open coastal city." In 1985, the coastal cities of Quanzhou, Zhangzhou and Xiamen were earmarked as a "golden triangle" of economic development.

The geographic advantages of the coastal cities and the location of the majority of "ancestral villages" of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia and Taiwanese in the coastal area reversed the artificial pattern of state-induced economic development of the interior during the collective period. By 1997, the economic transformation had raised Fujian's position nationally from being one of the most backward provinces in China to number seven in

<sup>4</sup>Statistical data in this section are indicators of diversity rather than exact data due to chronic uncertainties of Chinese statistical reporting at the grass roots level (see Cai, 2000).

terms of per capita GDP. As in the Mao era, however, economic development in one region of the province was realized through the unequal distribution of investment, resources and income; now the industrial heartland of the collective period in the interior of the province finds itself systematically neglected (Fujiansheng Jihua Weiyuanhui [Fujian Planning Committee] and Fujiansheng Tongjiju [Fujian Province Statistical Bureau], 1999; Lyons, 1998; Yeung, 2000:8).

The two research sites of this study clearly reflect the reversal of economic development from western to eastern Fujian. Village A is situated in today's industrial and economic developmental zone on the eastern coastline, while village B is located within the former industrial region of western interior Fujian. These field sites present, as intended, two different economic and social environments, but recent international migration has, nevertheless, become significant from both villages. Despite their radically different developmental trajectories, in both field sites the wage gap with Europe remains great. In 2000, peasants in the two villages earned on average between RMB 3,100–4,500 (US\$300–540, not including overseas remittances) annually (interviews with party secretary of village B, June 24, 2000 and with director of the branch of the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese in village A, Aug. 21, 2000), but if working in Europe average monthly starting wages might reach US\$1,000 (*see* Pieke *et al.*, 2004:ch. 3). However, it has been well established by now that income differentials alone do not explain why people migrate. The effects of industrialization and demographic changes are offset by chain migration that may continue despite the decline in wage gaps (Hatton and Williamson, 1998:52). Similarly, Douglas Massey and others have pointed to the significance of migration-producing structural changes in source societies that in turn perpetuate migratory flows (Massey, 1988; Massey *et al.*, 1998). Our research confirms these findings. Emigration in our field sites has become self-sustaining under the impact of economic changes in the villages caused by migration and the actions of individual migrants.

### *VILLAGE A: MIGRATION AS AN UNINTENDED POLICY OUTCOME*

Village A is located in the southeastern corner of Fuqing county, which itself is located in the flourishing coastal belt south of Fujian's provincial capital, Fuzhou. Fuqing's 1.18 million people went from being among the poorest in Fujian in 1978 to a position among the most prosperous in the province

in terms of GDP per capita in 1999 (Fujiansheng Tongjiju [Fujian Province Statistical Bureau], 2000:388–389). In fact, by the late 1990s, Fuqing reached a position among the 100 most economically and environmentally developed prefectures in the PRC (interview with the deputy director of Fuqing city branch of the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, Dec. 24, 1999).

In the previous section, we outlined how Fujian under the reforms capitalized on its proximity to Taiwan and its many connections with overseas Chinese, particularly in Southeast Asia. Although most of the coastal strip was eventually included in this strategy, an important difference in timing between the southern and central parts of the Fujianese coast is involved here. Whereas Xiamen had already become a special economic zone in 1978, Fuzhou became an open city in 1984, and only as late as 1987 was the decision taken to open up and develop the economy of Fuqing (Edmonds, 1996:89–90; Zhu, 2000:424–431).

This difference in timing continues to inform the specific pattern of economic development and international migration that pertains to coastal central Fujian in general and Fuqing in particular. Although it is impossible to give a full explanation of why snakehead activity became such a prominent feature in this part of China, American criminological research points to at least two factors. First, in the 1970s and early 1980s, the Nationalist government on Taiwan appeared to be implicated in setting up a smuggling network ranging from Hong Kong through Latin America and into the United States, providing the vital link with Latin American migration brokers who brought the first groups of Fujianese into the United States (DeStefano, 1997; Myers, 1997). Second, in the 1960s and 1970s, local fishermen developed a very lucrative smuggling trade with Taiwan. This generated both the cash and the cross-straits smuggling networks that in turn spawned the human smuggling trade in the 1980s (Chin, 1999:12; Giese, 1999).

Attempts in the early 1980s to use money earned from smuggling to set up rural enterprises came to naught due to heavy taxation (Chin, 1999:12), itself part of policies that continued to de-emphasize local economic development in the area. Between the start of the reforms in 1978 and 1984, when Fuzhou became an open city, migration brokerage networks and an emigration orientation thus could grow in the area, an orientation that has since been crucial in perpetuating and intensifying migratory flows (Myers, 1997:124). Furthermore, once foreign-investment-led economic development accelerated in the early 1990s, it happened in a very different way than

in the overseas Chinese areas in southern Fujian particularly in Fuqing. In the areas around Xiamen, the early start of overseas Chinese investment set a pattern of relatively modest investments in enterprises across the countryside by groups of households using their own savings and remittances from relatives abroad (Zhu, 2000:415–422). In Fuqing, by contrast, foreign investment lagged by at least ten years. Only in 1987 were ethnic Chinese tycoons from Southeast Asia permitted to establish businesses in two investment zones that by the early 1990s began to attract large-scale foreign and ethnic Chinese investment in often sophisticated enterprises (Edmonds, 1996: 89–90; Zhu 2000:424–431).

By the mid-1990s, foreign-invested enterprises in Fuqing thus generated much economic growth and employment, but unskilled and often temporary work in these enterprises attracted mainly workers from outside Fuqing who were more pliable than local workers (*see* Chan, 2001:7–10; Lee, 1998:109–136). Local Fuqing residents were found among the minority of supervisors and blue-collar workers in stable employment, but peasants were usually not deemed suitable for these well-paid jobs. Domestic trading in prosperous Fuqing city itself is an alternative, but conducting business also seems to be restricted to better-educated or more skilled persons (group interview with women in village A, Dec. 28, 2000).

### *FINDING EUROPE: INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION FROM VILLAGE A IN THE 1990s*

The fact that the population in Fuqing living beyond the immediate vicinity of the investment zones gained little from foreign investment is as much a consequence as a cause of international migration. Locals turn to migration because of a lack of access to employment opportunities. Equally important is that they often prefer to focus on the more lucrative opportunities for overseas migration that had already been well-established ten years prior to the first meaningful foreign investments. Our fieldwork village A is only ten minutes by car to the south of Fuqing city, yet the local economy is mainly limited to fishery and agricultural production. Nevertheless, the average annual income level of the 2,549 people (756 households) in the village was high by provincial standards (RMB 4,500 or US\$540 in 1999, not including remittances) (interviews with director of the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese branch in village A, August 21, 2000; Fujiansheng Tongjiju, 2000:406–407). Local wealth is built primarily by donations from ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia: 80 percent of the population in the township



of village A have relatives overseas (*see* Wang Furui, 1994).<sup>5</sup> Since 1978, these donations have, according to incomplete statistics, amounted to RMB 13 million (US\$1.56 million) for collective projects such as schools, a hotel, a hospital, an old-people's activity center, dikes, an ancestral hall, a theater stage and a local temple (interview with party secretary of village A, Aug. 22, 2000 and Sept. 7, 2000; Yu, 1994).

However, the population of village A did not simply live off its contacts with relatives who had migrated before 1949; migration was again very much a current issue. This is immediately apparent from looking at the village, which is dotted with expensive five- and six-story houses: 80 percent of all houses in the village are newly built with remittances from recent migrants at a cost ranging from RMB 300,000 to RMB 500,000 (US\$36,000–60,000). Immediately after the onset of the reforms in 1978, emigration from Fuqing to Southeast Asia began (Shi Xueqin, 2000:27–28). Ethnic Chinese from village A, primarily in Singapore, arranged for their relatives in the village to obtain visas for contract work and family reunification. Those without relatives abroad or aspirations to earn even higher wages than in Singapore began emigrating to Japan for study and/or work. It is unclear how the migratory route to Japan was created. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, peasants from the area where village A is located in southeast Fuqing had migrated to Japan, but inhabitants from village A were not among them. In the 1980s and early 1990s, new migrants from villages in southeastern Fuqing traveled to Japan for family reunification, as self-paying students, or irregularly, and it seems likely that the first migrants from village A to Japan followed their example, perhaps using kinship or other connections with these villages.

Migration to Japan dropped off by the mid-1990s when job opportunities dwindled and wages decreased as a consequence of economic recession in Japan and crackdowns on irregular migrant workers. Subsequently, Europe became the preferred destination. Due to the constraints imposed on our fieldwork in village A, we could not inquire into the reasons why migrants turned to Europe, but from our fieldwork in Europe we have been able to reconstruct a coherent picture for Fuqing as a whole, albeit not specifically for village A (Pieke *et al.*, 2004:ch. 2 and 3). In village A,

<sup>5</sup>Local official statistics for migration in the early twentieth century and after 1979 provided by the township branch of the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, June 1, 2000 and August 25, 2000; interview with director of the township branch of the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese where village A is located, August 21, 2000.

migration to Europe was pioneered, from the 1940s through the 1970s, by Fujianese sailors who jumped ship and by students in European countries who happened to have been from Fujian. Pioneering migration to Europe (and the United States) received a boost after 1989, when the Tian'anmen crackdown made gaining political asylum easier for Chinese citizens (interviews by Pál Nyiri, 1999–2001; see Pieke *et al.*, 2004). Subsequently, potential migrants used money that had been sent back by relatives abroad, that they had earned themselves (for instance, as temporary contract workers abroad or as traders, craftsmen, or workers elsewhere in China), or that they had borrowed from relatives and friends to pay migration brokers to arrange the journey via second or third countries, such as Russia, Hungary, Honduras or Argentina.

On average, more than one young person (usually male, but increasingly female) per family in village A has migrated overseas. The remaining village inhabitants are now mainly old people and young women with small children. According to incomplete statistics, by early 2004, 680 persons in village A – equal to one third of the village population or almost all young male adults and some women (one third of the emigrants in the village are now women) – had left the village for overseas destinations. During the 1990s, a majority of villagers had emigrated to Singapore and Israel, but, since 2000, village emigrants gradually turned their attention to Europe and Japan. Some 300 villagers are now living in Europe (mainly in the United Kingdom, but also in Italy, Belgium, Hungary and France), while others are still living in Singapore as well as in South American countries, Japan, and the United States. In 2004, only a very few stayed on working as contract laborers in Israel (interview with retired party secretary of village A, Aug. 21, 2000 and April 6, 2004).

For the people living in village A, migrating to Singapore to work legally as construction workers for two years with the possibility of extending the stay for another year, or (mainly irregular) migration to Europe were lucrative options. The wife of a migrant in Europe expressed this situation in these words:

If my husband had not emigrated, our life would have been duller. It is mostly a question of economy. Many are just peasants without skills making it difficult for them to earn more money [here]. If my husband had not left, it would have been difficult for us to buy appliances such as electric fans, a color television, washing machine, etc. Not to mention building a house.

Up until this point, we have explained international migration from

central Fujian in general, particularly Fuqing, essentially from the standpoint of the local opportunity structure. A migratory flow is caused and sustained by the presence of migration brokers. This, in turn, is a consequence of a history of smuggling across the Taiwan Straits, coupled with a lack of local economic development until the mid-1980s and a way out of China provided by contacts with relatives and friends abroad. This explanation is similar, but is by no means identical, to the explanation offered locally in Fuqing that highlights the history of migration of the area; the people of Fuqing migrate because it is in their nature, and they have always done so. Such explanations should be taken seriously, as they help us understand why the people in rural Fuqing so quickly and unanimously seized the opportunity to emigrate once it became feasible in the late 1970s and early 1980s and why the migratory flow continues even when, with similar effort and much less risk and expenditure, local opportunities can be explored. In short, whereas the structural facts of opportunities and constraints go a long way in explaining the specifics of where, when and how people migrate, a historically informed cultural explanation is required if we want to understand why these people from remote villages are prepared to move literally across the globe in search of wealth.

“History,” however, can hardly be viewed as a social force in its own right, perpetuating a disposition toward emigration after decades of very limited mobility during the collective period. What is important, therefore, is to gain a better understanding of how the successes brought by past migration are remembered and celebrated in Fuqing. In other words, we will have to understand how a history of migratory events is recast to become a proud tradition of migration that highlights emigration as the best, even the only, avenue to achieve true wealth, power and success. Such a tradition, in turn, can only be understood if we treat villages in Fuqing, like our own fieldwork in village A, not as isolated local communities, but as part of transnational communities of villagers, migrants, and former migrants.

Since 1949, Chinese government policies have been informed by, and oscillated between, the twin goals of insulating China from the corrupting bourgeois Western influence of the overseas Chinese and attracting from them remittances and investments in areas with a history of high overseas emigration. Since the early 1950s, the authorities in village A have solicited donations from former inhabitants of the village living in Singapore and Indonesia as prosperous businessmen. In Singapore, the latter were organized in a clan (village A is a single surname village) and temple association

that maintained direct connections to the village (Szonyi, 2000). From 1954 onward, the association has been instrumental in raising funds for donations to projects in the village. Although contributions have also been made to pave roads, build dikes and install running water, the lion's share of donations lies within what could loosely be called the "cultural sphere" of the village, such as elementary and secondary schools, the ancestral hall, and the main temple of the village.<sup>6</sup>

The continuous overseas donations define cultural life and local village identities. Since the 1990s, substantial donations for the restoration of the local ancestral hall contributed to the revival of communal ancestor worship activities (*see* Ahern, 1973; Baker, 1968; Freedman, 1958; Watson, 1976, 1985). Transnational village identities are also strengthened by the restoration of the main village temple and the recognition of its ritual superiority by the transfer of temple ashes (*fenxiang*) to a branch temple in Singapore. Recently, Chinese local authorities also permitted local religious activities, such as parades of local gods across the village territory (*youshen*), a ceremony in which a few thousand local and overseas participants participate for more than a week each year. Such local religious practices, which in non-overseas Chinese areas in rural China have to be negotiated much more carefully, have explicitly been allowed in village A because of its official status as a village with overseas connections (interview with the retired party secretary of village A, Dec. 27, 2001; *see also* Brandtstädter, 2001; Dean, 1986, 1989, 1998; Feuchtwang, 1998; Flower and Leonard, 1998; Jing, 1996; Pieke *et al.*, 2004; Siu, 1989, 1990).

The sponsoring and sanctioning by Chinese authorities of such traditional social practices enhance local identity constructions, but, being financed from Singapore, these identities refer to a transnationally dispersed community rather than being exclusively locally based and developed. The construction of a theater stage in front of the temple in village A illustrates this particularly well. On this stage, the family members of a successful migrant have plays performed by professional opera troupes (which may cost up to RMB 2,500 (US\$300)) or movies shown as an expression of gratitude to the gods who protected the migrant's voyage overseas. These shows en-

<sup>6</sup>Local official statistics for migration in the early twentieth century and after 1979 provided by the township branch of the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese on June, 1, 2000; local official statistics for donations from overseas Chinese provided by township branch of the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese on August 26, 2000. Returned Overseas Chinese where village A is located, August 21, 2000.

tain not only the gods, but the entire village and amount to a very visible expression of the central role that overseas migration plays in local village life.

Contemporary overseas migration from village A is more than simply the consequence of chain migration along existing overseas connections that enable villagers to fulfill their financial ambitions. Social practices related to former migration not only celebrate the village's identity as part of a transnational community, but, equally importantly, reaffirm the importance of international migration as the avenue and marker of success, regardless of the actual destination and presence or absence of other villagers there. Sure enough, villagers emigrate because they want to be rich. However, given the lack of sufficient opportunities to emigrate to those areas in Southeast Asia and Japan where most of the earlier migrants and their descendents live, villagers were quick to explore alternative destinations. In the 1980s, on the basis of very few and often quite tenuous connections, villagers capitalized on the opportunities provided by professional migration brokers in the Fuzhou area to travel to European countries without any earlier Fujianese presence.

Safeguarding the economic interests of the village, the village leadership boosts emigration in order to increase the level of remittances, even going so far as using village funds as loans to fund villagers' migration expenses at a modest monthly interest rate until this practice was prohibited by higher authorities in 1999. However, more important than the direct support for emigration from the village leadership has been the local implementation of provincial and county policies intended to stimulate economic growth in the area by activating the links with the overseas Chinese (Pieke *et al.*, 2004; Chang, 2000).

Our study of village A reveals that the flow of migrants from the Fuzhou area is generated, directed and perpetuated by a migration configuration that includes a range of institutional and cultural factors in the areas of origin and destination (on the concept of migration configuration, *see* Pieke, 1999; Pieke *et al.*, 2004:ch.1). These factors include a lack of government investment and the prominence of smuggling during the collective period, the late start of overseas Chinese investment in the area, and the active involvement of the village leadership in promoting overseas Chinese links and emigration. However, as we have seen, the Fuzhou migration configuration and transnationalism also include an important cultural component that has strong references to a tradition of emigration. Interestingly, the current celebration of the ongoing connections with former villagers in Southeast Asia and Japan is strongly informed by patrilineal ancestor worship and the desire to perpetuate patrilineal kinship ties between villagers

and former villagers overseas. In village A, transnational connections are clearly gendered and, as a result, so is international migration. Before 1949, fewer women than men emigrated from the village, but, in 2002–2003, one third of the new migrants were women. The remaining women stay in the village with their small children and parents-in-law, or else they work as short-distance migrants in shoe and textile factories in Putian county immediately to the south of Fuqing, where they can earn RMB 400–500 per month.

### *VILLAGE B: ENGINEERING MIGRATION*

The kind of migration history and transnational tradition found in village A are absent in the second case study of village B. Deliberately planned and virtually built from scratch since the early 1990s, migration from village B is much more directly connected with the drying up of local employment opportunities. This contrasts with village A, where a migration orientation is one of the chief causes of the continued lack of self-generated local economic development. As a result, migration from village B is embedded in a distinctively different kind of migration configuration, in which agents of the state play an even more active and open role, migration brokers are less of a factor (although by no means absent), urban and rural residents participate in equal measure, and women migrate almost as frequently as do men.

During the collective period, Sanming, despite its remote location, became somewhat of a miniature regional cosmopolitan area in itself. Many of the urban and rural residents of Sanming, or their parents, who spear-headed emigration to Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s had moved to Mingxi from elsewhere in Fujian or even farther away in the 1960s and 1970s (Mingxixian Difangzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui [The Editorial Committee of the Mingxi County Local Gazetteer], 1997:116–118). During this period, the Sanming area was developed into the main provincial center of heavy industry, producing iron, steel, machinery, and chemicals. As a result, by the late 1970s Sanming county ranked among the richest in all of China in terms of distributed collective income (Lyons, 2000:334). Similarly, prior to the reforms Mingxi county, with its share of 20 major heavy industrial plants, ranked among the top counties in Fujian in terms of gross value of agricultural and industrial output (Lyons, 1998:410; Lyons, 2000:388, 406; Mingxixian Difangzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui, 1997:5).

This privileged status has become a thing of the past. The economic

reform policies have significantly reduced the industrial output of the Sanming area relative to the formerly impoverished coastal area (Fujiansheng Tongjiju, 1997:392, 394, 2000:388, 406). In 1984, Mingxi's gross value of agricultural and industrial output and gross domestic product had already significantly declined in comparison to the coastal areas. By 1996, industrial workers in Mingxi earned, on average, annually half the amount (RMB 5,291) of workers in coastal Xiamen (RMB 11,133) and also significantly less than workers elsewhere in the coastal area; the same was true for Mingxi rural incomes compared to Xiamen (Fujiansheng Tongjiju, 1997:392, 394, 2000:388, 406).

Village B, the field site under study, reflects the general conditions of economic decline in Mingxi. The village is located in an area covered with forests in the hilly and mountainous eastern part of Mingxi. The population is predominantly engaged in forestry (China fir and mason pine timber and pine resin) and agriculture (rice, oranges, tobacco). Currently, the prohibition of unauthorized cutting of natural trees due to the threat of flooding caused by erosion has significantly reduced the main source of production in the village. Other sectors are dying out as well with the decline of forestry: transportation, machine and transport repair shops, and the like (interview with cadre from the Forestry Department in village B, Sept. 15, 1999; interview with party secretary, deputy head of village B, interview with chairman of the branch of the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese of the township of village B, Jan. 29, 2000). Since the beginning of the 1990s, the solution to these economic problems for many urbanites and peasants alike became migration to Europe. By the end of 1999, at least 3,700 persons from Mingxi county had emigrated, of whom 70 percent went to Europe, mainly Italy, Hungary, Spain and Russia. In village B, 257 persons were living overseas, or 22 percent of the total village population (interviews with the chairman of the Mingxi county Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, Aug. 2, 1999 and June 23, 2000).

#### *DISCOVERING MOBILITY: INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION FROM VILLAGE B*

In their study of European historical migration, Hatton and Williamson (1998) argue that structural transformations displaced peasants and, as a result, increased general mobility. In China in general and in Fujian in particular, economic reforms, commercialization of agriculture, diminished land holdings, and growing environmental calamities (mainly floods and

pollution) are all factors contributing to similar displacement of the rural population. As a result, from 1985 to 1995 internal labor mobility in Fujian increased, with an estimated 1.4 million migrants seeking employment primarily in coastal areas of eastern Fujian (Shen Jianfa, Tank Xiaohua and Lin Zhong, 2000:463). The inhabitants of village B, however, did not embark on internal migration. International rather than internal migration from this village only commenced in the beginning of the 1990s, when a network of contacts and information about international migration to Europe was established.

Previously, neither internal nor international migration had ever been pursued. On the contrary, the rich resources and industry of Mingxi county had caused in-migration of merchants from neighboring Jiangxi in the beginning of the twentieth century, in-migration of political refugees in the early 1930s from Guangdong province and the provincial capital of Fujian, and, after 1949, cadres, students, workers and even peasants from elsewhere in Fujian or beyond were allocated employment or land in Mingxi county. By 1973, 486 persons who had been allocated jobs by the state had settled in the township where village B is located, in addition to an unknown number of in-migrants from poverty stricken areas (Mingxixian Difangzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui, 1997:116–118).

The first migrants from Sanming prefecture (including Mingxi county) to Eastern Europe and Italy in the late 1980s and early 1990s were mainly well-educated city dwellers between 20 and 30 years of age. Many were employees or even cadres in state enterprises, and quite a few were teachers. These migrants were part of and used contacts with a much larger flow of urban migrants to Eastern Europe after the disintegration of the Soviet bloc. This flow had started with shuttle trade from the north and northeast of China to the Russian Far East and Moscow; soon, traders reached countries such as Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, while at the same time looking for more permanent opportunities for investment, trade and settlement. The Sanming pioneers in the late 1980s and early 1990s could not depend on established smuggling routes and networks of relatives. Instead, they had to carve out their own space and quite often relied on their original, pre-Sanming regional identity to link up with migrants from other areas in China. Furthermore, these early migrants did not travel from Sanming to a pre-selected destination, but changed direction and explored new places depending on the information received *en route* from other, often non-Sanming or even non-Chinese fellow migrants, the availability of local migration brokers, or simply out of curiosity. Migration for them was very



much an exploration of the unknown: events, contacts, information and decisions taking place during migration determined where migrants were heading and what they ended up doing for a living (Nyíri, 1998, 1999; Pieke *et al.*, 2004:ch.3).

The origins and growth of rural migration are partially connected to this history of exploration, yet, more so than urban migration, has fallen into a pattern of mass chain migration, which is strikingly similar to mass migration from many traditional overseas Chinese areas, such as the New Territories in Hong Kong, southern Zhejiang and indeed the Fuzhou area in Fujian. Such migration chains channel migrants from very specific places of origin to very specific destinations and employment in a highly segregated ethnic enclave of the local economy (on ethnic enclaves, *see* Portes and Bach, 1985; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999; Portes and Jensen, 1987; Zhou, 1992; Zhou and Logan, 1989). The experience of village B is highly illustrative in this regard because of the recency and speed of the establishment of the migratory chain to Europe.

The pioneers of migration from village B were the two brothers X and Y, whose father from Zhejiang had migrated to Mingxi together with a group of other poverty-stricken villagers from Qingyuan county in the southernmost part of central Zhejiang. This person subsequently married a widow living in village B. According to one account, his son X was an employee of a state chemical factory of Mingxi county, which in the 1980s shared the fate of many state enterprises in the area, forcing it to make many of its employees, including X, redundant (*xiagang*). According to another, less complimentary account, X and his brother Y were poor and dropped out of junior high school. X subsequently got a temporary job with the township broadcasting station installing the cable broadcasting network in the area. At this point, X's Zhejiang family connections became relevant. These connections told X about the riches of the Zhejiangese in Europe and the opportunities awaiting enterprising individuals, particularly in Italy. With the help of his Zhejiang relatives, X and his brother Y duly made it to Italy, where they quickly became successful entrepreneurs, inviting first their direct kin and later friends and other kinsmen from village B, and (according to one account) former colleagues from the chemical factory to join them. A local schoolteacher explains the influence of this pioneering international migrant in these terms:

Within a very short period of time they had become rich. In village B this caused a sensation and had a large effect. That such poor persons could within such a short time become rich was simply unbelievable. X and his brother would return home

and take their closest relatives with them overseas. As a result, a lot of people would start to imitate the brothers and emigrate like a chemical chain reaction. From this one family, it extended to friends in the village, from village B to Chengguan township in Mingxi and from cadres to peasants. The troops of emigrants are like a snowball that constantly is growing larger and larger.

Drawing on an incidental link with the extensive and well-established networks of Zhejiangese in Europe (Thunø, 1999), chain migration was initiated and perpetuated in this manner within just a few years. By the summer of 2000, local authorities estimated that 257 people had left the village and between 900 and 1,100 people had left the township (equal to 12% of the entire population) for overseas destinations (Mingxixian Difangzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui, 1997:117; interview with the chairman of the Mingxi county Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, June 23, 2000; interview with the party secretary of village B, June 24, 2000).

Peaking in 1997 and 1998, migration to Italy became a new way of increasing income. Migrants enter Europe as tourists, business people, family visitors, or contract laborers, and the journey may cost anywhere between RMB 40,000 and 80,000 (US\$4,800–9,600), to which interest payments at an annual rate of 3–5 percent have to be added. Migration debts are in general repaid within two to three years. Our survey in village B, conducted in 2000, confirmed that 98 percent of the informants found that migration was a wise decision because, in the words of one questionnaire respondent, “you can earn money and improve the economy of the family.” Admittedly, most respondents were family members of migrants rather than migrants themselves and thus were often the chief beneficiaries of migration: only nine out of the 58 households surveyed stated that they had to support relatives living abroad financially, while the remaining 49 households all received remittances. Official estimates of average annual remittances sent to village B are in the range of RMB 50,000 (US\$6,000) for each migrant who still is paying off traveling debts and RMB 20,000 (US\$2,400) for each migrant after he or she has repaid the migration debts. This amounts to an estimated total for the whole village of RMB 8.5 to 10 million (US\$100,000–120,000) annually. Since 1995, remittances in all of Mingxi county have officially been estimated to amount to US\$10 million annually (interview with chairman of Mingxi county Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, June 23, 2000; interview with party secretary of village B, June 24, 2000; interview with village head of village B, Jan. 31, 2000; interview with deputy head of village B, Aug. 2, 1999; *Fujian Ribao*, Apr. 17, 2002).

As in village A, the most striking sign of the wealth brought by inter-

national migration is the luxurious houses in modern (Taiwan or Hong Kong) style and the ubiquity of international telephone connections, VCRs and color televisions. The significance of this display of wealth was formulated by the head of the village's branch of the Overseas Chinese Federation:

In village B, basically all able-bodied and skillful people have vanished. Those without skills are just like always, it does not matter much. But the building of a house is the way by which people really make invidious comparisons. If you build a house with three stories, I build four stories; if you use concrete to wash the walls, I will use tiles on my walls.

Apart from the construction of houses and the purchase of consumer goods, remittances are deposited in savings accounts, lent to potential migrants, or used for unforeseen expenses. Fewer than five families in our survey had spent remittances to set up businesses or contemplated using their savings for business purposes.

The purchase of houses, consumer goods and clothing such as Italian leather jackets and gold necklaces is about more than just social status or the good life. This conspicuous consumption should also be read as a form of practice that reflects aspirations to achieve a modernity and civility that previously had been beyond reach, indeed may in the past not even have been contemplated as a possibility. Likewise, the modern notion of leisure so unfamiliar to agrarian society has been adopted and displayed openly by migrant families in village B. Wives of successful migrants are seen on the streets suddenly all dressed up as a demonstration of the freedom from work in the fields and being able to spend their time as they like. Similarly, when business is slow in Italy, migrants return to the village on holidays for periods of several months. In fact, three dance halls have been established in the township to cater to the increasing demand for entertainment. A dozen investments from overseas migrants have also been made in hotels and entertainment centers, reinforcing the link between migration, leisure and entertainment as aspects of a newly found modernity. Simultaneously, overseas migrants have started to give donations to more traditional cultural activities such as abandoned Buddhist temples and neglected ancestral halls in the village.

Through the discovery and funding of new and "traditional" forms of leisure and consumption, migrants from village B have developed a new modernity and identity that underline the backwardness of the remaining population in the village, thus preparing the entire village population to regard migration as the best and indeed only future. In this respect, village B is reconstructing aspects of a migration configuration that in village A

already existed. In both villages, consumerism, popular religion and ancestor worship are crucial in cementing transnational ties between the village and the migrant populations abroad. However, in village A, with its preexisting and affluent migrant population in Southeast Asia, the revival of popular religion and ancestor worship preserved and strengthened the villagers' migratory orientation. Already existing transnational ties were thus one of the causes of the commencement of fresh migration in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In village B, by contrast, the new migration could not build on such a remembered tradition of migration. Instead, the exact opposite happened: the new migrants and their families, once successful, built transnational ties through their consumption of luxury items and promotion of popular religion. In both villages, transnationalism and migration mutually shape and strengthen each other. However, in village A, transnationalism caused migration, and both are perceived locally as the perpetuation of a longstanding tradition. In village B, migration caused transnationalism, and the local perception of both is more explicitly shot-through with notions of modernity, progress, and even Westernization.

Village B's lack of well-established transnational connections prior to the new emigration of the 1990s is more than compensated for by the attitude of the local authorities towards emigration. In village A, it was the county, township and village authorities' encouragement of transnational connections with the well-established community of overseas Chinese in Singapore that kick-started and perpetuated the new migration of the 1980s and 1990s. Except for the village cadres, however, all other levels of government steered clear of direct and official encouragement and facilitation of new migration. In village B, however, local authorities not only tacitly condone new migration, but even actively encourage and enable it. The official attitude towards out-migration from Mingxi county to Europe was described by a provincial newspaper in these terms:

The Mingxi county party committee and government consider the work concerning labor export and new migrants very important. They express a clear-cut stand of developing the ideology and strategic aim of "increasing the pace of labor export to construct a rising overseas Chinese area (*qiaoxiang*) in the interior of Fujian." Every year, the county calls several meetings of public security, foreign trade, labor and other departments for research on special topics in order to solve existing problems in labor export, to reduce as much as possible the number of steps, to simplify the procedures, and timely to set up translation offices for foreign materials and labor export companies, sparing no effort to support and promote in all possible ways the export of labor. To solve worries of domestic attachment among people leaving the county, the county has decided to let peasants keep their leased land. [Similarly], the relations of employees to state or collective enterprises can be

transferred to the administration of labor service bureaus of the county, while administrative personnel may keep their former positions for three years after having left their jobs. The government regards people who leave the country as overseas migrants (*qiaomin*) and their relatives at home as overseas Chinese dependants (*qiaojuan*). [Upon their return, they and their dependants] are treated as returned overseas Chinese (*guiqiao*) and overseas Chinese dependants, and receive political privileges, support in production, care in life, and emotional encouragement. Every year, at Chinese New Year, the government intensifies the contact to migrants, promotes amiable feelings between migrants and fellow villagers and stimulates the sentiment of migrants to love the fatherland and local community by paying family visits, setting up seminars, holding interviews or surveys, and other methods. Simultaneously, the government vigorously makes a range of preferential policies to accommodate, guide and assist returned migrant investors. [The local government] plans to spend five years to multiply the number of migrants and gradually to establish an office and a Mingxi street in Eastern Europe to expand the export trade of Mingxi products and Mingxi companies (*Fujian Qiaobao*, Nov. 5, 1999, p. 1).

Clearly, the export of labor is a top priority for the county authorities, who are actively and self-consciously engaged in building a new overseas Chinese area on the model of the old overseas Chinese areas along the coast of Fujian. The local authorities in Mingxi county have, in fact, been so keen on promoting migration to Eastern Europe that they have proposed to transfer the issuance of visas to Sanming instead of the Hungarian embassy in Beijing. In addition, the Sanming authorities have made efforts to establish sister-city relations with the XIIIth district in Budapest. Both proposals have been turned down by Hungary (interviews with Pál Nyiri, July 29, 1999; with the director of the Sanming City Government Liaison and Trade Office in Beijing, July 29, 1999; and with the head of the Sister Cities Division, Fujian Province Foreign Affairs Office in Fuzhou, Aug. 4, 1999). Recently, county authorities in Mingxi started to plan for the establishment of a local "European village" with European style houses to sell to migrants returning from Italy and Hungary.

In some localities in Mingxi, the government has taken the persuasive power of examples very literally, such as in one village where the authorities have erected an honorary board with 156 names of emigrants from the village as examples of patriotic citizens. Political recognition of migrants, turning them into "models" to be emulated, are also provided by the local government when they send fresh flowers for Chinese New Year and set off firecrackers at the homes of returned migrants. The local political embrace of migration was experienced by 53 of 65 migrant families we surveyed in village B in 2000: local or county officials would drop by and send flowers, and they would also help migrant dependants solve problems or even invite

them to attend seminars. In concrete terms, official support for migration is given by establishing an exit service center providing peasants with a streamlined visa application service, information on job opportunities, legal issues, and assistance with purchasing airline tickets. Vocational training classes are offered on matters relevant to would-be migrants such as sewing, cooking, computer skills, and trading. Teaching classes also include legal and cultural knowledge about foreign countries and language teaching in Russian and English. Finally, the local government has relaxed its policies under which state-owned commercial banks and village credit cooperatives may provide mortgage loans or other types of loans to would-be migrants who lack the means to go abroad. The latter point, announced for the first time in 2002, seems particularly important. The use of local government and bank funds already happened openly in Mingxi for several years. Earlier, the government of Mingxi county established a "Mingxi county citizens' private migration financial guarantee fund" that gave loans to potential migrants to help them fund their migration overseas. Money for the fund was provided by the International Economic and Trade Office of Mingxi County, the Agricultural Bank of Mingxi County, and Department of Finance of Mingxi county. However, the new policy allows banks to fund migration directly, rather than through a government fund, thus widening the scope of such practices and integrating migration even further into the fabric of the Mingxi mainstream economy (interview with the chairman of the Mingxi branch of the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, June 23, 2000; *Fujian Qiaobao*, April 18, 2002; *Fujian Ribao*, April 17, 2002).

### *TRENDS IN CHINESE MIGRATION: LESSONS FROM FUJIAN*

The recent flow of international migration from Fujian province is a much more socially, culturally and politically embedded phenomenon than the image conjured up by the term "snakehead" suggests. Moreover, the contrast between village A and village B highlights the notion that Fujianese migration should not be thought of as a singular phenomenon. The new Chinese migration actually consists of many separate migration configurations, each with its own unique history and institutional arrangements. Each configuration, moreover, encompasses a range of individual experiences and practices, which together render Chinese migration extraordinarily complex, resilient and variegated. We found that the new migration fans out to often entirely new destinations before falling into the more familiar and conventional pattern of chain migration. One of the key features of the new Chinese

migration is a combination of a spirit of the exploration of the unknown, bringing Chinese pioneers to even some of the most unlikely destinations, and mass migration that links very specific source and destination areas once opportunities have been found or created by pioneers.

However, the distinction between pioneering and chain migration should not be overdrawn. In both our fieldwork villages, we found that the new migration in the initial phase draws on networks or histories of previous migration: without these networks or histories, migration might very well never have started at all. In village A, labor export to Singapore coupled with just a few first connections to Europe shaped the pattern of later mass migration from the village; in village B, the Zhejiang network provided the link to Italy. However, networks and histories play rather different roles in the two villages. In village A, overseas Chinese connections and a “migration history” to Singapore shaped a migratory disposition, while in village B the Zhejiang network played a much more specific and concrete role in accessing information, opportunities and employment.

The role of central policies and especially local administration in shaping the migration configurations in both villages has been crucial. Prior to 1978, emigrants were often perceived as defectors and traitors. With economic reform, the Chinese government has started to view the ethnic Chinese communities as a major resource. Overseas Chinese villages were given freedom to restructure their economies around foreign donations and remittances. In 1999, President Jiang Zemin reaffirmed this policy when he officially claimed the overseas Chinese to be “our mine of resources” (Xinhua News Agency, “Jiang Zemin on Rights of Returned Overseas Chinese,” translated in FBRs-CHI-1999-1104, Nov. 4, 1999, p.1; *see also* Thunø, 2001).

The national support for overseas Chinese connections gives local governments in sending areas the freedom to permit economic, political and cultural developments according to the aspirations of the overseas Chinese (and with that also those of new migrants) rather than orthodox Chinese Communist Party policies in order to create or sustain a flow of foreign revenues for capital investments, foreign knowledge and remittances. The authorities in village A embraced the national reassessment of the overseas Chinese as soon as it was announced in 1978. Celebrating and deepening existing overseas connections and a history of migration, this quickly created a fresh appetite for migration. Village B, without prior overseas Chinese connections apart from the tentative link with the Zhejiang diaspora in Europe, reveals the demonstration effect that the benefits of overseas Chinese

connections in coastal Fujian can have. As we have seen, the main reason for the soaring international migration from village B lies in the confluence of peasants' interests and support from the local government. The latter was keen to follow the example of the established overseas Chinese areas along the coast, and migration is a welcome way to earn foreign revenue and "reduce the pressures of unemployment and enhance social stability" (interview with chairman of the Mingxi county branch of the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, Aug. 1, 1999).

Once started, the migratory flows from the two villages have become self-perpetuating. Each act of migration expands the overseas networks, strengthens the institutional arrangements that enable migration, augments the demand for more labor within overseas ethnic economies, and produces safe conditions for new migrants upon arrival. At the same time, it has been shown in this article that increasing migration has led to structural changes within the sending villages, triggering further migration. Remittances shift the relative distribution of income and wealth within the villages. Investments in lavish houses, consumer spending, and donations to ancestral halls and temples redefine local social and cultural institutions and identities. Having entered this advanced migration stage, the sending villages have been transformed into constituent elements of transnational communities. Emigration now becomes a normal, indeed an almost inevitable act, rather than being primarily determined by economic considerations. A Chinese informant from village A, whose husband went to England, expressed this situation in these words:

My husband said, "If they do well abroad, why not me, too?" I think that if my husband had not gone overseas, our life would not have been that much worse. Actually, our family is quite well off in the village.

In some recent studies, structural changes in sending societies conditioned by migration have been related to the influence of increasing transnational contacts between sending areas and overseas migrants. New communication technologies have increased the likelihood of maintaining contact between the source and destination societies. In our survey of migrant families in village B, 95 percent had contact with their closest family several times a month over the telephone; by contrast, 64 percent of the migrants had still not returned from Europe even for a single visit. Contact on a scale impossible for Chinese migrants in the past not only make faraway destinations seem less distant, but communication and possibilities of frequent return trips strengthen the incentive for migrants to invest in local cultural



and social institutions. In village A, even migrants who had left their villages in the early twentieth century now return to invest in local cultural life.

Furthermore, the example of village B shows how increased mobility in general, coupled with more autonomy for local governments, facilitates the reach of migratory networks and enables the growth of migration configurations in places beyond the traditional overseas Chinese areas. This process brings emigration within reach of an ever increasing number of people and areas. The emergence of international migration from places beyond the traditional overseas areas is part of the history and current growth of complex local migration systems that include internal as much as international mobility. This point is demonstrated by the role of Zhejiang migrants in our case study of village B itself and by the importance of temporary female labor circulation to elsewhere in Fujian and contract labor migration to Singapore and Israel from village A. A further and illuminating example comes from village B. To avoid penalties for fallowing agricultural land, many families in village B have had to resort to renting out their land under short-term contracts to migrants from poorer areas elsewhere in Mingxi or in adjacent Ninghua county. Interestingly, in-migrants from Ninghua are now beginning to use the money earned as contract farmers to emulate the example of the locals in village B and migrate to Europe as well. Clearly, we have only begun to witness the start of such spatially cumulative migration from China. Not only will the number of migrants from China rise in the future, but, equally important, they will be drawn from increasingly diverse social and geographical backgrounds.

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