Analysis of the Changes in Rural Chinese Family Structure since Reform and Opening Up

Wang Yuesheng*

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

Abstract: This article uses data from censuses since 1982 to reveal changes in the family structure of rural China since the launch of reform and opening up and against the backdrop of institutional relocation, social transformation and an aging population. Since the advent of reform and opening up, rural family structure and its changes can be divided into two phases. Before the 1990s, the household contract responsibility system was implemented, labor in rural villages was still mainly engaged in farming, and the number of nuclear families remained stable with a steady rise. After the 1990s, as reform progress deepened, substantial numbers of young and middle-aged laborers in rural villages began to relocate into non-farming sectors and aging in rural villages rose. As those born in the early days of the family planning policy gradually matured, family structure was directly affected and changed in new ways and forms not seen before. Vocational divisions of labor among the parents of young families and married offspring emerged and the significance of cooperation for family economy and daily life between parents and offspring rose in importance. Also, the prevalence of immediate families with three generations climbed while the standard nuclear families declined, the ratio of middle-aged couples with young children that worked outside the home increased, the function of middle-aged and senior parents in the upbringing of infants and children enhanced, and the commonness of incomplete family types such as only grandparents with grandchildren increased. During this phase, the number of seniors living alone surged to the point of becoming a matter worthy of attention.

Keywords: reform and opening up, social transformation, family structure, rural village

* Wang Yuesheng, Institute of Population and Labor Economics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Wang Yuesheng, Institute of Population and Labor Economics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing. E-mail: wangysh12@163.com

At the launch of reform and opening up in 1978, the Chinese society ushered in a new phase of development. Under the driving forces of multiple key policies, monumental changes began to emerge in various facets of the rural villages of China such as production and business models, labor employment areas and opportunities, and the age structure of the population, leading to unprecedented social transformations. These created remarkable effects on the residential methods and family structures of Chinese citizens. Then, what changes have taken place in rural Chinese family structure since the advent of reform and opening up? What are the distinguishing features? What were the specific influential factors? This paper will investigate and remark on these changes.

Purpose of Research and Explanation of Data

Changes and Reforms in Rural Chinese Village Society Since 1978 that Have Affected Family Structures

The end of the collective operation methods under the collective economic system, and the return of the family as the basic unit of production.

In 1956 it was common for rural villages in China to establish an "advanced agricultural producers' co-operatives" collective economic system. In 1958 this was converted into the people's commune system which featured an even higher degree of collectiveness, thereby forming a management and operational model with a three-tiered (production team, a production brigade and people's commune) ownership structure founded on "teams" as the basic units of production. Each individual farming family was a household within the production team, a collective economic organization, and the labor of each family could participate only in economic activities centrally organized by the production team. They then obtained food and a corresponding remuneration. Thus, within the people's commune system, the function of the family unit, as an organ of production, no longer existed. It is worth noting that during the period between 1958 and 1960, quite a few rural villages constructed canteens based on the team being the unit of production, thus the daily food preparation and consumption functions of the family were also nullified. At first, these canteens enforce zero or just minimal restrictions in the method of dining, which resulted in severe waste and subsequently a food shortage. The system was not sustainable and after a brief period it was cancelled and the corresponding functions of family life were restored.

The collective economic system suppressed any income gap that might have appeared between rural village families. The family labor force had no opportunities or development space other than collective farming as the labor force of each family relied on their own labor to obtain work credits and acquire remunerations. Since basic life necessities, including food, were distributed according to the "population seven work three" (for each family, 70% of material distribution was based on the population of the family while the remaining 30% was based on work credits earned by the labor force of the family) or the "population eight work two" system, and thus even family members without

labor capacity could obtain food necessary for sustenance. Of course, the currency income and food materials obtained by each family and its members from the production team were at a rather low level, barely enough for basic maintenance.

The biggest issues with the collective operation system were lack of incentive and low labor efficiency. Around 1978 during the early period of reform and opening up, this kind of operational model was continued but supplemented by the "workload contracting" method that somewhat increased labor efficiency. In 1982, the central government made in-depth institutional changes and reforms in the rural villages and the collective economic organization was replaced by household responsibility system. This marked the end of the collective ownership and operational system that had been the norm for nearly a quarter of a century since the advanced agricultural producers' co-operatives were founded in 1956 and indicated the return of the rural farming family as the basic unit of production. This was a change that signified the end of an old era and the beginning of a new epoch in the contemporary history of rural villages of China and formed the bedrock for other changes and reforms that were to take place in these villages.

Shift of rural village labor toward nonagricultural areas.

Under the organization of the collective economy, the labor force of rural families in nonagricultural industries was greatly restricted. For one thing, the low labor efficiency in the collective operation model meant that more laborers were required, which made controlling the outflow of labor toward nonagricultural areas a necessity; for another, since the beginning of the 1960s, due to shortages of food and other daily necessities in the cities, newly founded enterprises were slashing staff or even closing down, and thus it was hard for rural village labors to find nonagricultural opportunities in the urban areas. Family members were shackled to the villages and working the land which resulted in the preservation of a relatively complete mode of family residence.

This situation began to change gradually after the launch of reform and opening up. The implementation of the land contracting system markedly stirred initiative among farmers and the limited land in the central and eastern rural areas is no longer enough for farming. Transferring to nonagricultural sectors and increasing family incomes have become the main goals for rural families and their labor. After the mid-1980s, the urban non-public ownership operation method gradually expanded, first in the service industries, and simultaneously with large-scale infrastructure facility projects, both of which created demands for a labor force from outside the system. These changes created opportunities for the rural labor force to relocate to nonagricultural sectors and urban regions.

As the rural household labor force relocated, frequently to distant urban areas, the practice of multi-generations of family members living together in the same village was disrupted and the number of households with absent members, only grandparents and grandchildren and seniors living alone increased. The ability for parent-child immediate family members to maintain family functions and mutually support each other decreased and the indigenous family functions of mutual support through multiple genetically related families weakened.

Implementation of family planning policies, changes in attitudes regarding reproduction, and the reduction in the number of children in the family.

Starting in the early 1970s, family planning policies like delaying or reducing reproduction were enacted across the country, and in 1980 the government enacted the one-child policy. Although a strict one-child policy was hard to enforce in the countless rural villages scattered throughout the nation, there is no doubt that the number of third and fourth births in rural village families declined after the 1980s. For rural villages in the coastal regions, the majority of household had two births or less; while second and third births were the norms for those in the central and western regions. Furthermore, the predominant case was that children were of the same gender. This substantially impacted rural families and their structures.

In most cases, in rural village families with multiple children, especially multiple sons, children who have grown up would mostly live away from their parents; for families with only one son, there was a greater chance of the parents living with the son after his marriage, which in turn lowered the frequency of the separation of rural village families.

Ratio of seniors in rural villages and the expansion of the population.

Generally, the rise in the population ratio of seniors originated from three main factors. First, life expectancy of seniors increased and the absolute number of seniors expanded. Second, the decline in new births reduced the number of young people while the elderly population rose. Third, the number of middle-aged and young laborers that worked elsewhere increased, all of which led to a relative increase in the percentage of seniors in the population. In 2000, China became an aging society, and seniors accounted for 7.50% of the population in rural villages, and 6.67% of the population in urban areas.

Then, under the effects of the four factors, what sort of changes occurred in the structure of modern rural village families? This is an inferential analysis and therefore requires specific data for verification.

Collation of Existing Research Studies

Studies that have investigated the structure of families in Chinese rural villages since reform and opening up are readily available.

First, my analysis was conducted based on data from the 1982, 1990 and 2000 population censuses, and then changes in family structures were explored based on the 2010 census to present the features of rural family structure changes that have taken place during this period. Guo Zhigang noticed that after 2000, due to the family labor force working as migrant workers away from home, the population ratio of grandparent-grandchild households in rural villages climbed drastically, reflecting the situation that most rural village households were occupied only by seniors and left-behind children. Yang Juhua and He Zhaohua indicated that in the monumental societal changes that have taken place since the beginning of reform and opening up, the number of children continued to decline, offspring's relocation to different societies and regions did not subside, the concept of

marriage changed, and the form and function of the family was altered. But it should be noted that there is still a lack of research that considers all rural villages as a holistic whole, explores trends in the changes of the family in such a context, and systematically investigates the impact of various societal and population factors on the forms of rural farming families. In addition, societal changes in Chinese rural villages occurred in phases and no currently available studies have taken this into account, with the majority being summarizing or general analysis, and thus rural family structure changes and their features against this backdrop have not yet been revealed. This is precisely the research objective of this paper.

Data Used for Research in This Paper

This research endeavors to present an overall image of the changes in the rural family structure and their features in different phases since the beginning of reform and opening up. From my point of view, the timing of the four national censuses conducted since 1982 and the phases of rural village societal changes share a relatively high degree of correlation, and the population census data provides the basic material for understanding rural family structure status in times of change and reform.

1982 saw the end of the enforcement of rural collective economic organizations and was basically the beginning of this system's dissolution. Thus the impact the collective operation model had on the lifestyle of farming families had not yet thoroughly dissipated. By the end of the 1980s, the reform and opening-up policies had been in effect long enough to impact the nonagricultural employment patterns of the rural village labor force, but farming was still the primary employment and means of living for rural villages in most areas, particularly in the central and western regions. There was also a rise in the young labor force that could work both in agriculture (operation of contracted land) and nonagricultural side jobs (working elsewhere during non-agriculturaling seasons). During the 1990s, the large-scale transition of the rural village labor force towards nonagricultural employment began and after 2000 nonagricultural employment for middle-aged and young rural village laborers became common while older middle-aged and senior members were chiefly engaged in cultivation on contracted land although some would partake in nonagricultural economic activities during non-agriculturaling seasons. This pattern has remained stable.

The 1982 and 1990 census data used in this paper are from the 1% sample database of the censuses, and the 2000 census data is from the 1% sample database of the long-form census, while the 2010 population census data is from a 1% sample excel document of the long-form census provided by the Population Census Office of the State Council. Compared with the data from the previous three population census databases the 2010 data restricts this analysis to a certain extent. In addition, 1% population sampling in 2015 provides the latest information on family changes, but the only currently available materials are the census data forms which make it difficult to use this data to analyze changes in family structures. And we could only refer to this data as we discuss intergenerational relationship structures.

Phasic Changes of Rural Family Structure and Their Features

In this part, we employ data from the four censuses as the basis, divide the analyzed timeframe into four periods or phases, investigate the Chinese Rural Family structure and their changes since the onset of reform and opening up, and strive to present the status and features of the different phases.

Rural Family Structure Toward the End of the Collective Economic Era

The 1982 population census data is a key material for us to learn about Rural Family structure at the beginning of the rural village reform and opening up and the end of the collective economic era.

I have previously performed numerous retrospective studies on the situations of family structure in various rural villages between 1965-1970, concluding that toward the middle and end of the 1960s, nuclearization had been achieved in rural village families. This period was during the implementation of the collective economic system. Therefore, we can deduce that the nuclearization of Chinese rural village families was neither the outcome of urbanization nor industrialization but engendered by the productivity level of a collective economic era that focused on agriculture.

Up until the initiation of reform and opening up in 1978, rural villages across China maintained the collective operational model in the collective economy. The rural household contract responsibility system with remuneration linked to output was introduced to rural villages in 1982. This was the start of the contracted land-use and as the policy was not yet fully implemented, this was a phase of transition between the old and the new. Therefore, I believe that the third population census (1982) is valuable for gaining an insight into the status of the family structures during the end of the collective economic era, and here we are able to obtain for the first time information about the overall status of family structures in rural villages across the nation (original databases of the 1953 and 1964 population censuses are hard to access and there is no way to conduct retrospective investigations).

Table 1 Family Structure in Rural Villages in China in 1982

Family type	%	Family type	%	
Nuclear family	67.95	Couple nuclear family	4.54	6.67
		Standard nuclear family	48.93	72.00
		Separated couple and single-parent nuclear family	10.93	16.09
		Extended nuclear family	2.64	3.89
		Transitional nuclear family	0.91	1.35
		Sub-total of nuclear family	67.95	100.00
Immediate family	22.82	Three-generation immediate family	17.50	76.69
		Two-generation immediate family	3.89	17.05
		Four-generation immediate family	0.61	2.67
		Grandparent-grandchild family	0.82	3.59
		Sub-total of immediate family	22.82	100.00
Joint family	0.84	Joint family	0.84	

Family type	%	Family type	%	
Single-person household	7.47	Single-person household	7.47	
Broken family	0.71	Broken family	0.71	
Others	0.21	Others	0.21	
		Total of couples and single-person households	12.01	

Data source: Calculated based on data from the 1% sample database of the 1982 national census
Note: 1. The "nuclear family" in the table refers to a family comprised of a married couple (or one member of the couple) and their unmarried offspring, a family comprised of only a married couple is also a nuclear family; an "immediate family" is comprised of a married couple (or the parents, or one of the parents), a married offspring and a grandchild; a "joint family" is comprised of a married couple (or the parents, or one of the parents) and two or more married offspring; a "broken family" refers to a family comprised of unmarried siblings.
2.The "standard nuclear family" is comprised of a married couple and unmarried offspring; the "separated couple nuclear family" is comprised of a married couple, but with one member working elsewhere, and unmarried offspring; the "single-parent nuclear family" is comprised of only one parent (because of death, divorce or other reasons) and unmarried offspring; the "extended nuclear family" is comprised of a married couple, unmarried offspring and the couple's unmarried siblings; and the "transitional nuclear family" is comprised of a married couple and recently married offspring (but the son/daughter in-law does not live in the household).

From Table 1 we can see that nuclear families accounted for the largest proportion of Chinese rural families in 1982, making up approximately 68% of the total; the second most common family type was the immediate family, making up more than 20% of the total; the third most common family type was the single-person household; and the joint family accounted for less than 1%. This result coincides with a multitude of past, small-scale investigations revealing that there was a high degree of nuclearization among the families of rural villages in China at that time.

In terms of the second-tier family types, among nuclear families, the standard nuclear family accounted for nearly 50% of the total, making it the largest second-tier family and represented more than 70% of all nuclear families; next were "separated couple nuclear family" and "single-parent nuclear family", at 16%; the couple nuclear family was third, constituting less than 7%.

Among the immediate families, the predominant category was the three-generation immediate family, accounting for 17.50% of all families and representing over 75% of all immediate families; next was the two-generation immediate family, and its proportions in total families and immediate families were respectively 3.89% and 17.05%; there were relatively fewer four-or-more-generation immediate families and grandparent-grandchild families, accounting for less than 1% of the total number of families.

It can be seen that in 1982, the year at the end of the collective economic system and the onset of reform and opening up, the majority of Chinese rural village families were either a nuclear family or an immediate family, with the former being the main staple. The standard nuclear family and the three-generation immediate family were respectively the most common type of nuclear family and immediate family.

Family Structure Right Before the Large-scale Transition of the Rural Village Labor Force Toward the Nonagricultural Sector

In 1982, the rural village land contract responsibility system was in full force, and this

institutional shift was a huge stimulant that activated increased productivity among farmers. Since the amount of land available for contracting by farmers in most regions was limited, and land operation was affected by seasonality, the duration of off-time for the family labor force increased as labor efficiency improved and people became more inclined to partake in nonagricultural economic activities. Meanwhile, at the onset of reform, urban areas did not have the capacity to absorb the excess rural village labor, and outside of farming these farmers mostly found work locally by selling or transporting agricultural produce. After the mid-1980s, processing enterprises started to emerge in the coastal regions and the demand for labor increased accordingly. Up until 1990, the number of rural village middle-aged and young labor that worked elsewhere did climb, but the predominantly farming-focused employment structure for most of the labor force did not fundamentally change. Then, in such a situation, what were the new changes that occurred in families in rural villages?

Table 2 lists the basic Rural Family structures in 1982 and 1990, which are essentially the same, with the nuclear family and immediate family maintaining their status as the two main family types. However, a noteworthy point is that the ratio of nuclear families in 1990 was slightly higher than that in 1982, of which the standard nuclear family represented more than 50%, indicating a trend and feature of the continual development of the nuclear orientation of family forms. This indicates that under the land contract responsibility system, the frequentness of separation of farming families did not decline, meaning that after the family reverted to its status as a unit of production, the awareness of jointly forming economic and daily life organizations between parents and offspring, and between married siblings was not raised, and the behavioral pursuit of independent units of living did not change, thus the "marry and spin off from parents" method perpetuated. Objectively, this period was at the height of marriages for those born during the baby-boom of the 1950s and for families with multiple sons. The prevailing custom was for a married son to move out of his parents' household. For many rural village families with multiple sons, parents had to finish the construction of an independent courtyard residence for their sons before they married, which evolved into a prerequisite for marriage discussions with potential in-laws, so that the newlyweds could live separately from their parents.

In the second-tier family types, the ratio of "separated couple nuclear family" and "single-parent nuclear family" decreased, meaning that during this period there was a dip in the number of families where the married couple did not live together. This development came about due to a relaxation in government policies that restricted the relocation of the spouse of someone who worked in the city from migrating from a rural village to an urban area. Since the family of an employee was now permitted to migrate to the city, both the total number and ratio of single-parent families in rural villages sank, and this development is reflected in the population census data.

Figures related to immediate family relatively did not vary much compared with previous data nor did second-tier family types see many changes.

One point worth noting is that during this phase the ratio of single-person household fell by 18.47% from 7.47% in 1982 to 6.09% in 1990, and the underlying reason deserves further investigation.

Table 2 Family Structure in Rural Villages of China in 1990

Family type	%	Family type	%
Nuclear family	69.88	Couple nuclear family	5.79
		Standard nuclear family	53.65
		Separated couple and single-parent nuclear family	7.73
		Extended nuclear family	2.09
		Transitional nuclear family	0.62
		Sub-total of nuclear family	69.88
Immediate family	22.46	Three-generation immediate family	17.51
		Two-generation immediate family	3.48
		Four-generation immediate family	0.73
		Grandparent-grandchild family	0.74
		Sub-total of immediate family	22.46
Joint family	0.95	Joint family	0.95
Single-person household	6.09	Single-person household	6.09
Broken family	0.56	Broken family	0.56
Others	0.06	Others	0.06
		Total of couples and single-person households	11.88

Data source: Calculated based on data from the 1% sample database of the 1990 national census

Overall, China experienced a momentous institutional reform by switching to the land contract system, farming families once again became units of production, and the large-scale employment-driven, city-bound relocation of the rural labor force began to take shape. But the Rural Family structure did not vary dramatically compared with that of 1982. The second-tier family type figures showed that nuclearization of rural families persisted. Rural Family members of employees in urban areas were able to migrate to the cities due to an easing in policy restrictions, which lowered the ratio of single-parent families in rural villages.

Family Structure After the Large-scale Transition of the Rural Labor Force

After 1990, it was common to see a substantial number of workers migrating from the rural villages of China to the cities. More workers from the central and western regions chose to migrate toward the coastal regions than to stay in their original province.

It should also be underscored that after the mid-1970s, family planning policies were widely adopted in rural villages, with the single-child policy going into effect in 1980. It was normal to see second and third births in rural villages across central and western China, and the number of fourth

or more births plunged compared with the period prior to the implementation of family planning policies. Up until 2000, many children born under this policy would leave home to find work, while others would go elsewhere to attend school. It was common to see families with few children to turn into "empty nests" (households with parents only and no children). What was the actual situation like? We are going to find out through a look at the data from the 5th census carried out in 2000.

Table 3 Family Structure in Rural Villages of China in 2000

Family type	%	Family type	%
		Couple nuclear family	11.36
		Standard nuclear family	46.48
		Separated couple and single-parent nuclear family	6.56
Nuclear family	66.27	Extended nuclear family	1.30
		Transitional nuclear family	0.57
		Sub-total of nuclear family	66.27
		Three-generation immediate family	18.99
		Two-generation immediate family	2.63
Immediate family	24.83	Four-generation immediate family	0.80
		Grandparent-grandchild family	2.41
		Sub-total of immediate family	24.83
Joint family	0.51	Joint family	0.51
Single-person household	7.52	Single-person household	7.52
Broken family	0.74	Broken family	0.74
Others	0.13	Others	0.13
		Total of couples and single-person households	18.88

Data source: Calculated based on data from 1% sample database of the long-form census of 2000.

According to Table 3, trends of changes in rural family structure began to see shifts in the year 2000, with the ratio of nuclear families diverging from the rising trend of 1990 and falling off by 5.17%. Within the nuclear family category, the ratio of "standard nuclear family" dipped by 13.36% while that of "couple nuclear family" surged by 96.20%. The decrease in the overall ratio of the nuclear family is primarily attributed to the drop in "standard nuclear family". This change indicated that in 2000, although the nuclear family remained the most common family type in rural villages, its relative ratio decreased. I believe this could be associated with a decline in married offspring that live separately from their parents, and the influential factor at play here is the passing of the height of marriages in families with multiple sons. Conceived in an era of few offspring, the "single son" (in rural villages, "single son" household also referred to families with one son and one daughter or one son and multiple daughters), born in or after the 1970s, were more inclined to live with their parents after getting married. For a son that often works away from home, living with parents has the benefit

of the parent's assistance in taking care of his children and helping with household chores.

During this phase, another emphatic reversal in family structure was in the immediate family. The ratio of immediate family edged down a little between 1982 to 1990 but markedly soared in 2000 by 10.55%, and within this category, the proportion of the three-generation immediate family went up by 8.45%. I believe that this was precisely the outcome of families with few offspring in which the offspring decided to live with his or her parents after marriage. Meanwhile, the most drastic change within the immediate family category was the grandparent-grandchild family, which skyrocketed by over 225%. One could say that this development was the result of employment-driven relocation of married middle-aged or young labor from rural villages into the city after giving birth.

The conditions of the rural family structure in 2000 show that the structure of modern rural families has not always progressed toward a nuclear orientation, but in this age when being small is the preferred family size, this turnaround has been moderate. Similarly, family units with multiple married generations, as represented by the immediate family, were not always in decline and experienced a rebound based on the 2000 data. I believe that such a change always hinges upon two requisites, one being the rise in the number of "single sons" and the other being a willingness to cooperate economically between the parents and their grown offspring. Meanwhile, as a higher proportion of the labor force in middle-aged or young families venture elsewhere for work, the demands for older middle-aged or senior parents to help with household chores also climb. In rural villages, parents in "single son families" often cater to the needs of their offspring as much as possible, even to the point of raising family expenditures to meet these needs. This is a crucial reason behind the increase in the number of three-generation immediate families and why such families can be maintained. In some families with multiple grown sons, married couples in the son's generation live separately from parents, and when they work elsewhere, they would delegate the task of rearing their underage offspring to their parents. Thus, it can be said that the growth in the number of three-generation immediate families is very much associated with this type of social environment.

Rural Family Structure During the Early Stage of Social Transformation

Rural village populations have always occupied the main share of the population of China, but this situation has gradually changed since the start of reform and opening up. The tipping point came in 2010, when the permanent populations of urban areas surpassed 50%, with non-agricultural employees accounting for the majority. Cities became the primary place of residence for most Chinese citizens and as a result the social transformation of China has started to surface. Of course, this shift was the result of the continual influx of rural village labor forces into cities, and we are now in the early period of this transformation. For the most part, the residence registration (*hukou*) of rural village laborers who work long term in the cities are still registered in rural villages, and a relatively high proportion of laborers working and living in the city are not with their relatives. Their young offspring and old parents are still living back in their rural hometowns. This has in turn led to an even higher level of aging among the rural village population.

Table 4 Family Structure in Rural Villages in China in 2010

Family type	%	Family type	%
		Couple nuclear family	16.73
		Standard nuclear family	30.92
		Separated couple and single-parent nuclear family	6.28
Nuclear family	57.02	Extended nuclear family	1.08
		Transitional nuclear family	2.01
		Sub-total of nuclear family	57.02
		Three-generation immediate family	20.27
		Two-generation immediate family	3.46
Immediate family	28.52	Four-generation immediate family	0.90
		Grandparent-grandchild family	3.89
		Sub-total of immediate family	28.52
Joint family	0.67	Joint family	0.67
Single-person household	11.79	Single-person household	11.79
Broken family	1.18	Broken family	1.18
Others	0.81	Others	0.81
		Total of couples and single-person households	28.52

Data source: Calculated based on data from the 1% sample Excel document of the long-form census of 2010
Not only did the 2010 structure of rural village families differ tremendously from those of 1982 and 1990, the differences were vast and obvious even when compared to the 2000 census.

The nuclear family retained its standing as the most common type of family, but its proportion dropped by 13.96% compared to 2000, and changes within its second-tier family types were even greater. The "standard nuclear family" that once represented more than 50% of the grand total in 1990 declined to less than 1/3, 33.48% lower than that of 2000, while "couple nuclear family" accounted for 17%, a surge of 47.27% compared with that of 2000. Immediate families rose by 14.86%, reaching almost 29%, of which "three-generation immediate family" grew by 6.74%, the "two-generation immediate family" jumped by 31.56%, and the "four-generation immediate family" went up by 12.50%, while "grandparent-grandson immediate family" shot up by 61.41%. There had been a rise across the board among all the second-tier family types within the immediate family classification. Another huge change was the increase of single-person households, soaring by 56.78% compared with 2000.

If the 2010 and 1990 data are compared, the changes in family structures become immediately obvious, notably the changes in second-tier family types. The "standard nuclear family" plummeted by 42.37% as the "couple nuclear family" soared by almost 190%. The "three-generation immediate family" rose by 15.76%, while the "grandparent-grandson immediate family" swelled by 426% and the "single-person household" category grew by 93.60%.

I believe that the dip in the proportion of "standard nuclear families" and the moderate rise in "three-generation immediate families" in rural villages in this period are connected to a decrease in the frequency of separations of rural village families since 1982. At the same time, the increase in

the possibility of the "single son" to choose to live with his parents after marriage further proves my deduction that since the onset of China's reform and opening up, especially after rural village labor forces shifted toward non-agricultural sectors, the degree of necessity of family economic and daily life collaborations between different generations of parents and offspring increased, and the trend of multiple generations living together began to appear in families with few sons. At the same time there was also a clear rise in the number of "couple nuclear family" and "single-person household" in rural village families, indicating that a small size-orientation development also existed in the structure of rural families.

The latest information available regarding rural family structures is from 2015, which provides limited family information from the 1% population sample investigation data in 2015. It is difficult to match, compare or contrast this data with data from the four previous population censuses regarding rural family structures. However, generation-related data in family households can be found in the summary data and we can use this to gain an indirect glimpse into the latest conditions of family structures in rural villages, as well as to compare this with the generation-related data in the two previous population censuses.

Table 5: Generational Structure of Rural Families in 2000, 2010 and 2015

Unit of comparison: %

Generational composition	Year 2000	Year 2010	Year 2015
Households with members from one generation	18.21	29.77	30.57
Households with members from two generations	59.72	47.54	45.07
Households with members from three generations	21.13	21.68	23.24
Households with members from four or more generations	0.94	1.01	1.12

Data source: Table 5-1c of Part One of the 2000 Population Census of China on the website of the National Bureau of Statistics of China (http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/5rp/index.htm); Table 5-1c of Part One of the 2010 Population Census of China on the website of the National Bureau of Statistics (http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm); 2015 data came from the Population and Employment Statistics Department of the National Bureau of Statistics. 1% National Population Sample Survey 2015, 2016. Beijing: China Statistics Press. pp.333-334.

According to Table 5, compared with the generational structure of families in 2010, there were minor changes in 2015. Households with members from one generation edged up by 2.69%, households with members from two generations contracted by 5.20%, and households with members from three generations added 7.20%. We can see that in the 15 years since 2000, the number of households with members from one, three, and four or more generations maintained an increasing trend, two-generation households being the only type that declined. The three-generation households here are predominantly "three-generation immediate families" (and include a very small ratio of three-generation joint families). Similar to my analysis, the reason behind their sustained growth is the rise in the number of "single sons" and their willingness to create joint units of daily life with their parents, which is beneficial to the offspring generation that have to venture elsewhere for work. The one-generation household includes the "single-person household" and also families comprised of just

a married couple, which can be deemed the representative of small families. The increase in the ratio of "one-generation household" indicated that while the proportion of the "three-or-more-generation household" increased, the 2015 structure of rural families maintained their small size orientation development trend.

The changes in the rural family structure since the beginning of China's reform and opening up may be divided into two general phases, before and after the beginning of the 1990s. In the former phase, although the household contract was implemented and the farming household returned as the independent unit of production and operation, the rural labor force was still basically engaged in farming, with very scarce participation in non-agricultural operation activities when not farming, and migrant work had not yet become full-fledged. The residential format among rural farmers carried on the model from the collective economic era and did not experience too much of an impact from societal changes and reforms, as family nuclearization continued and even showed signs of further advancement. Then in the latter phase, the transformations in rural societies began to take shape, the middle-aged and young labor force working in non-agricultural employment became commonplace. Middle-aged and young males worked elsewhere for extensive periods and even married couples with offspring would both work elsewhere, thus the level of aging of rural village populations further elevated. This has made rural families less complete. At the same time families with few sons, especially those with only one married son, increased. Under the circumstance in which non-agricultural employment was the main staple, the necessity for intergenerational cooperation between parents and offspring became more prominent. Therefore, among the rural villages there was a rise in the ratio of "three-generation immediate families", and also a sharp increase in "grandparent-grandchild families", but there was also a third situation, namely the clear growth of the "couple nuclear family" and the "single-person household". Evidently, against the backdrop of China's reform and opening up and social transformations, the rising necessity for intergenerational cooperation drove up the proportion of families comprised of multiple married couples in Chinese rural families, while at the same time extremely small family types such as the "couple nuclear family" and the "single-person household" also showed clear signs of increase. This indicates that the modern rural family structure is characterized in two aspects, one being the rise of units consisting of multiple married couples, and the other being the rise of empty-nest seniors and those living alone due to the death of spouse.

Impacts of Rural Population Relocation and Movement on Family Structures

Because the middle-aged and young labor force of families moving elsewhere to work in non-agricultural sectors became the prevailing trend after 1990, the 2000 and 2010 censuses required each family household to report the number of household members that left the household for half a year or more, including those migrant workers that had not changed their household registration and were away from the location of their household registration for more than half of each year. This data

provides possibilities for obtaining an insight into the relationship between family member population flow and family structures.

Impact of Family Member's Migrant Work on Family Structures

According to census data, in 2000 and 2010, respectively 20% and 30% of families reported to have members that worked as migrant workers. In the era when nuclear families and immediate families were the main staple, family members that lived together were mostly immediate family members with relationships by either marriage or blood, and thus the migrant worker was mostly either the married couple, one member of the married couple, or either the parent generation or the offspring generation. Once someone would leave their place of residence to work elsewhere, second-tier family status or even primary-tier family status would change.

From Table 6 we can see that in both periods more than 40% of single-parent families reported to have family members working as migrant workers, with the husband usually being the one working away from home. In both periods respectively more than 65% and 80% of "grandparent-grandchild families" reported to have family members working as migrant workers, and the primary reason was that the married couple in the middle generation both took up non-agricultural jobs in the cities. The figures for broken families were respectively more than 60% and 75%. Also, a high ratio of "couple nuclear family" reported having family members working as migrant workers. Obviously, in the modern era the rural labor force has obtained the opportunities to increase income through migrant work, but at the present stage it is almost always the family's young adults (husband, son, daughter-in-law, parents) that are engaged in migrant work, leading to a rise in incomplete families. Since "grandparent-grandchild families" are comprised of older middle-aged or senior grandparents and grandchildren, the juvenile members lack communication with their parents, resulting in rather immense impacts on their psychology and education. Of course, during the early stage of social transformation, in order for migrant workers to lower the cost of living at the location of their work, it was a common family strategy for working-age members to pursue migrant work, while leaving behind seniors and the underaged. This circumstance is not solely the consequence of the residence registration (*hukou*) system's restriction on the relocation of migrant populations into the cities.

Table 6 Impact of rural long–term family members working as migrant workers on family structures in 2000 and 2010

Unit: %

Family type	Year 2000	Year 2010
	Sum of families with family members working as migrant workers	Sum of families with family members working as migrant workers
Couple nuclear family	29.08	40.20
Standard nuclear family	10.17	12.39
Single-parent nuclear family	43.6	45.18

Family type	Year 2000	Year 2010
	Sum of families with family members working as migrant workers	Sum of families with family members working as migrant workers
Extended nuclear family	20.58	26.02
Transitional nuclear family	29.12	20.27
Three-or-more-generation immediate family	19.17	23.36
Two-generation immediate family	27.39	41.43
Grandparent-grandchild family	67.89	82.93
Joint family	20.53	56.20
Single-person household	26.77	37.51
Broken family	64.43	78.27
Others	19.44	81.33

Data source: Calculated based on data from the 1% sample database of the long-form census of 2000 and data from the 1% sample Excel document of the long-form census of 2010.

Regional Differences in the Labor Force Relocation and Movement and Their Impacts on Family Structures

The flow of the rural labor force into nonagricultural sectors in modern China shows distinct regional differences. Census data shows that in 2000, 20% of family households reported having migrant workers that would be away from home for more than half of the year, with the ratio being noticeably higher in provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions in the south such as Jiangxi (68.63%), Anhui (51.43%), Chongqing (34.9%), Guangdong (31.37%) and Guangxi (31.78%), while the figures for most other areas were below 20%. In 2010, on average 30% of family households nationwide reported having migrant workers that would be away from home for more than half of the year, and although there were no individual administrative division that particularly stood out, there were a few that were above 45% including Guizhou (49.74%), Guangxi (47.81%), Chongqing (46.65%), Anhui (43.11%), Fujian (42.53%) and Guangdong (41.53%). Those in northern China were less than 20%, with Shanxi reporting 13.28%, Heilongjiang 14.81%, Hebei 15.08%, Jilin 16.15% and Shandong 17.96%. These variations in migrant worker families and their impact on family structures are reported in Table 7.

Table 7 Relationship between Ratio of Rural Families with Migrant Worker and Family Structure in Selected Provinces (Municipalities) in 2010

Unit of comparison: %

Area	Ratio of families with long-term migrant worker	Couple nuclear family	Single-parent nuclear family	Other nuclear families	Immediate family	Grandparent-grandchild family	Single-person household	Broken family	Others
Hebei	15.08	16.49	4.26	42.02	26.67	1.39	8.47	0.40	0.30

Area	Ratio of families with long–term migrant worker	Couple nuclear family	Single–parent nuclear family	Other nuclear families	Immediate family	Grandparent–grandchild family	Single–person household	Broken family	Others
Shanxi	13.28	15.66	5.47	42.25	24.40	1.26	10.28	0.40	0.28
Heilongjiang	14.81	20.46	3.94	41.79	23.92	1.38	7.85	0.42	0.25
Anhui	43.11	18.24	6.98	28.45	21.85	7.13	13.68	2.28	1.40
Chongqing	46.65	20.24	7.35	20.37	18.26	8.72	21.23	2.28	1.56
Guizhou	49.74	16.44	8.34	33.08	19.85	6.77	11.96	2.92	0.64

Data source: Calculated based on data from the 1% sample Excel document of the long-form census of 2010.

Provinces and municipalities in which more than 40% of the families reported having long-term migrant workers had a ratio of "grandparent-grandchild family" approaching or in excess of 7%, "single-person household" also tallied over 10% with Chongqing reporting more than 20% for single-person households, which should primarily be seniors. There were over 2% of broken families and near or more than 7% of "single-parent nuclear families". Meanwhile, for areas where less than 16% of the families reported to have long-term migrant workers, the proportions of the family types mentioned above were obviously lower, while immediate families (excluding "skipped generation family") numbered at a relatively higher level. Long-term migrant workers became a key factor that drove the expansion in the number of incomplete families in rural.

Reform and opening up, along with the tremendous societal changes across China that took place thereafter, generated more opportunities for the rural labor forces to transfer into nonagricultural sectors, to raise income levels and to improve living conditions. However, during the early phase of social transformations, the long-term migrant work of the middle-aged and young labor forces in families also came with undesirable side effects, mainly the rise in the incompleteness of families, parents' lack of attention dedicated to the education of their young offspring, and the duty of child-rearing being delegated to grandparents. Meanwhile, old-aged parents that suffered from diminishing ability to look after themselves were neglected, with quite a large proportion relegated to solitude. This type of phenomenon is almost inevitable in the short-term but should not be allowed to perpetuate in the long-term because that would weaken the core functions of family and erode the value of social development.

Effects of the Senior Population Expansion in Family Structure Changes

As rural elderly life expectancy extends, the size of this population group gradually enlarges. Meanwhile, the increase in the number of middle-aged and young persons that leave the villages would also raise the proportion of seniors in the composition of rural permanent populations. This in turn will amplify the impacts of the senior population on Rural Family structures and their changes. Our basic understanding is that if seniors prefer to live with children that have have

been married, then the ratio of immediate families in rural would rise; if seniors could take care of themselves and they are more inclined to live alone, then the proportions of "couple nuclear family" and "single-person household" would increase. According to data from the 1982 and subsequent population censuses, the ratio of seniors aged 65 or above living in immediate families shows signs of decline, but on the contrary the same ratios in "couple nuclear family" and "single-person household" have risen. We also see that after the year 2000 the number of immediate families have been increasing in rural.

The Proportion of Seniors in Overall Family Household Compositions

The proportion of seniors in overall family household compositions, and their changes, directly reflect their level of coverage in family households. This composition is not only related to the level of aging in rural, but also concerns with the mode of living and senior care among these older people. Of course, the increase of the former, as in the level of aging in rural, more directly lifts the proportion of seniors in family household compositions.

According to data from the 2000 and 2010 censuses and data from the 1% population sample investigation of 2015, we can obtain information about aging levels in rural and the proportion of seniors aged 65 and above in family household compositions (see Table 8).

Table 8 Rural Village Aging Levels and Ratio of Family Households with Seniors Aged 65 and Above

Unit of comparison: %

Year	Aging Level	Ratio of family households with seniors aged 65 and above
2000	7.50	22.02
2010	10.07	25.95
2015	12.03	29.73

Data source: 2000 and 2010 data calculated using information from the two respective population censuses provided on the website of the National Bureau of Statistics of China and 2015 data came from the Population and Employment Statistics Department of the National Bureau of Statistics. 1% National Population Sample Survey 2015, 2016. Beijing: China Statistics Press, pp. 342.

During the social transformations, the continually rising level of aging in rural villages resulted in the continual increase in the ratio of family households that included elderly persons. More than one fifth of family households reported to have been living with seniors aged 65 and above in 2000, with the figure exceeding 25% in 2010 and approaching 30% in 2015. The gradually mounting influence of seniors in the rural family structure is now apparent.

Who rural village seniors live with

Between 1982 and 2010, the majority of rural seniors aged 65 or above had children, and they produced their offspring before the enactment of family planning policies. Thus, most of these seniors have multiple children and at the times of the censuses, most of their children were already married.

Table 9 Mode of Living of Rural Seniors Aged 65 and Above Since 1982

Unit of comparison: %

Mode of living	Year 1982	Year 1990	Year 2000	Year 2010
Live with children	70.33	70.56	63.63	53.3
Of which: Married children	56.44	57.82	53.74	46.54
Unmarried children	13.89	12.74	9.89	6.76
Couple nuclear family	13.58	16.41	21.73	26.63
Single-person household	12.33	9.88	9.28	12.45
Skipped generation family	3.22	2.88	5.11	6.46
Others	0.53	0.28	0.25	1.16
Sum of single-person households and couple nuclear families	25.91	26.29	31.01	39.08

Data source: Calculated based on data from the 1% sample database of the 1982 national population census, the 1% sample database of the 1990 national population census, the 1% sample database of the long-form census of 2000, and the 1% sample Excel document of the long-form census of 2010.

Since 1982, the mode of living of rural seniors aged 65 and above share similarities with the general rural family structure previously discussed, and there were obvious shifts at different time periods.

In the four periods, the ratios of seniors that lived with children all surpassed 50%, with figures from 1982 and 1990 even exceeding 70%. After 2000 the drop in the number was obvious, with 2000 being 9.82% lower than 1990, while the figure for 2010 was 16.23% fewer than 2000.

However, the ratio of seniors that resided with married children are more telling. This type of households contributed to more than 50% of overall households in the first three phases but crossed below the half-way line for the first time in 2010, at 46.54%.

At the same time, the trend of seniors living alone rose sharply after 1990, and especially after 2000. The single-person household proportion then surged by 34.16% in 2010 compared with 2000. The "couple nuclear family" proportion in 2000 soared by 32.42% relative to 1990 and was 22.55% higher in 2010 than in 2000. The sum of the "single-person household" and "couple nuclear family" surpassed 20% of the total in 2000 and accounted for more than 1/4 of the total in 2010.

The rising trend in the ratio of seniors living in skipped generation family is worthy of attention, with the 2000 figure increasing by 77.43% compared with the previous phase, and then 2010 rising another 26.42% higher than 2000. I believe that the reason behind this phenomenon was not due to grown grandchildren holding up their responsibility to take care of aged grandparents. Instead it was because grandparents had to take care of underage grandchildren and can be directly attributed to the married couples in the middle generation working as long-term migrant workers and leaving their children behind to be took care of by the grandparents. This is one of the expressions of the impact that the social transformations have had on rural family structures.

New Changes in Types of Families with Elderly People in with Seniors Lived in 2015

Since the data of the 2015, 1% population sample investigation could not be obtained, comparative

research applying the same categorization method as the four previous phases was not possible. Also, the statistical item called "number of families with elderly people with seniors aged 65 or above" seen in the population censuses since 2000 and the 1% sample investigation in 2015 tallies the number of families with elderly people with a senior resident member, but not each individual senior as a subject of investigation. We use this as the basis for analysis in Table 10.

Table 10 Composition of Rural Family Household with Seniors Aged 65 or Above by Type

Unit: %

Family household type	Year 2000	Year 2010	Year 2015
Single-person household	10.70	16.07	16.05
Couple household	10.28	13.53	15.98
One senior and juvenile (skipped generation family household)	1.15	1.25	1.12
Two seniors and juvenile (skipped generation family household)	0.94	1.05	1.17
Others	76.92	68.10	65.69

Data source: Table 5-4c of Part One of the 2000 Population Census of China on the website of the National Bureau of Statistics (http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/5rp/index.htm); Table 5-5c of Part One of the 2010 Population Census of China on the website of the National Bureau of Statistics (http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm); 2015 data came from Population and Employment Statistics Department of the National Bureau of Statistics. 1% National Population Sample Survey 2015, 2016. Beijing: China Statistics Press. pp.342.

Per Table 10, the ratio of seniors living in a single-person household roughly maintained the same level in 2015 compared with 2010, but the ratio for those residing in "couple nuclear family" went up by 18.11% in 2015 relative to 2010. This indicates that there was an increasing trend for rural senior couples to live on their own. The overall level of seniors living alone and living in "grandparent-grandchild families" (sum of "couple nuclear family", single-person household and "grandparent-grandchild families") continued to balloon. This means that seniors aged 65 and above with reduced independent living ability were not the driving force that fueled the increase in immediate families in rural.

Following the rise in the aging of rural, the number of families with seniors has also steadily risen, with the figure reaching 30% in 2015. However, the number of elderlies that resided with children, especially married children, dropped below the 50% mark in 2010 (only 46.54%). At the same time, the number of seniors that lived on their own, especially elderly couples, has continued to rise since 2000 with the figure eclipsing 25% in 2010, and data from 2015 indirectly show that this rising trend is not showing signs of slowing. Even though the number of immediate families in rural has remained steady, especially the number of "three-generation immediate families" has been climbing. It's not because more seniors aged 65 and above are living therein, but because the ratio of middle-aged and younger seniors living with married children has expanded. Actually, the increase in the level of aging in the rural caused the increase in the proportion of "couple nuclear family" in the family compositions, thus contributing to the increase in extremely small families in the overall family composition.

Conclusion and Discussion

Obvious Differences in the Rural Family Structure Changes During the Different Phases Since the Launch of Reform and Opening Up

During the early period of reform and opening up, rural in China still employed the collective economic system centered on agriculture, family structure retained its nuclearization-orientation, and even after the implementation of the land contract system in 1980s this situation did not fundamentally changed. The primary reasons why family nuclearization was able to be sustained were that the preference among the main labor forces in the rural was to stay put, and the prevalence of sibling in multi-children families to leave their parent's home after marriage and live on their own. After 1990, following the deepening of the reforms, large numbers of the middle-aged and young labor force began to move to nonagricultural sectors, and noticeable social transformations in the rural began. Seniors' contributions to the composition of the permanent populations in the rural enlarged, and as those born during the early days of the implementation of family planning began to grow up, the ratio of families with only one grown son also rose. Rural family structures started to see new and unprecedented changes. During the course of this social transformation, vocational divisions of labor between the parents' generation and the married children's generation in families with few children emerged, and the necessity for cooperation between these two generations in family economies and daily life increased, which raised the number of "three-generation immediate families" and lowered the number of "standard nuclear families". The number of middle-aged and young offspring generation couples that worked as migrant workers increased, the function of the middle-aged and young senior parent generation in taking care of infants and grandchildren elevated in importance, and the ratio of "skipped generation family" and other forms of incomplete families rose. Older middle-aged and elderly seniors who could not contribute to the care of infants created a rise in the ratio of older people living on their own in "couple nuclear family" or "single-person household".

Pay More Attention to Seniors Who Have Reduced Independent Living Abilities and Who Live on Their Own

As the level of aging in modern rural rose, the ratio of families that include senior members gradually increased. Some seniors capable of living independently would live individually or as couples, and most of the elderly that live on their own usually have children that live separately from them in the same village, and can get help and care from their children. But there are also middle-aged and young children that work elsewhere as long-term migrant workers who are incapable of helping their aged parents on a daily basis. This kind of situation is worthy of attention, and the government should augment public service programs that target seniors, in particular those that live on their own, and provide them with practical and effective aids to minimize the difficulties and risks in their lives.

Prioritize Issues that Exist in Intergenerational Relationships in Families

In terms of the present-day rural, the strengthening of collaborative willingness in families with few children and the formation of "three-generation immediate families" have their upsides. As young and middle-aged members of the offspring generation normally work elsewhere in nonagricultural economic sectors as migrant workers, the capacity for middle-aged and young seniors to help with taking care of their grandchildren and household affairs mainly benefit the offspring generation in these families where multiple generations reside together. Yet, this is not a universal case, as there are families where seniors aged 65 or above, especially those aged 70 or above and with weakened ability to handle domestic chores, do not receive enough care and attention. At present, a relatively high proportion of middle-aged and elderly seniors in rural have multiple adult children, and married children usually are unwilling to live extensively with aged parents. Of course, many of these middle-aged and elderly seniors would choose of their own accord to live on their own in fear of the possibility of generating family conflicts when living together with children. As children, they should realize that they are obligated to support and care for their aged parents, and the village and other social organizations ought to pay attention to amending the offspring generation's negligence and abandonment of their elderly parents.

Adopt Institutional Measures to Reduce the Formation of Incomplete Family Types

During times of social transformations, the biggest impact afflicted on rural families is the extensive migrant employment of the middle-aged and young labor forces, which leads to a rise in the number of incomplete families and limitations in the performance of intergenerational functions and relationships. During the early part of social transformations, this kind of phenomenon is unavoidable. But following improvements in residence registration (*hukou*), migration and social welfare, family members, particularly underage children, relocating with middle-aged and young parents will increase, which will mitigate the "skipped generation family" and left-behind children issues. At the same time, there is also the possibility of a rise in middle-aged and senior parents that move in with their married children that have settled down in cities to help take care of grandchildren or to obtain better senior support and care. The government should provide more conveniences and beneficial measures to facilitate family members with this type of willingness or plan to engender the gathering of family members as the basis for the urbanization of the modern populace, instead of separation between the main labor forces and their children and parents.

Predictions on Future Changes in Rural Family Structures

The proportion of the rural population in the total population will continue to shrink, the ratio of the middle-aged and young labor force in the permanent population will continue to drop and the growth of the senior population will be sustained. These will become the main influential factors in the structure of rural families. At present, most middle-aged or younger senior parents in rural

have two or three children, which is considered few by historical standards. If grown children establish their home in a rural after marriage and giving birth but work far away from home in a nonagricultural sector as a migrant worker, then the economic and daily life model in which the middle-aged or younger senior parents live together and cooperate with the offspring generation, as in the immediate family model, will continue or even increase. At the same time, following the gradual decline in the number of old couples (those born around 1940) with multiple offspring, the number of "couple nuclear family" or single-person household formed by seniors living on their own will decline. There is possibility that, in the future, if the ratio of the rural youth generation working, getting married and settling in the cities increases while their rural village parents have not followed and moved in with them, then not only will the number of rural seniors with few children and living on their own increase, but the growth trend of the "three-generation immediate family" and other types of family units with multiple marriages will be suppressed.

During an era of social transformations, researchers need to continually understand changes in the mentality of the people about life, observe the new living habits and preferences of different population groups, and identify the impacts that the execution of new systems impart on family relationships to better comprehend the changes the social transformations have on the features pertaining to the family structures in rural areas.

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