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*Trans-local Parenting: How the Intersection of Social Structure and Individual Agency Reconstructs Parenthood among Migrant Workers in South China*

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Abstract

The proposed project investigates how the intersection of structural factors and agency of various actors in migrant families in South China reconstructs parenthood in a separated-family situation. Mass internal migration in China since the 1970s has given rise to the issue of left-behind children, who have become a serious social problem in Mainland China and attracted both public and academic attention. Previous studies on this topic have mostly focused on the behavioral and psychosocial problems of left-behind children caused by their physical separation from their parents. The agency of migrant parents and their parental practices in childrearing have not been discussed, although transnational parenting has become a fast-growing topic in the studies of international migration. Existing literature on transnational parenting focuses on maternal experiences and the role of migrant fathers, and the collaboration between migrant parents and substitute caregivers of left-behind children in childrearing are understudied. Meanwhile, current discussions of Chinese parenthood concentrate on the impact of Confucian culture, the rural-urban divide and the increased education level of parents on parenthood construction. The influence of internal migration on parental practices has not been discussed, although migration greatly affects people's lives in both urban cities and rural villages. In order to fill these gaps, this project will adopt a multi-sited and multi-voice design to investigate: (1) how the interaction among migrant parents, left-behind children and substitute caregivers of left-behind children reconstructs the meaning of parenthood for migrant workers in South China; (2) how the structural factors (migration, gender ideology, Chinese culture, the penetration of information and communication technologies) shape the process of trans-local parenting practices. This project will have the following contributions: (1) it deepens the theoretical discussion of parenthood by demonstrating how the interaction of various structural factors and the diversified agency of different actors in trans-border families shape parental practices from afar; (2) it enriches the discussion of migrant parenting and trans-border families by investigating both migrant fathers and migrant mothers and examining both the care givers and the care receivers; (3) it enriches the discussions of the meaning of parenthood in Chinese societies by revealing how mass migration challenges traditional Chinese understanding of parenthood and provides new opportunities for migrant parents to reconstruct parenting ideologies; (4) the multi-sited and multi-voice research design will

provide important methodological implications for studies of migration and trans-border families in both China and elsewhere.