



# Gender, migration and well-being of the elderly in rural China

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# MAIN TOPICS

- **Introduction**
- **Aging and elderly well-being: A national picture**
- **Impact of out-migration on well-being of the elderly in rural China: Why and how**
- **Tradition and evolution of family support for the elderly**
- **Conclusions and prospects**

# INTRODUCTION

- Rapidly declining fertility and persistent low mortality accelerated population aging in China.
- Large-scale rural-urban migration and decreased family size weakened family support for the elderly in rural area.
- Social security system is far more developed in cities while a reliable pension system has not been established in rural areas. The majority of rural elders rely on their children.
- The traditional culture of filial piety is undergoing a transformation. The elders are losing their original authorities within a household.

## ■ Objectives

- The impact of out-migration on the well-being of the elderly in rural China
- Exploring the role of gender differentials

## ■ Well-being of the elderly

- Intergenerational support
- Physical and psychological health



# Fieldwork

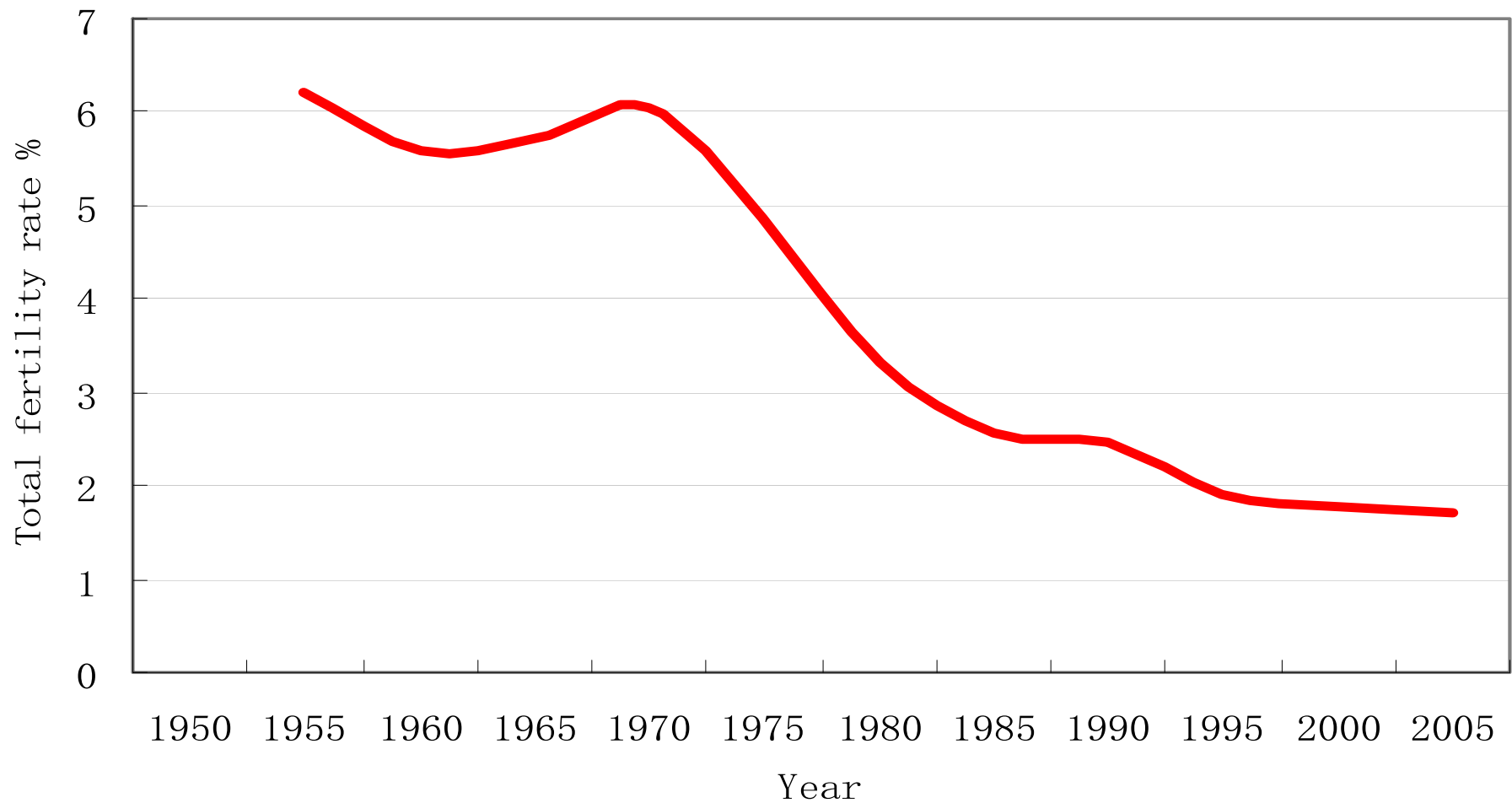
- **Longitudinal study of well-being of the elderly in Chaohu, Anhui Province, China.**
  - **Time:** Baseline survey conducted in Apr. 2001, two follow-up surveys in Oct. 2003 and Dec. 2006.
  - **Survey site:** Relatively high density of older adults and high rates of out-migration of young adults;
  - **Sampling and respondents:** Random sampling of 1,800 rural people aged 60 and above, using a stratified multistage sampling method.
  
- **Elder-care, gender, and son preference among rural-urban migrants in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.**
  - **Time:** April, 2005
  - **Survey site:** Highest proportions of rural-urban migrants among Chinese cities;
  - **Sampling and respondents:** Random sampling of 1,739 rural-urban migrants;



# **AGING AND ELDERLY WELL-BEING: A NATIONAL PICTURE**

## **1. China's Population Transition**

- In the past five decades, China has been experiencing dramatic population changes. (Figure 1)
- This has had a profound impact upon China's population structure. Population aged rapidly.



**Figure 1: China's total fertility rate, 1950-2005**

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>

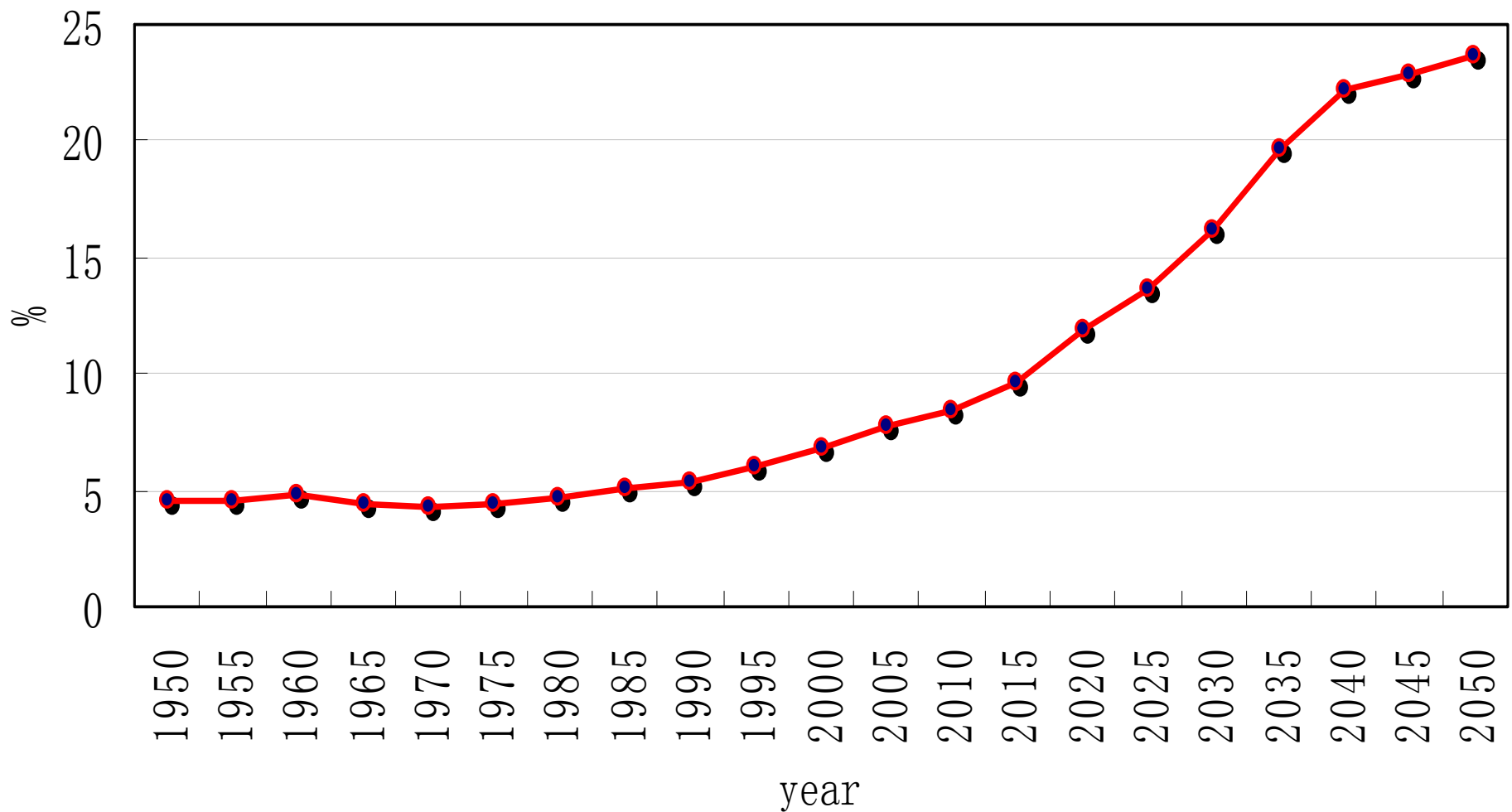
# 1.China's Population Transition - population aging

## ■ Current situation

- The proportion of elders aged 65 and above was 7.7% in 2005 (Figure 2)

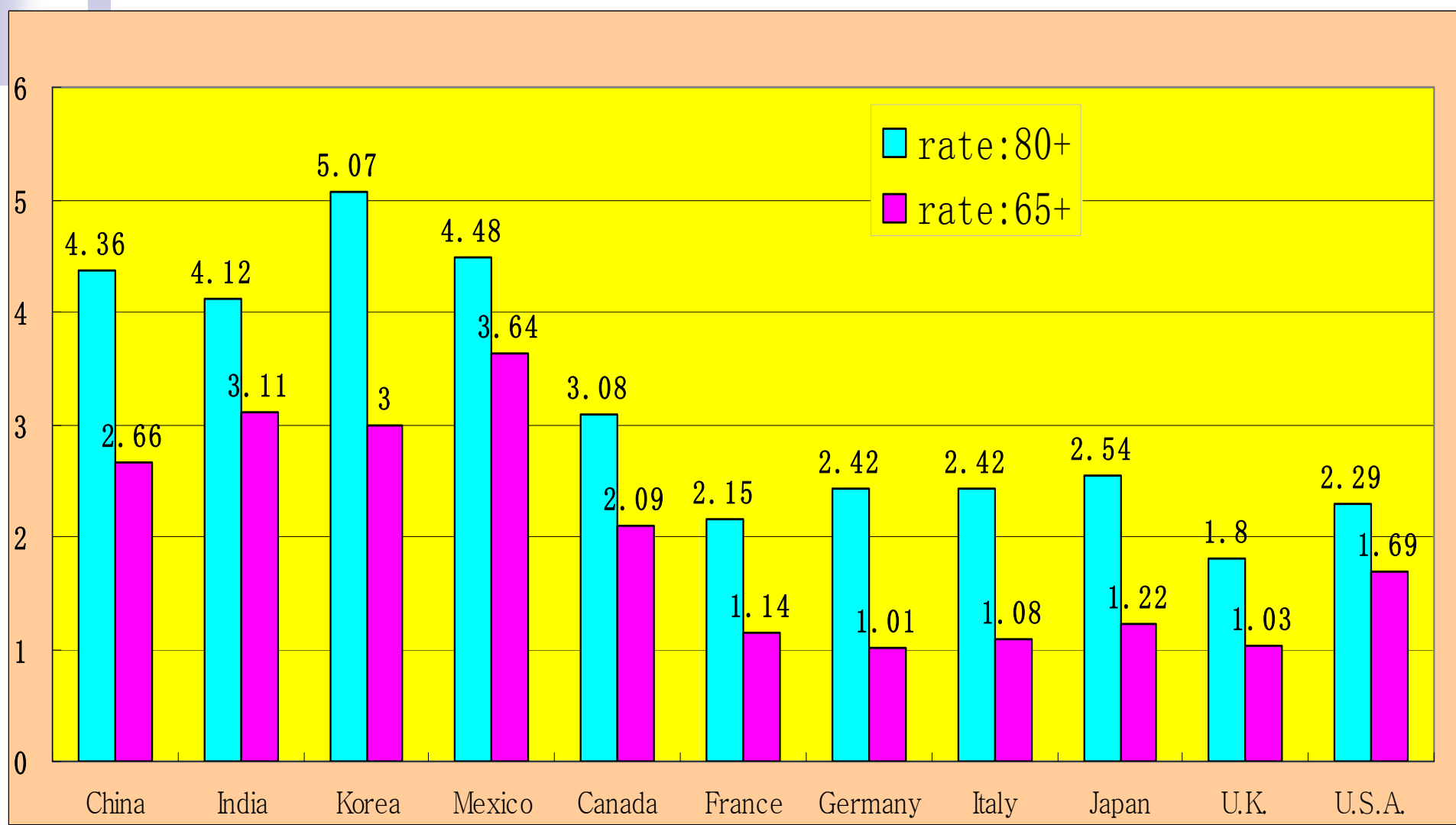
## ■ Features

- **High proportion:** The proportion aged 60 and above was 11.4% in 2007, ranking the 64th in the world (the 11th in Asia) (Figure 3)
- **High speed:** The doubling time of population aged 60 and 65 years old ranks 19th and 24th, respectively, in Asia.
- **Huge size:** The population aged 65 and above reached 100.55 million, ranking, in 2005, the largest in the world.
- **Rapid growth of the oldest old:** The growth rate of population aged 80 and above is about twice that for the population aged 65 and above.



**Figure 2: Percentage of the population aged 65 and above in China: 1950-2050**

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects



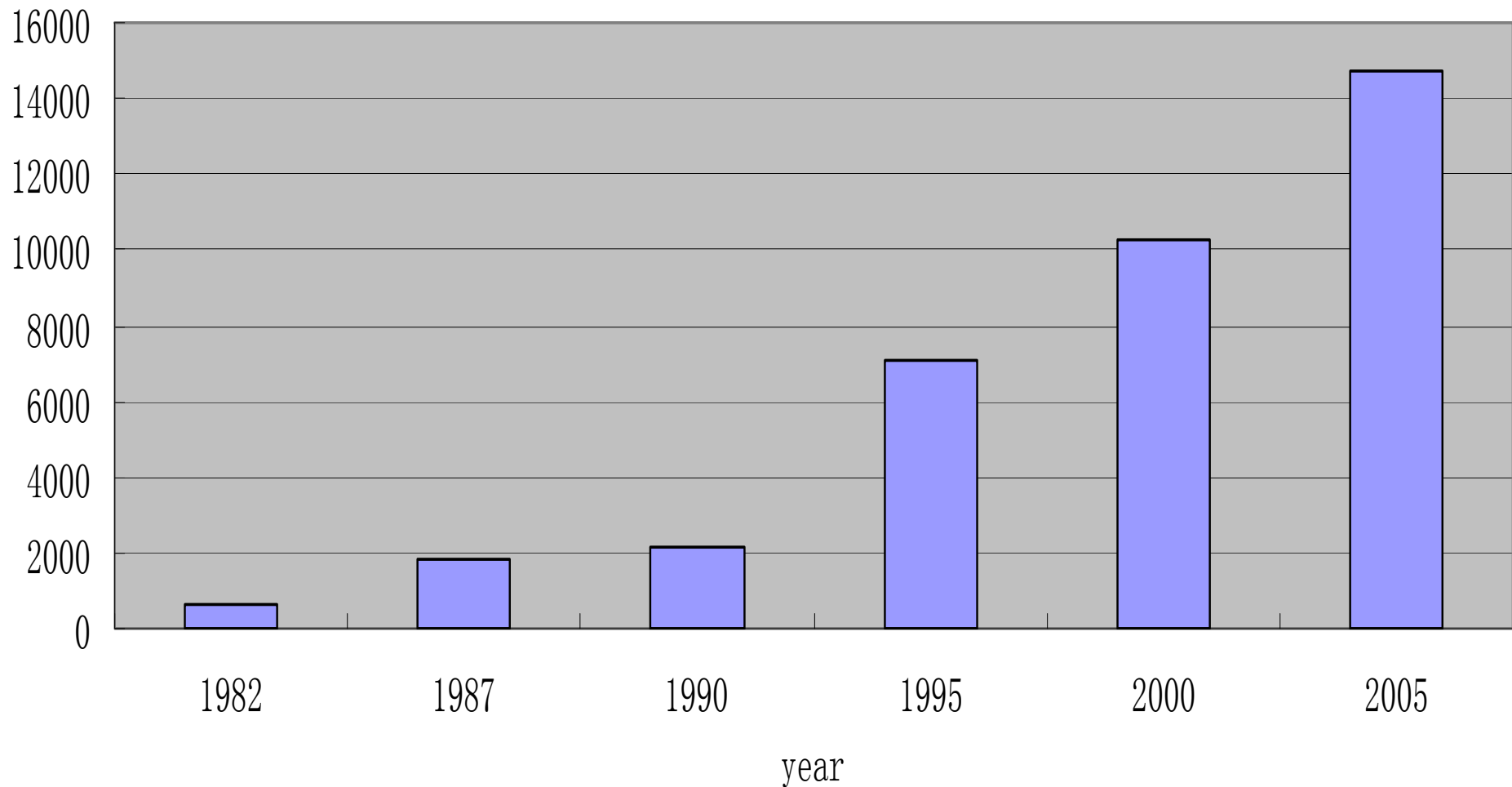
**Figure 3: Average annual growth rate of the elderly population, 1990-2050: International comparison**

Source: World Population Prospects The 2005 Revision. United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. New York, 2007.

# AGING AND ELDERLY WELL-BEING: A NATIONAL PICTURE

## 2. Migration from rural to urban areas

- The “floating population” increased 21-fold during the last 20 years
- The “floating population” was 147 million in 2005 and keeps growing (Figure 4)
- Female migrants increased: Male and female migrants ratio is 125:100 in 1990, dropped to 101:100 in 2005
- As migrants tend to be young, population aging is greater in rural areas: 73.7% of the population aged 60 and above reside in rural areas in 2006.
- The proportion aged 80 and above in rural area will be 13 percent higher than in urban areas in 2050 (Zeng, 2005)



**Figure 4: Size of rural-urban migrant population: 1982-2005 (Unit: 10,000 persons)**

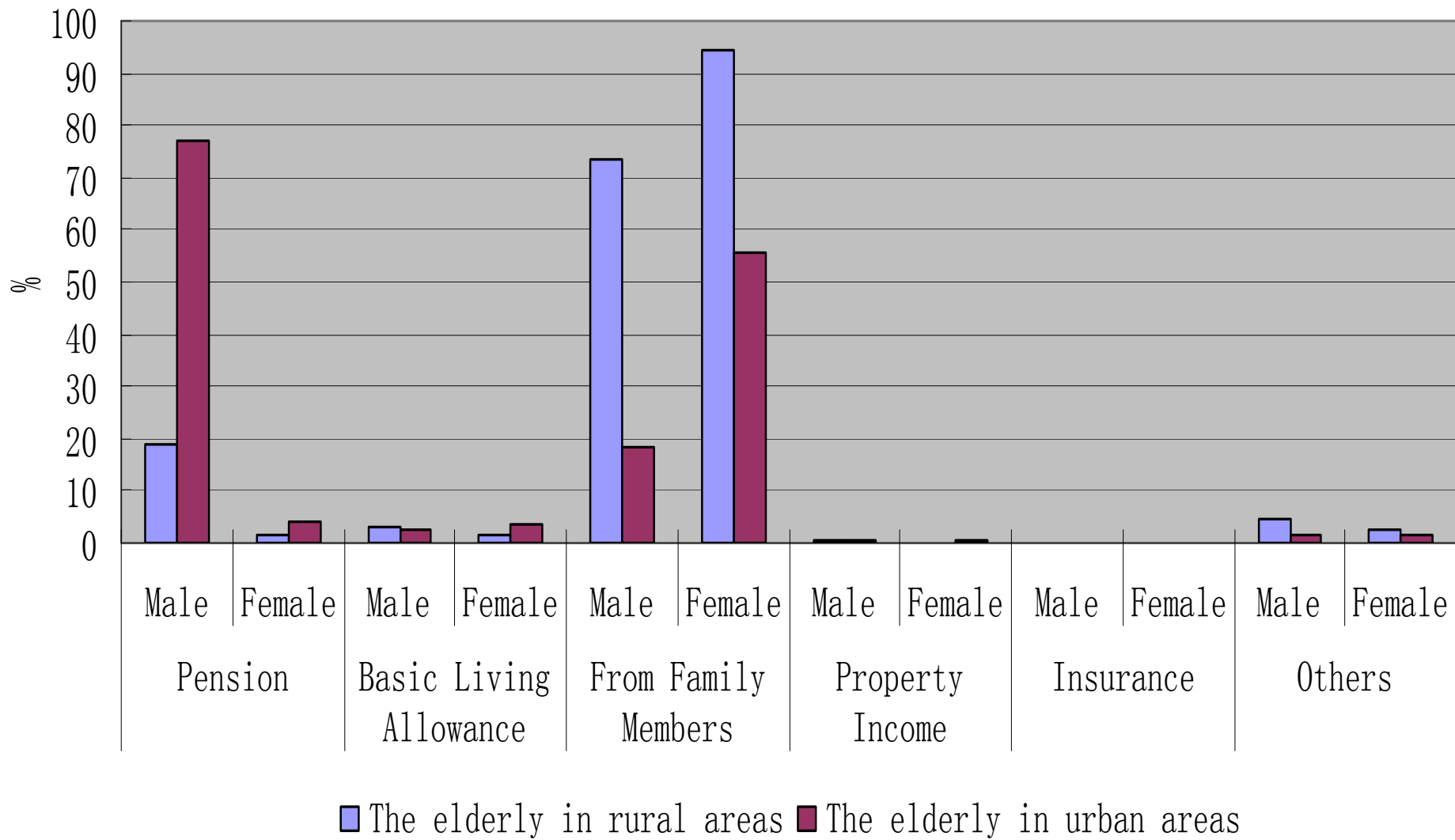
Resource: The 3rd, 4th and 5th China national population censuses; China National 1% population sample surveys in 1987, 1995 and 2005.

# AGING AND ELDERLY WELL-BEING: A NATIONAL PICTURE

## 3. 'Crisis' in old-age support in rural China

- Universal pension and health care systems have not been established in rural areas.
- Family, mainly adult children, still serves as the primary source of old-age support for the Chinese rural elderly. (Figure 5)
- Migration weakens family support for the elderly.





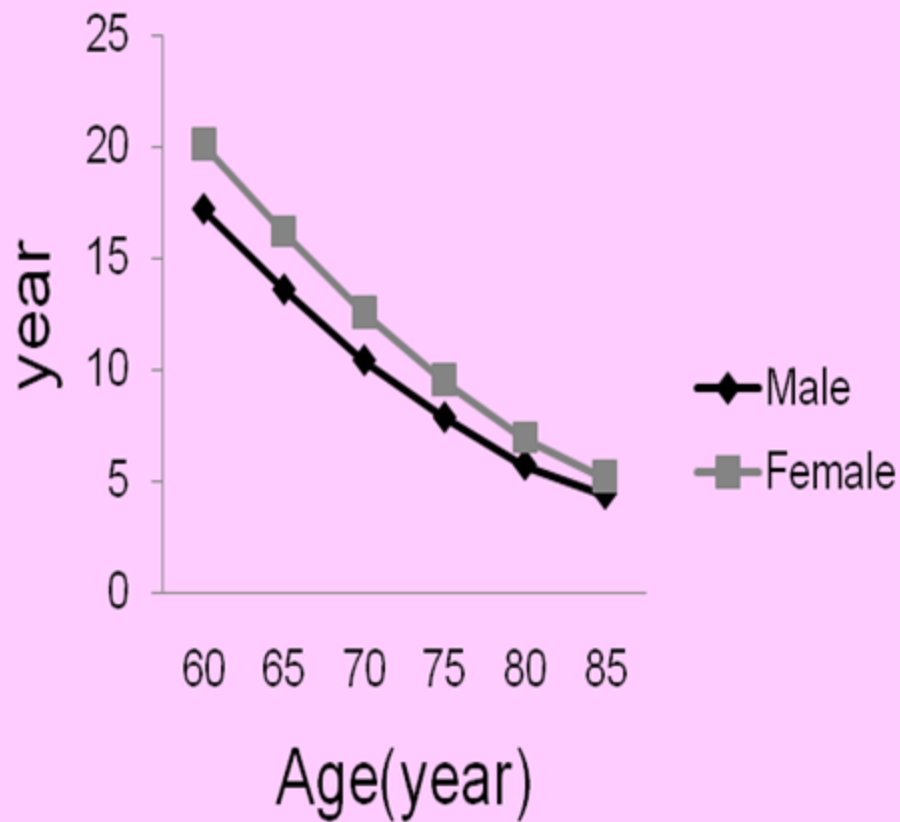
**Figure 5: The income source of China people aged 60 and above in rural and urban area in 2000**

Resource: The 5th China national population census

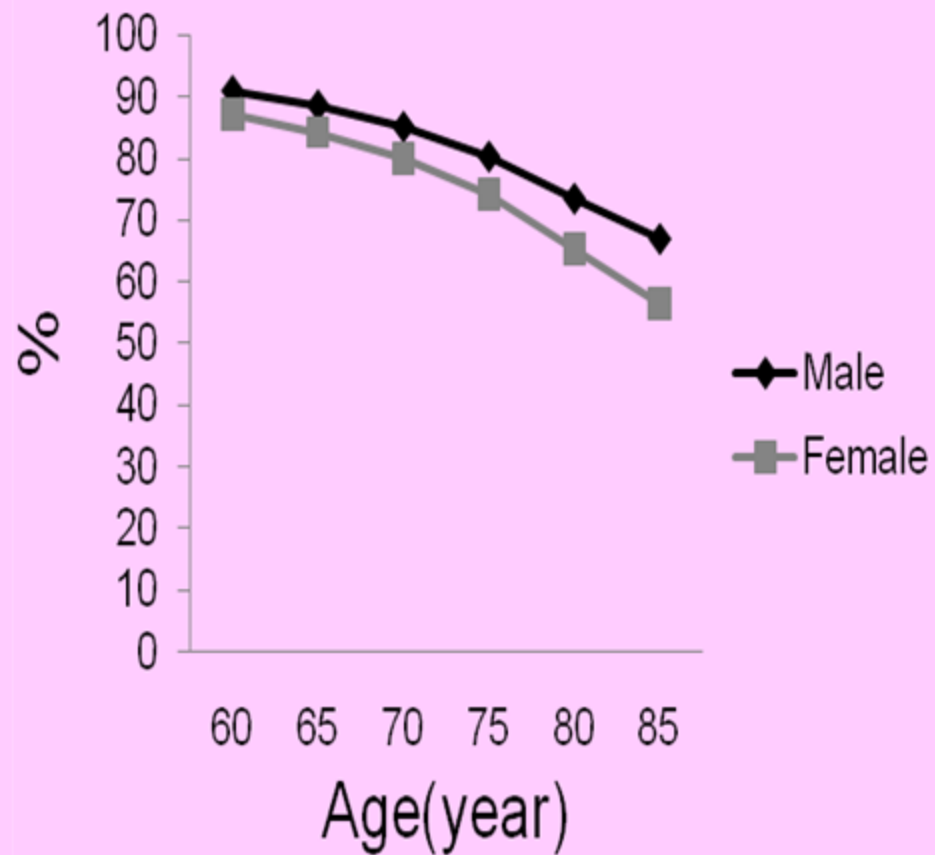
# AGING AND ELDERLY WELL-BEING: A NATIONAL PICTURE

## 4. The income and health condition of Chinese elderly

- A national survey in 2006 reveals that: Average annual income was 11,963 yuan (RMB) for urban elderly and 2,722 yuan for rural elderly in 2006; rural women earned the least
- Self-care ability and chronic conditions: Males are better than females, the elderly in urban area are better than those in rural area, rural females are the worst off
- Psychological well-being of the rural elderly is lower than that of the urban elderly
- Life expectancy of the female elderly is longer than male elderly, but the ratio of disability-free life expectancy for females is much lower (Figures 6 and 7)



**Figure 6: The life expectancy for male and female Chinese elderly in 2004**



**Figure 7: Ratio of disability-free life expectancy to life expectancy for male and female Chinese elderly in 2004**

Resource: Du Peng, Li Qiang. 2006. Disability-free life expectancy of Chinese elderly and its change between 1994 and 2004, Population Research (5): 9-16

# IMPACT OF OUT-MIGRATION ON WELL-BEING OF THE ELDERLY IN RURAL CHINA: WHY AND HOW

## 1. Intergenerational Corporate and Exchange

- Intergenerational transfer is mainly upward (from children to elderly); Providing old-age support is still the core content.
- Children's migration promotes the intergenerational "reciprocal" exchange behavior and, indirectly, exchange among children.



# IMPACT OF OUT-MIGRATION ON WELL-BEING OF THE ELDERLY IN RURAL CHINA: WHY AND HOW

## 2. Impact on Intergenerational Support (Figure 8)

### ■ Economic Support

- Migrant children provide more support
- Beneficial to the psychological and physical health of the elderly.

### ■ Instrument Support

- Out-migration lowers the instrument support children provided
- Help with household chores can be psychologically helpful, but help with personal care has a negative effect.

# IMPACT OF OUT-MIGRATION ON WELL-BEING OF THE ELDERLY IN RURAL CHINA: WHY AND HOW

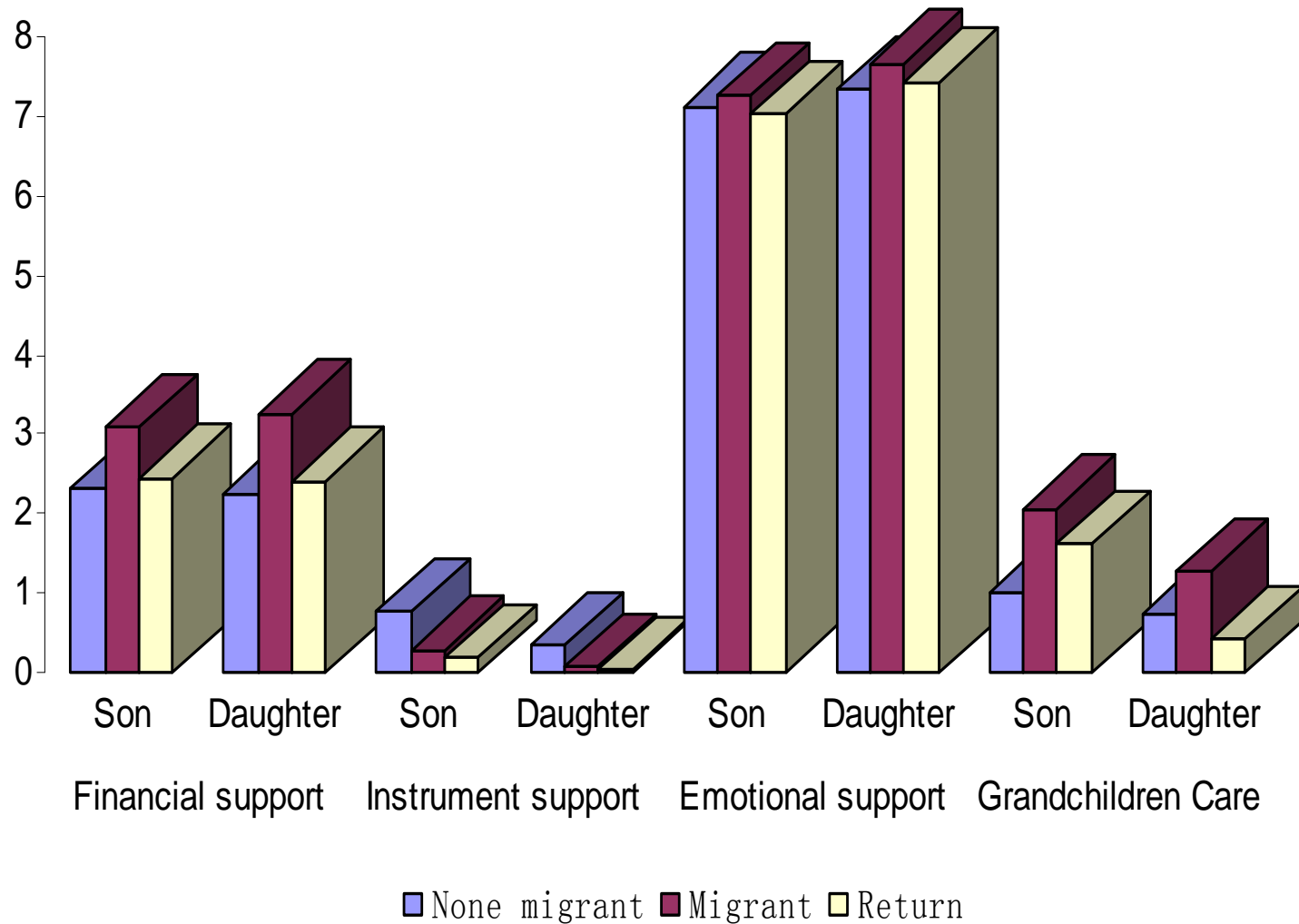
## 2. Impact on Intergenerational Support (Figure 8)

### ■ Emotional Support

- Migrant children provide more support
- Helps to build more harmonious family relations, but still cannot offset the loneliness of the elderly .

### ■ Grandchildren Care

- Elder parents provide more help for migrant children
- Helps to generate more economic and psychological returns, but increases burden of childcare.



**Figure 8: Average amount of intergenerational support : Comparison by adult children’s gender and migrating status**

Resource: The well-being of the elderly in Anhui Province, base-line survey in 2001

# IMPACT OF OUT-MIGRATION ON WELL-BEING OF THE ELDERLY IN RURAL CHINA : WHY AND HOW

## 3. Impact on the household by gender (Table 1)

- Changes by gender for elderly parents
  - Elder mothers tend to increase the transfers with adult children, by which they receive more compensatory support.
  - Elder fathers benefit more from economic help by children.
  - The negative impact on instrument support to elder fathers is more significant.
- Migration of adult children has increased the burden on elder mothers who are usually the main family care providers.
- “Activity of daily living” and “self-rated health” of elder mothers are both worse than elder fathers.

**Table 1: The impact of children’s migration on economic and instrument support:**

**HLM estimation (N=983)**

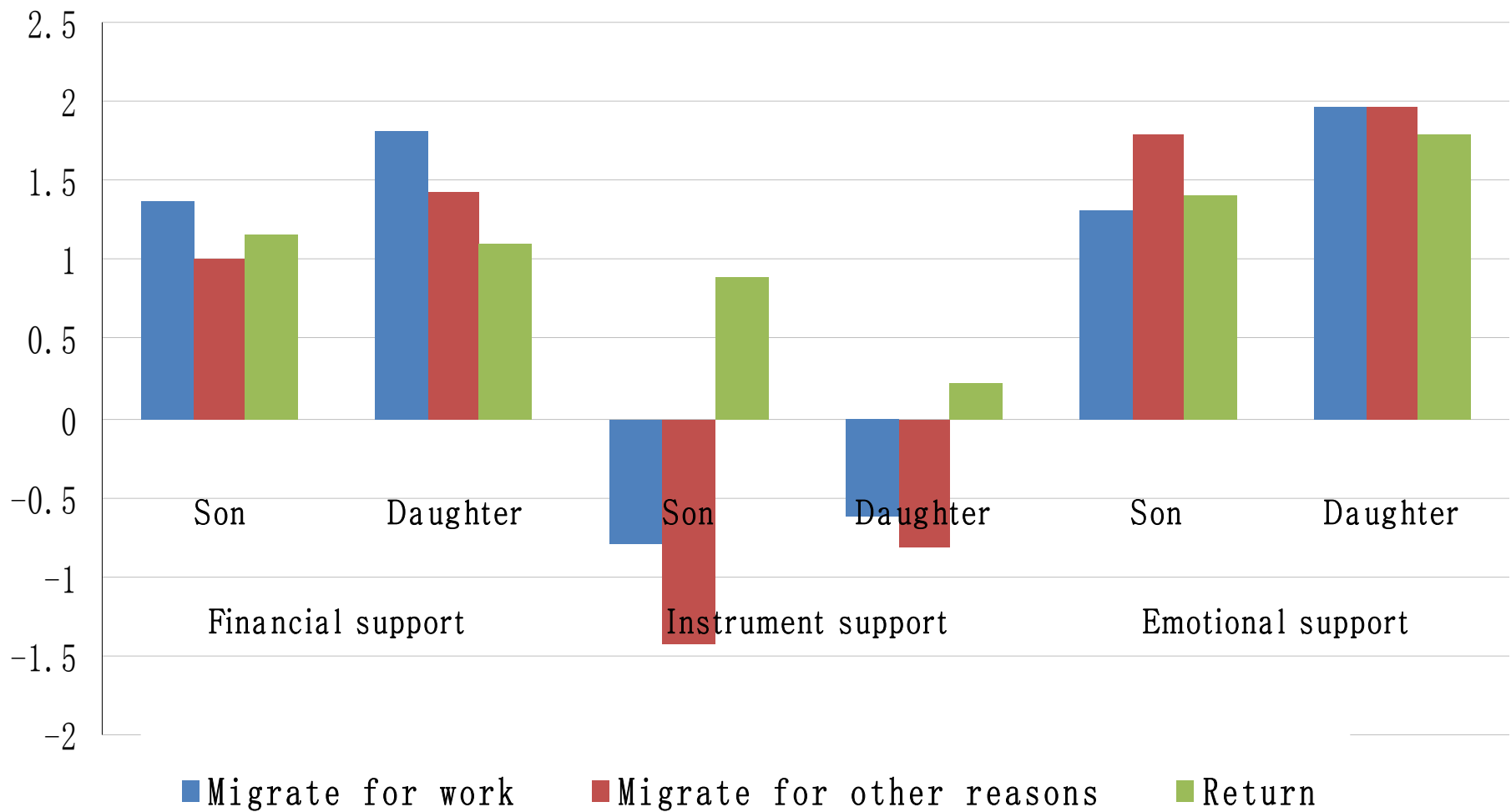
	<b>Economic Support</b>			<b>Instrument Support</b>		
	<b>Children→ Father</b>	<b>Children→ Mother</b>	<b>Children→ Father</b>	<b>Father→ Children</b>	<b>Children→ Mother</b>	<b>Mother→ Children</b>
<b><u>Having migrant son</u></b>						
No						
Yes	<b>0.277***</b>	<b>0.209***</b>	<b>-0.986*</b>	<b>-0.111</b>	<b>-0.336</b>	<b>-0.725*</b>
<b><u>Having migrant daughter</u></b>						
No						
Yes	<b>0.285***</b>	<b>0.265***</b>	<b>0.322</b>	<b>-0.227</b>	<b>-0.148</b>	<b>-0.889**</b>
<b><u>Grandchildren care</u></b>	<b>0.006</b>	<b>0.011*</b>	<b>0.089</b>	<b>0.117**</b>	<b>0.132*</b>	<b>0.208***</b>
<b><u>Living Arrangement</u></b>						
Live with spouse or alone						
Live with children or their spouse	<b>0.036</b>	<b>0.020</b>	<b>1.027*</b>	<b>0.936**</b>	<b>2.418***</b>	<b>2.670***</b>
Live with grandchildren only	<b>0.068</b>	<b>0.137*</b>	<b>-0.872+</b>	<b>-0.402</b>	<b>-0.482</b>	<b>-0.327</b>

Data: The well-being of the elderly in Anhui Province, base-line survey in 2001

# IMPACT OF OUT-MIGRATION ON WELL-BEING OF THE ELDERLY IN RURAL CHINA : WHY AND HOW

## 3. Impact on the household gender division (Figure9)

- Changes in the gender division of adult children
  - Weakening gender division in economic support
  - Weakening gender division in instrument support
  - Expanding gender differentials in emotional support
- Children's migration increase the importance of daughters in the family support for the elderly.
- Nevertheless, because Chinese traditional family support for the elderly still has sons as the primary providers, these changes have brought negative impact on psychological health of rural elders.



**Figure 9: Impact of children's migration on gender division in intergenerational support: Logistic regression results (Reference=none migrant)**

Resource: The well-being of the elderly in Anhui Province survey, base-line and the first follow-up wave in 2001 and 2003

# TRADITION AND EVALUTION OF FAMILY SUPPORT FOR THE ELDERLY

## Retaining Tradition

- Family old-age support is prevalent, sons are still the primary providers.
- Rural elderly women are traditionally assigned more domestic chores and remain more vulnerable.
- The traditional stem family is still the desired family structure for the rural elderly.
- The filial piety concept is still dominant.

## Changes

- Time-money exchange
- Elderly parents become more vulnerable
- The traditional concepts are modernizing
- Daughter's role is strengthening



# CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

## Conclusions

- Labour migration has significant impacts on the traditional family support, now characterized by coexistence of tradition and changes. Modernization and social transition have had a negative impact on elder's health in rural China.
- Chinese rural elderly make a great contribution to their family, alleviating burden of childcare and agricultural fieldwork for the younger generation.
- Migrant rural women are playing an increasingly important role in old-age support. With the reduction in the number of children, traditional mode of primarily relying on sons is becoming more and more unrealistic.
- The negative impact of children's migration is more significant on the female elderly.

# CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

## Prospects: Policy suggestions

- Increase financial budget for social security (pension, medicare and others) and social assistance.
- Strengthen economic independence of elders is a crucial way to improve their quality of life.
- Strengthen the cultural construction on "filial piety" and improve elders' social and family status.
- Promote equal rights and obligations for old-age support between sons and daughters by means of "Care for Girls " campaign, other advocacy and legislative means.
- Institute policies to improve rural elderly women's well-being.
- Gradually eliminate the differentials in social security between rural and urban population.



*Thanks !*