New Emigrants’ Network of Overseas Chinese: An Exploration into an International Migration Pattern
—— A Case Study on Shaxi Village

ZHAN Guan-qun  HUANG Yuan-zhen
(Fujian Normal University, Fuzhou 350007, China)

Abstract: This study focuses on people who go abroad from Shaxi Village, Mingxi County, Fujian Province, and discusses something about new emigrants’ network of overseas Chinese on the basis of field work. The study maintains that the new emigration will proceed in accordance with economic globalization and China’s reform and opening. The overseas migrant network is made up of three chains, emigrants, the emigration capital and oversea chain. The emigrants’ chain is established by the interaction between people at home and abroad due to their blood ties, geo-relation and geographical factors, the emigration capital is formed by native capital or oversea remittance from previous emigrants, which provides a circular economic support for later emigrants, the oversea chain is made of interpersonal relationship among new migrants.

Key words: overseas; new emigrants’ network; international migration; pattern

0. Introduction

The overseas new emigration is a hot point that has drawn much attention from the academic circle, and this phenomenon is critical in Fujian Province. Since the beginning of reform and opening policy in China, streams of people in Fujian going abroad give rise to massive overseas new emigrants[1], most of whom are peasants. Due to the fluidity and covet characteristic of the new emigrants, accurate number of them cannot be desired. Based on some relative documents, it is estimated that about 800,000 to 1,000,000,000 natives in Fujian have emigrated through different channels[2]. The overseas new emigration has changed the traditional layout of overseas Chinese in Fujian with a tendency of extending from south to north, from east to west, and from the coastal area to the inland area as well.

To explore the international migration pattern of overseas new emigrants, the authors have been to Mingxi County (known as “the county with largest number of
emigrants to Europe from Fujian”), Sanming City several times for the field work since August, 1999. Taking the peasants abroad as our research objects, the study tries to make a preliminary discussion of overseas new emigration. A viewpoint about overseas emigrant network is proposed here and criticism is welcome from any colleague and expert.

1. Research motive

Mingxi County, traditionally known as Guihua, lies in the Northwest of Fujian Province. 70 years ago, Mao Zedong described in his verse that “paths in Counties like Ninghua, Qingliu and Guihua are narrow, forest deep and moss slippery”, which vividly depicted Mingxi as a remote county that was hard to get due to its poor traffic condition. The total area of it is 1708.6 square kilometers, in which 2.198 million Chinese acres (86.5%) is for forestry use. The forest coverage is 81.2 %, ranking first in Fujian, and the cultivated area is 177,000 Chinese acres, accounting for 7%. It has a total population of 116,000, with an agricultural population of 93,600 accounting for its 80.7%[3].

No record about Mingxi citizens who went abroad on business kept before 1980s. It was reported that there was only a few returned overseas Chinese and dependents of overseas Chinese who worked or resettled there from south Fujian.

Such is Mingxi County, where three villagers in Shaxi Village, Shaxi Township, applied for immigration in 1989, which started with the new overseas emigration in the county. From then on, the number of emigrants grows rapidly and the applicants extend from Shaxi to the whole country. By May 2003, 11,358 residents in Mingxi have been issued passports, and 6,186 of them are emigrants accounting for 5.3% of the total population. The distribution of these new emigrants covers 23 countries in Europe, America and Asia. Most of them settle in Europe and about 71.9% of emigrants work and live in Italy, Hungary, Russia and Bulgaria. Mingxi has become “the county with largest number of emigrants to Europe in Fujian”[4].

For more information and careful observation, the authors take Shaxi Village in Shaxi Township as a base for the field work.

Shaxi Township lies in the east of Mingxi County. It is composed of 6 administrative villages, with 1925 households and a population of 6725. So far, the number of emigrants has exceeded one thousand. Shaxi Village, the site of Shaxi
Township, is noted for its first group of overseas new emigrants in Mingxi County and the largest number of emigrants in the village scale of the country. Shaxi, known as the place of origin of “the first county with emigrants to Europe in Fujian”, has a population of 1,042, with 1.83 Chinese acres of cultivated area and 39.3 Chinese acres of mountainous area per person. There was no overseas Chinese or emigrant before 1989. It was in 1989 when the first villager went to Italy via his relative in Zhejiang Province. Thereafter till October, 2003, altogether 352 villagers had gone abroad and most of them settled in European countries. This figure makes up 37.8% of the total population. In addition to 80 villagers who obtain passports, the number of emigrants and would-be emigrants is supposed to account for 41.5%\[5\]. A typical and interesting phenomenon was that all male adults under the age of 40 had gone abroad except one in the Shaxi Street.

What we wanted to investigate would cover all aspects about the new emigration issue. In the course of our investigation in January, 2000, two phenomena there attracted our special attention.

The first one was that the field was cultivated as usual. Going around the village, the authors found not a single land left uncultivated. As we know, a great many of villagers have gone abroad and most of them are the backbone labor force at the age from 18 to 45. Compared with those in coastal areas, Shaxi villagers possess more cultivated area per person. So, what puzzled us was that fields were well uncultivated in the village whereas the number of emigrants was growing.

The second one was that the Shaxi business office of China’s Agricultural Bank was closed. One of our concerns is overseas remittances, but we were greatly surprised to find that all the financial offices in the township failed to operate and asked: “Why does the Agricultural Bank have to close down since there’s a great amount of remittances from abroad?”

We didn’t notice these two phenomena before investigation, so they were not included in our program of the field work. However, we decided to pay special attention to them as soon as we convinced that there would be potential issues about the new overseas emigration.

2. Interaction between overseas emigrants and native immigrants

First of all, we made an investigation on land cultivation. Visiting Director Luo of Village Commission and other villagers, we got to know that Shaxi is
topographically smooth, with fertile land and convenient transportation, compared with neighboring villages like Gaiyang, Xiayang and Xiafang, etc. If the same labor and cost on fertilizer and pesticide are put in the same area of land, the harvest in Shaxi Village is much better than that of those remote mountainous terraces. As many native villagers went abroad, peasants from remote Gaiyang Township came to Shaxi to rent their land. At the beginning, the renter should give some grain to the land contractor in addition to paying agricultural taxes. Later on, as more and more villagers went abroad and much more land became available for the newcomers, no grain was needed to give to the land contractor. Meanwhile, the newcomers showed a variety of their native places. Some of them came from Gaiyang, Xiayang and Xiafang of Mingxi County, and some from neighboring Counties like Ninghua, Qingliu.

It is reported that those early arrivals either from Gaiyang, Xiayang and Xiafang or from neighboring Counties like Ninghua, Qingliu are relatives or friends of Shaxi villagers, and some of them went land there via the introduction by staff members who worked in Shaxi from other places. On the other hand, the early arrivals would recommend relatives or friends of their own to join them when more Shaxi natives went abroad. Moving with the whole family from their hometown, such peasants live and work in Shaxi Village, their children going to school there. This phenomenon is actually known as a mini-scaled emigration, which is called “internal emigration”.

A questionnaire survey conducted involves 81 households, 26.4% of the total 307. Emigrants in those surveyed households account for 61% of that of the whole village. As far as the question “By whom the family-contracted land is cultivated?” is concerned, 62 respondents, 76.5% of the total number, chose “By people from other place”, among them which 47 respondents chose “By Gaiyang natives”, ranking first, 9 chose “By Ninghua natives”, 2 chose “By Changting natives”, 2 chose “By Xiayang natives and one chose “By Xiafang native” and “By Shaxi native” respectively. 11 respondents chose “By ourselves”, accounting for 13.6%. Eight of the questionnaire (9.9% of all) remained unanswered. These data coincide with the interview, which testifies the reliability of our investigation.

Then our focus turned to the small-scaled migration caused by Shaxi emigrants. A visit was paid to Mr. Ma, a teacher of Shaxi Junior Middle school from Ninghua County, and to Mr. Huang, who was recommended by Mr. Ma to farm in
Mr. Huang, one of Mr. Ma’s relatives, was originally a villager of Shuangshi Village, Caofang Township, Ninghua County. His hometown is remote and the traffic there is rather inconvenient. In Mr. Ma’s words, crops, say oranges, grown in Shaxi Village sell more easily than those in Ninghua, because they are purchased by fixed merchants in the harvest season. In Ninghua, however, oranges are impossible to be carried away even if they are given as free gift. It’s lucky for Mr. Huang to have moved to a better surrounding like Shaxi from mountainous area. This kind of chance was rare in the past. The interview shows that peasants from other places are very much the same as Mr. Huang.

Mr. Huang told us that he came here about six years ago when his two children were young, but now they have grown up, the eldest being 20 and youngest 17. After finishing Junior Middle school, neither of them continued schooling nor was willing to do farm work; instead, they both asked for going abroad. Mr. Huang was making every effort to meet their demand.

The investigation showed that four children of emigrants from Ninghua had gone abroad. Mr. Ma told us that his brother-in-laws, a Ninghua native, former Deputy Manager of Mingxi Wine factory, had gone to Europe a few years before. When he returned home, he encouraged his relatives to go abroad and a group of them followed.

Three years after our investigation, we were told by Director Luo that 18 peasants from other places had gone abroad by the end of October, 2003. Again, we told by Mr. Liang, vice town head in charge of overseas Chinese affairs that almost 80 non-native peasants working in Shaxi Township had emigrated, 40 of whom were from Gaiyang Town.

This question is worth considering. Like the Huang’s, many peasants from Ninghua and Changting County or Gaiyang, Xiayang and Xiafang Townships were brought here by the waves of emigration. Most Shaxi villagers went abroad, which is called “international emigrants”. The land they left is cultivated and their living surrounding is filled by newcomers. Then what else did these people leave in their hometown after they left for Shaxi? Suppose some of them became rich through emigration, then it would be a vivid example for their fellow villagers in their hometown.

Such is the case that internal emigrants emerge quietly when overseas new emigrants appeared in Shaxi Village. As soon as these internal emigrants save
enough money and have qualification for application, many of them join the streams of overseas emigration. In this sense, internal emigrants are candidates of the overseas emigrants. Mingxi’s overseas new emigration is characterized by the linkage between overseas emigration and internal emigration.

The countryside in China is characterized by its centralization and exclusiveness. One of its remarkable features is that an ethnic group often lives together in one community. People in countryside tend to settle together according to their surname. For example, there are two surnames in Shaxi Village; one is Lian, the other Luo. Of course, there are some people with other surnames, but they are small in number and resettled here from other places. Normally, the larger the village is, the greater develops the local economy, and the more various the local surnames are. Nevertheless, the smaller a village is, the more centralized its surname distributes. And people with major surnames often bully on those with minor surnames. However, in Shaxi Village, the natives and the newcomers are able to get along with each other very well. It seems that the waves of overseas new emigration does not mean how many villagers have gone abroad, but mean that a series of changes has been brought, which extends from Shaxi and Mingxi County to surrounding areas. Its influence is so great that it will take a long time for us to evaluate it.

3. Where does the emigration fund come from?

The expenses for going abroad and overseas remittances are one of our basic concerns, to which we pay more attention when finding the close of business office of Agricultural Bank in the town. The investigation shows that that there is only withdrawal of money but no deposit of money in the bank. The villagers withdraw money from bank for the emigration expenses for themselves, family members or their relatives. No money is deposited because the bank office is unable to offer foreign currency transition. At that time even in Mingxi County there wasn’t a financial organization capable of doing that, let alone in Shaxi Township; the foreign currencies had to be deposited in some banks in Sanming City (Note: Service of foreign currency transition is now available in Mingxi County.) Agricultural Bank there has to close down due to the situation above.

It seems to have explained the closure of local Agricultural Bank, but the conclusion is not convincing because there are two questions yet to be answered.
One is “Where does the fund for emigration come from?” The other is “Where do the remittances from the emigrants go?”

By the end of June, 2000, the number of emigrants in Shaxi Village has reached 257. The investigation indicates that the fund of emigration was about 60,000 - 80,000 Yuan per person at that time. Suppose the average cost is 70,000 Yuan, then the total expenses of the new emigrants of Shaxi Village was about 17.99 million Yuan. The business office of Agricultural Bank in Shaxi closed down in 1998. The financial business office before the closure offered financial service for six administrative villages, 51 natural villages in the whole Township; its entire amount of deposit that time was less than one million Yuan, which was obviously insufficient for the emigration expenses. We were told that most of the expenses they needed were borrowed from either relatives or friends with interest much higher than of the bank.

In the previous questionnaire, as far as the emigration fund is concerned, two questions are designed. One is “Where does the fund for the first family member’s emigration come from?” and the other is “Where does the money for the other family members’ emigration come from?” Each question is allowed for multiple choices.

The response to the first question is like this. No one answered “From governmental loan.” 77 answered “Borrowing from relatives”. 73 chose “Borrowing from friends.” and 49 “Using original savings.” None chose “Others.” One copy remained unanswered.

The response to the second question is shown as follows. “From family members already abroad” (40 respondents), “From governmental loan” (0 respondent), “Borrowing from relatives” (38 respondents), “Borrowing from friends” (35 respondents), “Using original savings” (3 respondents), “Others” (0 respondent) and unanswered (38 copies).

The results of our interview and questionnaire survey are identical. The analysis finds that there are mainly three approaches to pooling emigration fund—borrowing from relatives or friends, earlier emigrants’ support and original savings of the family. The investigation shows that the average savings of Shaxi household was low before 1989, and it’s rare that a family could afford the total expenses or even main part of it at one time. So the family savings are auxiliary and make up only a small proportion. As for the second approach, we can see that
if family members go abroad one by one at short interval, the previous emigrant is often unable to provide much money for the following emigrants, for the first one has to pay back his debt of emigration expenses. However, if the members go abroad at long interval, thing are different. Thus, the main part of the emigration expenses seems to be borrowed from their relatives and friends. Who on earth are these “relatives and friends”? The survey indicates that the previous emigrants, small in number, did borrow money from their relatives and friends. When more and more people planned to go abroad, they have to turn to previous emigrants, as their relatives and friends are unable to provide such huge sum of fund.

4. Where do the overseas remittances go?

We observed and studied how much money the emigrants remitted home and what was the money spent on. Actually, the source of emigration fund and the consumption of remittances are two aspects of the same question.

Firstly, focus was on the amount of remittances from abroad every year. According to the investigation in June, 2000, 174 emigrants each remitted money home, except the 20 early couple emigrants who seldom remitted money back because of their investment on leather workshops and 43 children. It is estimated that the overseas remittances of the whole village will approximately amounts to 8.7 million Yuan per year if every emigrant annually send back home 50,000 Yuan on average. This is said to be a conservative estimation. Many people, including Mr. Lian, vice town head in charge of overseas affair, believe that the total amount should be more than 10 million Yuan. It is difficult to make accurate calculation as the overseas remittances are dynamic and transferred to Shaxi Village through different channels. However, it is an undeniable fact that the overseas remittance grows in direct proportion to the number of emigrants.

Secondly, attention was paid to the expenditure of remittances. Remittances are used in four ways, that is, to repay the debt, to support family, to build or buy houses and to buy domestic electric appliances, etc.

The debt is often paid back in two or two and a half years. Annually 20-30 debtors, not all of them, repay the money. Suppose each of 25 debtors pays 40,000 Yuan per year, the total sum will amount to 1 million Yuan. Moreover, this sum of money will again function as flow capital.
By June, 2000, there had been 164 households with emigrants in Shaxi Village. Suppose 10,000 Yuan is used to support one household, then totally 1.64 million Yuan is needed; if the expenditure includes domestic electric appliances, 2 million Yuan is sufficient.

Building or buying house, though not widespread, is quite a big expenditure. According to Director Luo of Shaxi Village, there have been three waves of building house in the village since the reform and opening-up policy. In 1978, there were 50 households built their houses without overseas remittance. In 1990, there were 80, which had nothing to do with remittances because few villagers went abroad at that time. In 1996, when the old streets of Shaxi undertook reconstruction, only about 20 households used overseas remittances to build new houses. By January, 2000, three emigrants’ family of Shaxi Village built their houses in Mingxi County seat, each of them having spent 200,000 Yuan. Four households purchased apartments in Sanming City; each spent 80,000 Yuan. Another two bought apartments in Fuzhou and Xiamen City respectively; each of their cost is less than 400,000 Yuan. According to his estimation, the total sum of this investment is impossible to surpass 2.6 million Yuan. What’s more, the money isn’t paid in a year. Suppose the expenditure is ended in three years’ time, the money spent per year should be about 860,000 Yuan. If the price rising is taken into consideration, the annual expenditure is about 1 million Yuan.

When asked whether the money was invested in some enterprises, Director Luo gave a negative reply. The reason is that their individual economic strength is not powerful and establishing enterprises is full of hazard. There are 20 couples who invested money on leather workshops in Italy, but this bears no relation with overseas remittance.[8]

According to our calculation, among the total 10 million Yuan of overseas remittances in 2000, the actual expenditure is 2 million Yuan on supporting family and buying domestic electrical appliances, and 1 million Yuan on building or purchasing houses. If 30% of the remittances are deposited in the bank, there will be 3 million Yuan savings deposits per year. Suppose another 10% is arranged for flexible use, the annual expenditure is 1 million Yuan. Altogether the money amounts to 7 million Yuan. Based on this elastic estimation, there is still 3 million Yuan of circulating capital in Shaxi Village. Normally, the total emigration fund for new emigrants in Shaxi Village per year is supposed to be 2 million Yuan. The
overseas remittances are sufficient to cover all the expenditure. We believe that our analysis and calculation correspond with actual circumstances.

Finally, attention was concentrated on money borrowing of the emigrants. In Director Luo’s words, the practical way is that new emigrants borrow money from others and then repay it with what they have earned abroad; when they finish paying debts, they begin to lend their savings later emigrants. When asked whether emigrants and their family members are willing to lend money to others, Mr. Luo said that normally people are reluctant to lend money especially a great sum of money to others because credit and ability to repay of the debtors are indefinite. However, things are different in Shaxi Village. Villagers are ready to lend money to the would-be emigrants for the following reasons. First, they don’t worry about being repudiated a debt. The debtor will lose his credit for repudiating the debt, and he will be looked down upon at home and abroad. Secondly, they are sure of the debtor’s ability to repay the money. Thirdly, they receive high interest and this kind of practice is by no means risky. Therefore, borrowing money for emigration is out of question[9].

We can see from this that a large amount of money keeps circulating between the emigrants and would-be emigrants.

5. An invisible network

The destination of the overseas emigrants is foreign countries. They follow the principle of transferring from economically underdeveloped area to developed area. However, because of the difficult entrance to developed countries, they tend to reach their destination indirectly via a third country as an easier access.

There are no exceptions for the emigrants from Shaxi Village, who enter countries in west Europe via countries in east Europe. Special attention is paid to their emigrating time and the countries in which they live and work. In the survey of June, 1, 2000, some items designed are “When did your family member go abroad?”, “Which country was s/he first bound for?” and “Which country is s/he living now?” The response is shown as follows.

The responses show that “The first country s/he was bound for” are Italy (129 respondents), Germany (6 respondents), Hungary (5 respondents), Austria (8 respondents), Russia (5 respondents), Dutch (3 respondents) and Brasilia (1 respondent).

The answers to “The country s/he is living now” are Italy (129 respondents), Germany (8 respondents), Hungary (4 respondents), Austria (8 respondents), Russia (4 respondents), Dutch (3 respondents) and Brasilia (1 respondent).

The emigrating time and distribution of these new emigrants reflect the general flow of all emigrants in Mingxi County.

What we are more concerned about is their situation in foreign countries. How did they live? How did they look for jobs? How did they settle down and get on with their lives? With these questions, we interviewed 7 new emigrants with the qualification of residence, who returned home for a visit from foreign countries. Here are the records of the interview.

Ms Deng, married, 30 years old, graduating from Junior Middle school, has been in Italy for two years and is now working in a leather clothes factory in Prato. Her two sisters went abroad much earlier. They all live in the same city, but do not work in the same factory. Deng told us that her boss was from Wenzhou of Zhejiang Province. Most Mingxi emigrants prefer to work in the factories run by Chinese rather than by Italians, because they are allowed to work for only 8 hours a day in Italian-owned factories, whereas they are allowed longer working hours and can earn more money in Chinese-owned ones. Based on the principle of more pay for more work, many emigrants work for 15 hours a day as the purpose of their emigration is to earn as much money as possible. Workers’ accommodations are provided by the boss in Italy.

According to Ms. Deng, emigrating is for nothing but earning money. Though homesick, they are unable to return home frequently. First, they must obtain the official status, in other words, the right of residence; otherwise they won’t be permitted to enter the country again after they have left. Secondly, they must earn enough money. They have to work harder in the first two years to repay the borrowed money for emigration. Only the bosses have more chances to return to China to replenish their stock of goods.
Mr. Lu is about 40 years old. His wife went to Italy in 1995 and since then she has been working in a Chinese-owned leather clothes factory. He joined his wife in 1997. Both of them do the same kind of job.

Mr. Zhang is 38 years old. He went to Hungary in 1997, and now is doing business on clothing in Budapest. First set up a street stall selling clothes, shoes and hats, he then rented a stall and started wholesale business and retail as well. What he sells is made in China and his business becomes more and more prosperous.

Mr. Huang is 35 years old. He went to Italy in 1997 and is now selling both fresh flowers and dried flowers in Florence. He packs the raw material from Holland, and then exports the product. Mr. Huang used to work as a dried flower packer for a boss from Zhejiang province. Later he made a contract to do the flower business by himself. The business is brisk especially before the Christmas. He hires two or three workers and more when the business is brisk. Most worker are his fellow villagers.

Mr. Deng, 37 years old, went to Italy in 1997, now is a leather clothes worker in Florence.

Mr. Luo, 38 years old, went to Italy in April, 1997. He is working in a leather clothes factory owned by Chinese. The owner of the factory, Lv, also from Shaxi Village, went to Italy in 1991. The so-called leather clothes factory is actually a workshop of family type with 8 sewing machines and 10 workers dealing with raw material processing.

Mr. Lian, 35 years old, went abroad in 1993, is working in a clothing factory in Milan, Italy. His boss is from Lishui, Zhejiang province and owns a workshop-like factory that is engaged in business of making cotton fabric clothes. Not knowing how to operate the machine at the beginning, Mr. Lian did some odd jobs. Gradually, he learned how to sew and how to cut out clothes and has now become a skilled clothes maker. His boss treats him very well lest he should change the job.

Mr. Luo, 30 years old, is a native of Gaiyang Township, Mingxi County. As a nephew of a Shaxi villager, he grew up and went to school in Shaxi Village and is closely link with relatives there. He went abroad in 1998 and now works in a factory in Florence, Italy, making cotton fabric clothes.
They said, “Compared with the earlier emigrants, we earn a little less money than them, because more emigrants competing for the jobs makes each of us earn less. However, so long as you are skilled, you are capable of getting more money. Since many Chinese set up clothing factories, more workers are badly needed. So it’s not difficult to find a job. We often change jobs when we notice that the salary in the factory is lower than that in others. All of us have worked in more than one factory.”

Different from the other five emigrants, Mr. Zhang and Mr. Huang are do business themselves. They have to communicate with many foreigners, but they get on very well with the natives in Hungary and Italy. They find it more difficult to do business than ever before because more and more people do the same trade. They knew little about Hungary and Italy at the beginning, but now they feel that both the surroundings and people of foreign countries are good. If they spend the same time and labor abroad, they can get much more income than that in their hometown. Even though now they earn less money than before, the reward is still much more than the result of farming in their village.

When asked whether they got to know foreign countries before emigration, they said they knew nothing or only a little about them. What they knew is that they could earn money there. Since many emigrants fare well abroad, they don’t care about how the foreign countries are like. In addition, they generally go abroad following the previous emigrants, most of whom are their relatives or friends, or at least familiar fellow villagers. Of course, some of them go abroad with emigrants from other places. For example, Mr. Lian went with one of his friend from Wencheng, Zhejiang province. There are more overseas Chinese from Wencheng in Europe, and they has a relatively long history there. As a matter of fact, the waves of emigration in Shaxi Village began with the leading of some Zhejiang emigrants. Hu Zhiming, the first emigrant in Shaxi Village and Mingxi County, has some relatives in Wencheng, Zhejiang province. In 1960s, 20th century, a group of people moved from Wencheng to Shaxi Village. Hu’s mother was one of them, who married a Shaxi native and gave birth to Hu and his brother. In 1989, Mr. Hu went to Italy via Hungary with the help of his relatives in Wencheng, Zhejiangjiang. As he made great success there, he headed his younger brother and some other Shaxi natives abroad. From then on, more and more people have gone abroad with the help of either relatives or neighbors.
When asked whether their going abroad meant following the crowd blindly, their replies are negative. As there are already some relatives or friends or fellow villagers abroad, they feel relieved even though no jobs are found for them. What a new emigrant worries about is his job and accommodation. Actually, these problems are often well solved because bosses in Italy are responsible for the accommodation for the workers. For example, one of Lian’s friends worked for a boss and provided food and room for Lian before he himself found a job. Later on, when Lian’s relatives and friends came, they enjoyed the accommodation offered by their bosses. If a couple works in the same factory, the boss would provide a single room for them.

They explained why they’re offered free accommodation. The reason why the bosses don’t drive them away is that it's not easy to find appropriate workers, especially skilled ones. On one hand, both the bosses and the workers have to cooperate to assure interest of each other. On the other hand, all being Chinese, they are relatively able to live in harmony. They would get angry and leave if their friends are driven away. Who else will do the job for the boss? They can easily find jobs in other places; however, the boss finds it difficult to employ new workers right away, especially in busy seasons.

There seems to be an invisible network among the emigrants from Mingxi County in Italy. So long as there are relatives or friends of yours in Italy, you needn’t worry about place to live in or food to eat as soon as you arrive there. You may take it easy to find a job and may get help from others. Italy is a country that has a great demand for labor, which can be indicated by its frequent amnesties to illegal immigrants. Similar interpersonal networks, to some extent, are found to exist in other European countries. Maintained through blood ties and geo-links, the invisible network not only supports the emigrants from Mingxi, but also virtually encourages those who are looking forward to going abroad.

6. A pattern of the emigrants’ chain

In summary, taking Shaxi Village as example and its peasants that have gone abroad as our object of study, we tried to find out the formation and the operating mode of the group of overseas new emigration in China. Then we came up with the idea of the emigration network, maintaining that the network consists of three
chains—the chain of domestic would-be emigrants, the chain of emigration fund and the chain of overseas emigrants.

The emigration chain emerges in the great background of reform and opening-up policy and economic globalization, which reflects the trend of the time. But for the less-restricted political environment, the large-scaled group of emigrants wouldn’t have come into being. Without the globalization of labor force and its following changes brought by the economic globalization, the emigrant group couldn’t have developed so rapidly. It is worth noting that the reason why we showed no special concern for the purpose of the emigration is that nearly all of emigrants do that for nothing but earning money.

The network of emigrants is formed by blood ties and geo-links, which has inherited traditional “chain emigration” and formed a distinctive characteristic indicated by the linkage between overseas emigrants and internal emigrants and close connection between the emigrants and would-be ones. Shaxi villagers who went abroad are called overseas emigrants. And the newcomers to Shaxi from other places rented their originally contracted fields, which is called internal emigration. As time goes by, some young peasants from other places or children of those peasants also went abroad. The more people moved to Shaxi, the more of them became overseas emigrants, who again led the way for people in their native place to join waves of emigration. Though there haven’t been so many newcomers going abroad in Shaxi, the trend keeps growing. This is called “the effect of Shaxi Village”. What is worth mentioning is that this effect has gone beyond the village. Its influence is so intense that it has aroused more and more “Shaxi Villages” in the neighboring towns and even cities, where peasants, affected by this effect, have gone abroad one after another through blood ties, geo-links and other channels. A new wave of emigration is formed in this area.

The same thing happens in the overseas Chinese towns and the coastal areas. The authors once paid a visit to some administrative villages in both suburban Tingjiang Township of Fuzhou and Guantou Township in Lianjiang County. We were told that that the fields there were almost farmed by peasants from other counties or even other provinces. Some of them have gone abroad, and others are preparing for that. Local people would leave for America instead of Europe but the expenses are so huge that they find it more difficult to America Shaxi villagers to Europe.
People keep going abroad one after another in a village or a township, but the emigration is limited after all no matter how big the number of emigrants is. However, the number will keep growing infinitely if more towns, cities or even provinces are involved. The situation in the overseas Chinese towns and their neighboring area is developing in this way.

Another chain, the chain of fund for emigration, is of the same importance. A great sum of money is necessary for going abroad. Unable to loan money from governmental financial organizations, the would-be emigrants have to pool money through folk approach. The earlier emigrants were able to raise fund for emigration through various channels, as there were not many emigrants thus the total fund wasn’t too great. When more and more people planned to go abroad, they had to raise fund more through the overseas remittances. What we emphasize is that the fund for later emigration is mainly the direct or indirect part of remittances from those who are already abroad, which is indicated in our result of investigation. The operation of network is like this. The first group of emigrants lends money to the second group, and the fund needed by the third group may come from both the first and the second one. The following groups repeat the same practice. It manifests that the overseas emigrants and would-be emigrants keep close contact with each other not only in information exchange but also in economic aspect. Thus the circulation of folk loan gives rise to the chain of emigration fund.

The two chains mentioned above exist at home, but the destination for the emigrants is abroad. How do they settle down? How do they live and work in foreign countries? They need help and information from others as these questions matter a lot to their survival in foreign surroundings. And those who are ready to offer help must be the new emigrants’ family members, relatives, friends or fellow villagers. Having inherited the similar traditional “chain of emigration”, they formed a special network maintained by blood ties and geo-links, which is in essence a network of interpersonal relationship abroad. The phenomenon of overseas new emigrants is still not allowed to flow in the world as it is incompatible with current tendency of economic globalization. Free economic globalization and restricted flow of international labor force constitute a contradiction, manifesting the developed countries’ unjust treatment upon the developing ones. It is the contradiction that arouses the chain of overseas emigrants. The emigrants have
no choice in reality but to depend on this original network, which shows their
protest against unjust international situation as well.

The network of overseas emigration, which includes the chain of domestic
would-be emigrants, the chain of emigration fund and the chain of overseas
emigrants, has been formed and it will proceed to work. The authors maintain that
it is a new pattern of international migration worthy of special concern.

Notes:
[1] The definition of new emigrants is not exact, as it refers to all the people that have gone abroad
except those on official errand. The majority of it is peasants, which is characterized by their
inclination of emigration.
[2] It was estimated in the end of 1990s that there were about 600,000 emigrants since the reform and
opening, 60% of whom were natives in Fuzhou City. The latest investigation shows that there are
600,000 emigrants from Fuzhou, including 260,000 from Fuqing, 200,000 from Changle, and 100,000
from Lianjiang respectively. Thus, the number of Fujian province is supposed to be 800,000 to
1,000,000. This figure may not be accurate, but it tends to testify a fact that there has been an
enormous group of new emigrants since the beginning of 1980s.
[4] Ibid.
[5] The data is provided by Director Luo and some members of Shaxi Village committee.
[6] The specific data of the survey in this paper is listed as follows: There are altogether 307 households
(including singles) in Shaxi Village, and among them 81 (26.4% of all) are included in the survey. The
total population of it is 1009 (554 males and 545 females), and 430, accounting for 39.1%, participated
in the activity. Among all the 164 households in the village include family members that went abroad,
we surveyed 81 (49.4%) of them. By the end of June, 1st, 2000, the number of emigrants in Shaxi
Village amounted to 257, and 157 (61%) involved in the questionnaire.
[7] This is the record through a telephone interview with Lian Luqin, Vice County head on December,
[8] This is the record through an interview with Director Luo of Shaxi Village on January, 30th, 2000.
[9] Ibid.

Supplementary statement:
This paper is composed on the basis of field investigation and the authenticity of it is
guaranteed. Except notes after the article, the data and facts listed are all from our
research material.

Authors and their working units:
Professor ZHAN Guan-qun, Society and History Institute of Fujian Normal University.
Professor HUANG Yuan-zhen, Foreign Languages Institute of Fujian Normal
University.