

Rural modernization and the remaking of the rural citizen in China: Village redevelopment, migration and precarity

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Abstract

The Chinese government's ambitious plans to modernize the countryside have significant impacts for rural populations. Upgrading or relocating villages is one component of this vision with profound implications for rural citizens. We use multiple social science research methods to investigate ongoing rural transformation in two villages designated for Village Redesign in Anhui Province, China. We show that the Village Redesign process is negatively impacting on the migration–development nexus and the resultant limbo deepens the precarity of high-mobility, translocal households who already experience secondary forms of citizenship and limited social protections. This study raises further questions about the ongoing transformation of rural China and questions the modernizing rural agenda of the Chinese state.

KEYWORDS

China, countryside, migration–development nexus, precarity, rural transformation, translocal

1 | MIGRATION AND PRECARIETY IN RURAL CHINA

In present day China, vulnerabilities associated with the ongoing transformation of the countryside, are characterized by highly mobile, multi-sited or translocal households, increasing levels of job and labour market insecurity, variable and unpredictable income, secondary forms of citizenship and limited social protection. Building or constructing a

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new socialist countryside (NSC) (*shehui zhuyi xinnongcun jianshe/建设社会主义新农村*) represents the most recent iteration of the state's desire to develop rural areas (Wilson & Zhang, 2019). The NSC was first elucidated during the 2006–2010 5-year plan with key constituents carried forward in subsequent 5-year plans. However, the original focus of the NSC has drifted from one which was peasant-centred, participatory and encompassing a range of different aspects to that which now focuses almost exclusively on housing and land (Looney, 2015).

Despite the drift in focus towards housing and land, the implementation of the NSC agenda is far from straightforward. The central Chinese Government guidelines lack specificity and mean that there is considerable scope for local interpretation and implementation. For instance, Ahlers (2014) argues that the manifestation of the NSC in specific locations is derived from a macro policy environment and local government agency which is constrained (or enabled) by the institutional setting (e.g., nature of the local population, the locality, administrative structure and finances) within which it is operating (a point also made by other authors, see Hsing, 2010, and Chuang, 2015, for instance). As such, there is considerable variation in the policy development, design, implementation, and importantly, the outcomes.

The remaking of rural villages has several variants (including in situ redevelopment, village to village consolidation and resettlement, village to town relocation and the subsumption of peri-urban villages into expanding urban areas) and descriptions (such as village communities, rural communities, central villages and town communities) (Long et al., 2012; Meyer-Clement, 2020). We focus specifically on in situ redevelopment and village to village consolidation, in which villages are relocated and grouped together to form modern rural townships. This policy is generally targeted on villages that are seen to be 'dying' or 'left-behind' and are more remote from larger urban areas.

The state's goal of rural modernization is in tension with its desire to maintain control over its subjects. For example, people are encouraged to become more entrepreneurial and individualistic through the easing of certain restrictions (such as movement) and commodification of resources (the ability to divest of land) but these processes remain tightly controlled by the state (Zhao, 2013). Moreover, these transformative processes are not equally experienced as evidenced by the considerable scholarship on precarity and what it means for migrants, those who are the left behind and their villages. Researchers have identified positive migration–development linkages and the increased salience of attachment to place (for those that stay as well as those that must go) that counter-balance precarity whilst also emphasizing contradictory strains on social and emotional ties caused by chronic absences and rural depopulation (Porst & Sakdapolrak, 2018; Tappe & Nguyen, 2019).

In this paper, we reflect critically on precarity and how it is experienced in rural areas that have been earmarked for redevelopment or consolidation through a case study on two rural villages in Anhui province. Two research questions underpin our work (1) what are the experiences of migrants and non-migrant households in rural areas that have been earmarked for redevelopment or consolidation and (2) what are the implications of these experiences on the migration development nexus for rural areas undergoing profound transformations? Although there is an extensive scholarship exploring the migration–development nexus and translocality within China, there has been surprisingly little focus on the links between precarity and the state agenda for the countryside (Kochan, 2016). Through our research, we explore concerns about rural precarity and migration–development linkages in the context of village redevelopment and consolidation under the rubric of the NSC. We conclude by arguing that the disruption to trans-local livelihoods risks severing the networked connections that are necessary to sustain and nourish many rural locations, potentially threatening state legitimacy in the rural domain.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Precarity and the migration–development nexus in China

The concept of precarity links disenfranchisement, disempowerment and marginalization at the micro-level to the functioning of neoliberal capitalist modes of production at a structural level (Paret & Gleeson, 2016). Broadly

speaking, this theoretical perspective sees approaches to fostering national growth in conditions of late global capitalism as driving fundamental changes in state-citizen relations (Munck, 2013). Whilst critical attention has mostly focused on changes in state-citizen interactions around labour and employment relations, these processes are also recognized to involve significant restructuring of the basic social contract, namely state-citizen relations around welfare obligations and entitlements. The latter centre on redefining public and private responsibilities for social reproduction, typically rolling back state-led social protection and provisioning (Piper & Lee, 2016), to promote national competitiveness in a world where the factors of production are increasingly unwilling to bear or share the costs of reproduction of the labour force. The widespread trend is for both state and capital to shift the costs of social reproduction on to individuals, households, and families in contexts where social provisioning is increasingly commodified (Standing, 2011).

In attempting to make these changes without undermining its legitimacy and authority, the state must foster new neoliberal ideas about moral citizenship. The new 'political settlement' (Wood & Gough, 2006, p. 1967) aims to transform the mutual obligations and claims of state and citizen in ways that maximize economic growth but which render the existence of substantial proportions of the population increasingly precarious (Murphy, 2002). Precarity, experienced as labour insecurity, the absence of a basic social income, the lack of a work-based identity and the general absence of rights, is intimately linked to migration and labour mobility (Standing, 2011). Although research has most often focused on precarity and international migration, integration into global capitalism also drives internal migration with similar effects on precarity both for migrants and their left-behind families or communities (Mallee & Pieke, 2014; Standing, 2011).

Fostering liberalization of the economy whilst retaining centralized political control has led to a restructuring of state-citizen relations in China (as is the case in many socialist-market economies) (Douglass, 2012; Perry & Selden, 2010). This economic transformation, whilst creating unprecedented economic opportunities, has rendered the lives of many more precarious (Whyte, 2010). Historically, state control over citizens in China has been tightly linked to control over mobility and despite relaxations that enable rural people to migrate for work, their relations as citizens with the state remain firmly linked to their rural home place (Standing, 2011; Whyte, 2010).

There has been extensive research on the precarity of rural migrants in the city and how this is produced by China's drive to modernize the economy (Chang, 2009; Swider, 2015). The strategy of encouraging labourers from rural areas to come and work in the modern economy whilst discouraging the bringing of families and hindering permanent settlement has created a vast army of temporary rural-to-urban migrant workers. The economy relies on this flexible or floating workforce—temporary labour migration has become a pervasive and inescapable reality for most rural households (Chan & Selden, 2014). Despite the relaxation of state controls over movement to facilitate this mobile workforce, *hukou* regulations¹ still work to anchor rural migrants to their home places, hinder migrant efforts to reside permanently in urban areas, and construct rural migrants as secondary citizens (Johnson, 2017) (the equivalent in Standing's term of 'denizens' [2011, p. 93]).

2.2 | Migration and precarity in rural China

Our focus is on the rural transformation in China and how it also plays a powerful role in shaping the precarity of rural people. The response of rural families to the combination of better urban economic opportunities and the institutional barriers to living and settling in urban areas is well documented: stretching households across rural and urban locations in order to retain rural-based entitlements and protections whilst sending some members for better paid work in the cities. Such behaviour constitutes a chronic form of circular migration (a pattern of temporary or seasonal migration where individuals move back and forth between their home and places of work) (Chen & Fan, 2016; Wang, 2005; Zhao & Howden-Chapman, 2010). The fact that continuous (re)migration is induced by institutional barriers to permanent migration has led some analysts refer to this situation as one of 'incomplete migration' (such as Gao et al., 2017) or 'incomplete proletarianization' (Chan & Selden, 2014). However, rather than seeing the

increasing trend towards translocal householding (Jacka, 2018) as problematic, it may be more useful to ask what the relationship is between translocality and precarity for particular people in particular places (Tappe & Nguyen, 2019; Wilson et al., 2018)? This is salient because, although stretching is a household response to manage poverty and insecurity, straddling the rural and the urban can also prove to be a source of further precarity.

Importantly, the complex relationship between migration and precarity in rural areas is not only about household-level capabilities (such as the wellbeing of left-behind family members [Bridges & Liu, 2022]) since the pervasiveness of chronic circular migration impacts on rural communities as a whole (Gao et al., 2017). This type of chronic migration has been linked to profound changes in the nature of rural villages. Research has considered how the varying migration–development linkages may in some places enable migration to drive rural development, but that in other circumstances leaves entire villages and even provinces behind (Driessen, 2018; Xiang, 2007a). The absence of working age people can undermine the possibilities for a dynamic rural society and economy. The prohibition of rural property transfers has also fuelled the phenomenon of ‘village hollowing’ where older village centre homes are abandoned whilst remittances are invested in new homes on the village outskirts (Liu et al., 2010). Such research argues for equalization of entitlements between rural and urban citizens, the freeing up of the rural property (so that unwanted residential plots can be recycled as agricultural land), and facilitation of ‘complete’ migration whereby rural families can settle permanently in urban areas with the same entitlements as recognized urban dwellers (Gao et al., 2017; Tao & Xu, 2007).

A further important consideration in the links between migration and precarity is land. China has a unique land tenure system, the Household Responsibility System. Under this system, village collectives own the farmland and plots are leased to households for fixed term contracts.² Land is a critical resource for translocal households and provides seed funding and security for migrants as well as supporting the subsistence needs of rural household members and care for dependents (Jacka, 2018; Kaufmann, 2021). Over the past 20–30 years, the Chinese state has been exploring ways to commodify land to support the scaling up, mechanization and modernization of agriculture (Andreas & Zhan, 2016; Hsing, 2010; Ye, 2015). This has seen a relaxation in the ability to transfer use rights as well as greater opportunities to lease and pool land for commercial interests (see Liu, 2019, and Rogers et al., 2021, for a more detailed description of the current state of rural land transfers). Although there is a large amount of scholarship in this area, considerably less attention has been paid to how state-led elements of rural transformation with regard to land and housing feed into the relationship between migration and rural precarity (Jacka, 2018).

2.3 | China's rural transformation

In part due to China's increasing population, urban expansion and declining amount of farmland, the pressure on the state to maintain its agricultural land bank is high. In response to these issues, the Chinese government has adopted measures to ensure that the amount of farmland does not drop below a baseline of 120 million hectares (considered the ‘red line’ of arable land area in order to maintain self-sufficiency for grain security necessary to feed the population [Andreas & Zhan, 2016]). In 2005, the Ministry of Land and Resources in China proposed the ‘increasing vs. decreasing balance’ land use policy that was formally adopted in 2010. This policy seeks to balance urban expansion (and loss of farmland) with rationalization of rural areas that releases farmland. The overall aim being to ensure that no additional farmland is lost. Alongside this strategy for maintaining its desired amount of agricultural land are the state's policies for the modernization of rural production and a remaking of the rural peasantry (Perry & Selden, 2010). These policies include ‘building new countryside’, the ‘construction of beautiful villages’, the ‘transfer of management right of contracted land in rural areas’ and the ‘linking up increased urban construction land with decreased rural construction land’ (Long et al., 2010; Tu & Long, 2017).

These initiatives are variously aimed at ‘consolidating’ and ‘upgrading’ rural villages which are considered under-utilized and freeing up agricultural land for the purposes of a modern economy and are directed by local authorities, often in partnership with powerful commercial interests (Chuang, 2014). The consolidation or spatial

reorganization or the countryside can take a number of forms. For example, cities and towns can be allowed to expand to subsume villages on their borders or the population of whole villages can be relocated to other (expanded villages or urban areas). The formerly occupied settlements are then cleared, and the land is returned to farming (Li et al., 2014; Long, 2014; Long et al., 2010, 2012). The impacts of these rural community-building initiatives (Meyer-Clement, 2020) on affected populations is mixed showing both positive and negative outcomes (see Chuang, 2015, Cai et al., 2020, Gu, 2022, and Kan & Chen, 2022, for more information).

At a provincial level, the state-led spatial reorganizing associated with the NSC is driven by the need to generate revenue from land sales, ongoing processes of urbanization, to underpin the provision of new or the improvement of existing infrastructure, to support the delivery of enhanced services and to recycle land (Long et al., 2012; Meyer-Clement, 2020). Villages are identified and selected based on perceived need and suitability and, whilst these initiatives apply to all rural areas, they are not implemented evenly. Local government capacity and geographic location is important; for instance proximity to dynamic urban centres make repurposing lands more of a priority whilst in more remote locations, change is unlikely in the foreseeable future (Driessen, 2018). Despite this, many relatively remote rural villages in China experience the impacts of these initiatives in the form of anticipatory actions even if implementation is not imminent and perhaps never will occur. These anticipatory actions include the curtailment or ban on renovations and new buildings effectively holding entire villages in stasis, disrupting links necessary to sustain and renew villages which can lead to further decline and depopulation (Chen, 2020).

Rural community building and the NSC programmes draw on ideas concerning the 'moral citizen' and shaping a new modern rural citizen (Fong & Murphy, 2006; Long et al., 2010; Murphy, 2004). This ideology, in Murphy's (2004) analysis, renders legitimate the increasing precarity that some citizens experience as a result of these modernization projects. Chuang (2014, p. 652) sums up the situation: 'As rural citizenship is terminated as a basis for land rights, issues of public goods distribution are increasingly resolved through market mechanisms rather than state channels and "who gets what" ... is subsumed under an ideological frame which assumes the desirability of a social order organized according to market principles.' Examples of this desirability are seen in the *suzhi* and *nongmin* discourses through which differentiated qualities are conferred onto specific people and social groups whilst others are portrayed as problematic (Driessen, 2018; Murphy, 2004; Wilson et al., 2018). Whilst there is no simple definition, *suzhi* is used as a means to differentiate between people (good and bad, civilized and uncivilized, urban and rural) and can be thought loosely as 'quality' or 'high quality' (see Chan & Enticott, 2019, for a more detailed discussion). *Nongmin*, beyond its legal and administrative use (to denote anyone with a rural *hukou*), is used to mean peasant or farmer and typically implies someone of low value and status (see Schneider, 2015, for a more detailed discussion). *Suzhi* and *nongmin* discourses are often used together and can be employed to justify specific actions and policy making.

The pull of the city, particularly for the younger generation, its identification by some as 'modern', 'desirable' and 'civilized', and the inevitability of historical levels of rural depopulation, are undeniable (Long et al., 2010). Ironically, the precarity and discrimination that rural migrants face in the city is often made more bearable by the fact that it is intended to make a better life for their (rural) families, that it is temporary (if chronic) in nature and the possibility (probability) of eventual return to the rural home. Seeing circular migration as 'incomplete' (Cai & Ng, 2014) risks underestimating both the affective bonds that rural migrants maintain with rural homes and their recognized importance for migrants and their families for making sense of the deprivations associated with translocal householding (Chen & Fan, 2016; Murphy, 2002). In so doing, it risks further reinforcing the view of rural locations as enclosed and bounded rather than networked and shaped by translocal relations (Chen, 2020). When viewed in these terms, the proposed redevelopment or relocation of rural villages risks severing connections that sustain rural locations by undermining both the material connections and emotional 'promise' of rural return thus further impacting on migrants', and their families' experiences of precarity.

To sum up, research on temporary migrants has tended to focus on their precarity in the city and on the institutional barriers to permanent migration. More recently, this research has been complemented by work on rural transformation, particularly on the phenomenon of village hollowing, and how positive migration-development linkages

are frustrated by the poorly developed mechanisms for recycling land and property. Taking precarity as our overarching conceptual lens, we extend its application through a relational analysis by exploring the impact of state policies on translocal livelihoods and rural communities. Our research sheds light on the experiences and relationships of migrant and non-migrant households in two villages that have been earmarked for redevelopment or consolidation (known locally as the New Village Redesign [NVR]). Whilst we do not claim that these villages are representative of all villages in China, they are certainly not unusual. Importantly, the locations we spotlight are indicative of places that have received limited scholarly attention (when compared to those where the impetus for change is greater and where money and developments are or are likely to take place), and it is in this area that we make our contribution. Insights from this study shed light on the ways in which rural transformation manifests in rural areas with less perceived potential for growth (more remote from dynamic urban centre, less available capital, etc.) and where development initiatives are unlikely to occur, but the impacts of the NSC are still felt. Through this analysis, we argue that existing research may underestimate the significant impact of practices anticipating state-led rural transformation and their role in exacerbating rural precarity.

3 | METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Research methods

The results and discussion that follow are drawn from data collected over a 4-year period from 2012 to 2015. The data were collected as part of a larger piece of research that explored links between migration, development and risks (predominantly related to environmental change) for rural households and rural-to-urban migrants (see Tebboth et al., 2019, for more details on the research and the methodology employed). During this larger project, issues linked to housing, land and rural development surfaced repeatedly. This paper presents a synthesis of this data subset, through which we explore issues linked to the ongoing transformation of the countryside and people's experiences of precarity.

The research employed a multi-sited case study based around two villages in Anhui Province that were heavily involved in rural–urban migration and a related sample of rural migrants from these villages in Shanghai. Migration is a longstanding and common component of rural livelihoods in Anhui (Chan, 2011). The research focuses on Wanzhuang and Dongdian villages in Bozhou prefecture, Lixin Country, Anhui Province. Bozhou Prefecture is a relatively impoverished part of a province, dominated by rural-based and agricultural livelihoods; it has the least educated population in terms of number of years of schooling attended and the third highest rate of illiteracy at a prefecture level in Anhui (9.12%), a situation which has not changed for the past decade (China Statistical Press, 2012a, Ch. 3, figs. 8 and 6, China Statistical Press, 2022, Ch. 3, figs. 8 and 7). Over the past 12 years, Bozhou reported the second highest (behind Fuyang) proportion of temporary migration (defined as leaving for 6 months or more but not changing registration) to other provinces, indicating a stable pattern of interprovincial migration (China Statistical Press, 2012a, Ch. 3, figs. 21 and 22, China Statistical Press, 2022, Ch. 3, fig. 16).

The villages were selected on the basis that they experienced contrasting adverse weather events that are likely to increase as a result of anthropogenic climate change as the inter-relation between migration and climate vulnerability was the central question of the original research project. Significantly, the villages were not selected because they have been earmarked for Village Redesign; this only emerged during the research and was a key preoccupation and cause of much anxiety for the respondents. Whilst their circumstances and characteristics are unique, and we make no claim that our findings are representative, these villages are typical of many remote rural villages in China suggesting that similar experiences will be found elsewhere (see for instance Driessen, 2018; Li & Xu, 2023; Meyer-Clement, 2020).

Data were generated through a variety of social research methods: rapid rural appraisal (RRA), household questionnaire surveys and semi-structured and life history interviews³ (see Table 1). RRA methods generated insights

TABLE 1 Methods of data collection and sampling.

Method		Sampling within two research sites	
Instrument	Description	Dongdian	Wanzhuang
Rapid rural appraisal (RRA)	Social mapping with census Wellbeing ranking Resource mapping Historical calendar Seasonal calendar Cause and effect of migration	N = 60, drawn from different socio-economic strata within the village	N = 55, drawn from different socio-economic strata within the village
Household questionnaire three-part survey focusing on households, individuals within the household and absent migrant members	Part 1 collected information on environmental change.	50 households were surveyed in Dongdian representing 40% of the total number of <i>de jure</i> households or 62% of the <i>de facto</i> resident households.	47 households were surveyed in Wanzhuang representing 38% of the total number of <i>de jure</i> households or 76% of the <i>de facto</i> resident households.
	Part 2 collected information on migration, migration decisions and migration networks. Proxy respondents were used to obtain information on absent members	33 absent migrant members (from 23 households) as well as household level insights on migration decisions and networks	60 absent migrant members (from 25 households) as well as household level insights on migration decisions and networks
	Part 3 generated a household roster with key socio-economic and demographic data	117 individuals included in household roster	98 individuals included in household roster
Semi-structured interviews (SSIs)	General interviews to understand key issues within the case study locations	32 interviews within Anhui province	
Rural and urban life history interviews (LHIs)	Longer-form interviews focusing on the productive lives of respondents and significant events or experiences from the perspective of the interviewee	12 household-level interviews in Dongdian ($n = 6$) and Wanzhuang ($n = 6$). 12 interviews with migrants working in Shanghai (N.B. not all interviews were carried out in Shanghai, half were in rural locations).	

concerning the socio-economic characteristics of the case study sites and insight into the changes over time in relation to migration including the perceived drivers of these changes. The household survey generated data on migration decisions and migration networks, household characteristics and environmental changes. The interviews were employed to deepen insights on issues linked to migration including the NVR. Data were analysed in phased approach beginning with the initial scoping interviews and rural appraisal methods, followed by the household survey and concluding with the long-form life history interviews. In each phase, data were analysed to inform the design of the next phase of the research. Once all of the data were generated, we employed primarily quantitative analysis to explore key issues within the questionnaire and a thematic analysis of the qualitative data. The qualitative analysis

was part deductive (focusing on known key issues and research priorities) and part inductive (allowing us to surface novel issues).

Much of the analysis presented below draws on life history interviews. These interviews were undertaken in 2015 with a subset of survey respondents who exhibited different forms of mobility behaviour. Qualitative life history methodologies provide space for research participants to tell their life story with their own words unconstrained by an externally imposed structured set of questions (Singh et al., 2019). Through the life history interviews, respondents repeatedly talked about the NVR, its consequences and how it was impacting upon their and their families' lives, allowing the meaning of these events to be viewed in relation to the broader narratives of their lives (Lewis, 2008).

Access to the sites was facilitated via a researcher from Fudan University with knowledge of the area who engaged with local cadres and a research assistant. During the initial phase of the research, the local cadres were present to support access for rural appraisal activities. Subsequent phases of the research were undertaken without further local support. Survey enumeration was undertaken by master's degree students from Hefei University. Sampling in rural areas depended on the research instrument employed. For group activities, participants were selected based on socio-economic characteristics and suitability for the activity (e.g., knowledge of issues to be discussed) and identified in consultation with community leaders. Every household within the rural case study sites was included within the household survey sample frame. The survey respondents were the household head, their spouse, or where not available another adult household member. Through the survey, information was generated on all household members who reside in the household as well as absent migrant members. Surveys were often carried out in public places or in rooms with multiple members of the household present, as such some responses were provided by people other than the main respondent. The identification or tracing of an appropriate urban sample relied on the contacts made during the research in the rural locations (Bilsborrow et al., 1984). Rural research participants were asked to provide contact details for family members who have migrated to Shanghai during the last 10 years. The urban sample ($n = 12$) was based on a non-probability snowball approach.

3.2 | Case study context

Dongdian and Wanzhuang are natural villages (rather than administratively defined hamlets in a larger natural village or small town) earmarked for NVR. The village of Dongdian is part of Qianwei Administrative Village which belongs to Xinzhangji township administration within Lixin County. The village is located approximately 7 km (as the crow flies) from the nearest town, Kantuan (small local town), and 24 km from the Lixin, the nearest County Town. The village contains approximately 124 houses although a substantial number (approximately 35%) of these are empty owing to sustained out-migration (source: authors' own data). Wanzhuang is part of New Hexie Administrative Village and belongs to Zhangou Xiang, within Lixin County. The village is south of Dongdian and located 11 km from the nearest town (Kantuan) and 28 km from Lixin. The village contains approximately 106 houses (slightly smaller than Dongdian) of which a large number are empty (approximately 42%) (source: authors' own data). Ninety-five per cent of the resident sampled adult population ($n = 225$) across both sites held a local, agricultural *hukou* (source: authors' own data).

The economies of the villages rely predominantly on agriculture and animal husbandry (chickens, fowl and goats), with the majority of adults describing their main activity as farming. Three crops dominate in both case study sites: wheat, corn and soya in a double-cropping agricultural cycle. Households in Dongdian tended to farm fewer but larger plots on average compared to Wanzhuang (see Table 2). Plot ownership was predominantly in the form of long-term land allocations although there was a small degree of informal (non-cash) exchange agreements between households to farm the fallow land of absent households. This type of arrangement was more common in Wanzhuang than Dongdian, particularly for households that owned two or more plots. Income from remittances also contributed to household incomes in the two sites. Survey responses indicate that 50% of households in Dongdian

and 61% in Wanzhuang receive remittances (at the time of the survey), highlighting their importance to the household economy (particularly for Wanzhuang).

A high proportion of residents are over the age of 60 (see Figure 1), and 73% of households contain at least one dependent or non-economically active household member. The dependency ratio of 45% for Dongdian and 48% for Wanzhuang is comparable to the average for Anhui (43%) (China Statistical Press, 2012a) but noticeably higher than the average for China as a whole (34%) (China Statistical Press, 2012b). More tellingly, of these, approximately one-third of households have a ratio of at least one non-economically active household member to one economically active household member (source: authors' own data). Like other rural villages heavily involved in temporary migration, Wanzhuang and Dongdian have disproportionately high dependency ratios compared to the national average and their population age structure is skewed towards the old and the young.

4 | FINDINGS

Both Dongdian and Wanzhuang were in line to be incorporated within either a renovation or relocation scheme although the details of which were not clear to villagers. We investigate *their understandings* of the NVR scheme, its perceived impacts on their lives and translocal relationships, and its wider implications for inward investment and rural depopulation in 4.2 before turning our attention to its links to the migration–development nexus in Section 4.3. However, to appropriately locate these discussions, we first describe the importance of migration for rural households in the villages and its relation to precarity of the villages (Section 4.1).

TABLE 2 Average plot size and average number of plots per household for Dongdian and Wanzhuang.

	Dongdian (n = 50)	Wanzhuang (n = 47)
Average plot size (in mu)	5.7	3.9
Average number of plots	1.6	2.2

Source: Authors' own data.

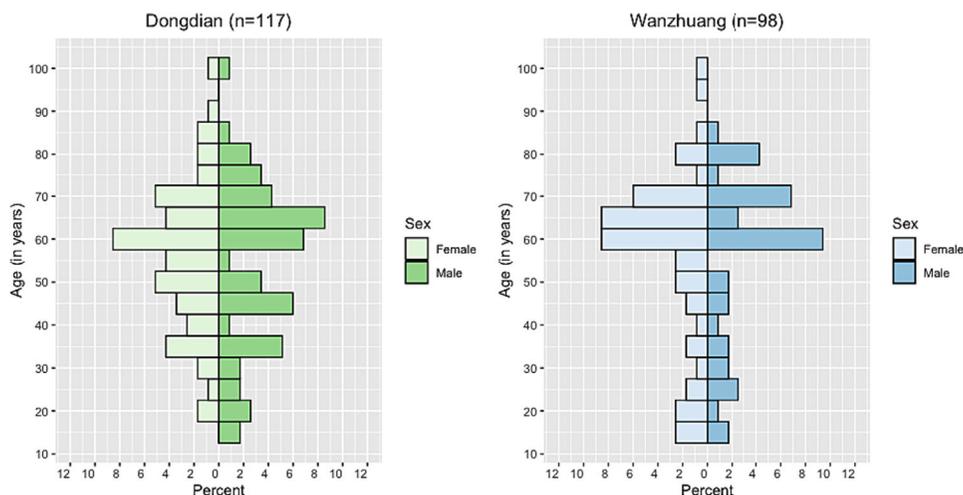


FIGURE 1 Age structure and gender balance of de facto adult village residents. Source: Authors' own data. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ijid.3849)]

4.1 | Differentiating household mobility regimes and its implication for precarity

Whilst migration is central to most rural livelihoods in both villages, closer examination of who migrates, how and why, reveals important differences in the relationship between migration (or non-migration) and precarity. In Dongdian and Wanzhuang there are three different mobility regimes: (1) households containing longer duration, absent migrant member(s) who are likely to become permanent movers; (2) highly mobile translocal households, whose members exhibit shorter-term and more cyclical migration behaviours; and (3) households that are 'stuck in place' and whose members show no mobility.

Movement⁴ from both villages was bifurcated between longer-duration, more permanent moves and shorter-duration, more temporary moves (see Table 3 and Figure 2). Longer-term movers ($n = 93$ people from 48 households) tend to be younger, are more likely to be male (by a ratio of 2:1) and have higher levels of literacy. Their main reasons for leaving were economic, relating mostly to an inability to maintain a decent livelihood locally through agriculture or the prospect of better opportunities elsewhere. A minority of longer-term movers also mention dissatisfaction with local livelihoods and a constraint on the amount of land available for farming. These migrants were the most likely to be able to develop an urban foothold in the future, for themselves and/or their families, and were least likely to return to live in the village.

Shorter-duration (circular or more seasonal) migrants ($n = 30$ people from 24 households) tend to be older than longer-term migrants but still younger than average of the case study populations. Shorter-duration movers comprise approximately equal numbers of men and women and had lower rates of literacy when compared to longer-duration moves. They mostly migrate to work in proximate provinces undertaking a range of labour activities (such as work in

TABLE 3 Socio-economic characteristics of respondents, subset by household mobility regime.

	Longer term ^a	Shorter term ^a	Non-mobile
n (individuals)	93	30	25
n (households)	48	24	13
Age (mean; 1dp)	27.1	46.5	61.7
Gender ratio (m:f)	65:35	53:47	56:44
Literacy rate (%)	87	52	44

Source: Authors' own data.

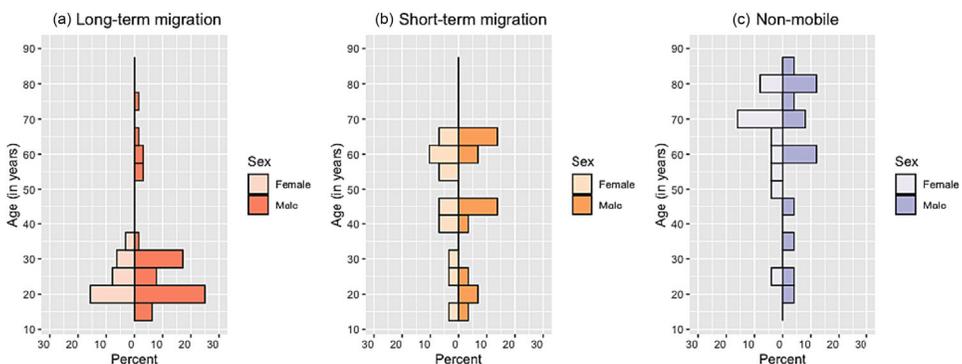


FIGURE 2 Age structure and gender balance of respondents, subset by household mobility regime. (a) Long-term migrants ($n = 93$ with 29 excluded as age unknown); (b) short-term migrants ($n = 30$ with 1 excluded as age unknown); and (c) individuals residing in non-mobile households. Source: Authors' own data. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

factories, litter picking and recycling, construction and general labouring). Their main reasons for migrating revolve around bettering livelihoods and personal (social and family) reasons; they describe the main livelihood activity of their households as being farming within the village. Although highly mobile, these migrants' and their household's security remain anchored in the village.

Lastly, some households ($n = 13$) exhibit no mobility of any members (nor have done at any point in their lifetime). Of the three mobility regimes, the members of these households ($n = 25$) are the eldest on average and have the lowest levels of literacy (especially compared to longer-term migrants). In other words, whilst most households' lifecycles involved the migration of some or all of their members at different times, a minority (26%) of households had lifecycles that were completely immobile or 'stuck in place'.

The mobility behaviours show that most households utilise migration to exploit positive migration–development linkages (whether that be through the sending of remittances, using income to support village provisioning, as a safety net for family members in times of hardship, or to exploit place-based rural entitlements) to manage their precarity in the face of ongoing structural changes in China and their rural manifestations. The NVR risks disrupting these positive migration–development linkages, and it is to that which we now focus.

4.2 | NVR: Creating uncertainty and frustrating development and inward investment

Spatial and administrative reorganizing is a crucial element of the NSC and undertaken by sub-provincial levels of government. Villages are identified and selected based on perceived need and suitability. For example, if a village has a number of empty properties, then it is more likely to be subject to a scheme to relocate the remaining population to another location (that is considered more viable). Villagers in Wanzhuang and Dongdian understand that their villages were earmarked for NVR which has profound implications for land and housing, two critical elements underpinning livelihoods and identity in rural locations. The most noteworthy and discussed implication of the inclusion within the NVR is a ban on building new homes or improving and renovating existing ones. However, aside from this most tangible impact, the NVR was more strongly linked with uncertainty about what it would mean on the ground and when (or even if) it would occur. This vacuum of information contrasts strikingly with the imposition of the anticipatory ban on house building and renovation and the potential for NVR to undermine the very viability of these villages.

There was much confusion in Wanzhuang about what the scheme entailed among the interviewees. For example, Wang Baozhi, a returned migrant who had spent several years living and working in Shanghai, reports that the village has been included under NVR project: he expressed much uncertainty but says that work was scheduled to begin last year but was postponed. Even more significantly, he is unclear of the overall aims: either it is to redesign and rebuild the village by allowing an increase or decrease in the housing and farming footprints of individual plots if required, or it is to rationalize local villages into larger settlements to free up farmland. Another interviewee in Wanzhuang, Wang Zhou thinks that the NVR means that '[t]he government would plan and build new houses, and then you will buy them. And the government will decorate them, and you shall pay money to buy the house', but Wan Hao-Cun, a local cadre says that 'The government decides to move the village'. In contrast to knowledge about what NVR might bring and when, the ban on house building/renovation is well understood, has been in operation for some years, and is widely observed even though it significantly disrupts villagers' lives. This is illustrated by Wang Zhou who states that 'The policy doesn't permit the house project ..., if it [the government] permitted to build the house, I would have built the house long time ago. Even [if] I must borrow money from others, I would do'.

Similar levels of uncertainty were evident in Dongdian. Pan Hua was unsure what would happen in the future but did think that the initial stages of the NVR were finalized. He says that residents were now expected to pay a deposit of 100 000 RMB to secure a small, single-story home although the site was far away from the existing village. In contrast, Pan Hong thought that the plan was still being formulated and that the village would be combined with two other settlements nearby. The new settlement, he said, would consist of four- to six-story buildings. Lastly, Pan Ji stated that the leader of the municipal government visited and told them they (the village) need to move out

as part of the NVR Project, and that the closest town is where people will relocate to, although funds for the programme have not yet been allocated.

Survey data show that 81% of respondents across both sites indicate that 'restrictions placed on building homes [locally]' was a key factor in the long-term migration of people out of the villages. Respondents in the rural appraisal activities also highlight that the inability to invest in housing contributed to ongoing depopulation as well as stymying inward investment. In both locations, respondents made causal links between the prohibition of building new houses, the issues this was creating in supporting people (particularly younger generations) to live in the villages and the consequential decision to migrate. The interview data augment this analysis. Pan Lijuan, when talking about her son, states that 'he cannot do anything at home, there is not enough room for them to stay'. Similarly, Wang Chung reports that his son has not bought a house because the family home is due to be demolished as part of the NVR. The de facto moratorium on new development is providing further encouragement for people to leave the village and reducing the likelihood that people will return.

Moreover, the spectre of the NVR acts to prevent the renewal and upgrade of the existing building stock. In Wanzhuang, Wang Zhou states that he would reorganize the house but the 'policy [the New Village Redesign] doesn't permit the house project'. Similarly, in Dongdian, Pan Ji highlights that the uncertainty regarding the nature of the NVR policy has prevented people from renovating their homes and as a result, the 'houses in our village are in bad condition'. Wanzhuang and Dongdian are prone to frequent flooding from the Fai River, resulting in damage to built infrastructure and assets. The inability to undertake significant repair on existing properties has particularly severe consequences for some villagers. For instance, in Wanzhuang, 56% of households reported damage arising from flood events, and in some cases, properties that we visited were still requiring significant repair 10 years after the flood. In these instances, the NVR acts in combination with other factors to prevent significant investment in the existing housing stock which further stymies renovation and renewal opportunities.

The confluence of the stasis in housing created by the NVR along with the need and importance to maintain a claim on agricultural land places rural inhabitants in an invidious position. The NVR reduces the propensity to invest in and recycle agricultural land owing to the difficulties with building or renewing housing which further exaggerates the lack of growth and renewal in the village, dissuading investment and reducing the prospect of local employment outside of the existing agricultural opportunities. Significantly, the ban on housing development not only accentuates ongoing processes of rural depopulation and village hollowing that are widespread features of rural transformation, but it also undermines household relations as children appear less likely to return and invest (in a material and non-material sense). We now turn our attention to explore the implications of this stasis on the evolving migration–development linkages.

4.3 | Migration–development linkages and rural transformation

Spilt household arrangements provide a means to maximize income and manage risk by different household members working in different locations but these arrangements incur costs that are borne by different household members in different ways. Pan Lijuan's experience is typical of translocal households. She cares for four grandchildren and an infirm 80-year-old uncle. On a normal day, Pan Lijuan gets up very early before sunrise to cook for the grandchildren to get them to school by eight o'clock. Whilst the grandchildren are at school, Pan Lijuan cares for her uncle. In the early afternoon, Pan Lijuan returns to school to pick her grandchildren up and gives them lunch before returning them to school again. At five o'clock in the evening, she will pick her grandchildren again and make dinner. Pan Lijuan describes her life as 'very tiring' and 'quite busy'. Crucially, her situation, although still financially very difficult, is rendered materially viable through her receipt of remittances she receives from her daughter and son to look after the grandchildren. Furthermore, she makes emotional sense of her hardships in terms of sustaining the translocal family in the face of the impact of separation of her children and grandchildren: 'My daughter-in-law cried when she called her children ... [her son] missed them so much'.

The bitter-sweet nature of migration–development linkages for split households includes the irony that many parents migrate to pay for their children's food, clothing, health and education, but their very absence undermines their child's potential educational attainment, particularly where left-behind children are cared for by grandparents (see Murphy, 2020, for a detailed exploration of the impact of migration on left-behind children). Pan Xiong, a grandparent carer, notes that

We cannot educate young kids, for example, if we raise our grandson in the future, we could not understand their textbook in primary school. The education we accepted is different what they accept. The knowledge we learned is as simple as one plus one. But they learn something as hard as double-digit addition.

Similarly, Wang Zhou, a migrant father, says that his daughter

... did very poorly in study. At that time, my wife and I went out to work, no one can take care of the children in their studies at home, and they did poorly in their studies. When my son was in elementary school, he did well in study. [RA: His performance was good?] Yes, we didn't go out to work at that time, it is better for him that we look after him at home. When he was in junior high school, no one looked after him, and his performance in study was bad.

Our point here is that the ambiguities around these migration–development linkages are what drives translocal householding and that the viability of translocal households rest in large part in being able to sustain the continuity of networked family relationships anchored in the rural village despite routine and regular separation of family members. The earmarking of Wanzhuang and Dongdian for redesign threatens the migration–development linkages that are needed to sustain the coherence of translocal households in two respects. Firstly, it prevents the use of remittances for reorganizing or upgrading rural homes which is important to demonstrate wealth and 'face' as well as to show quality and social suitability. Crucially, housing renewal, renovation and new buildings are essential for households to meet their changing needs associated with significant transitions around household division, inheritance and marriage, changing household headship and status. Without the ability to reorganize and upgrade housing, significant life course transitions such as marriage are threatened which underlines the precarity that rural households experience (Jacka, 2018; Sargeson, 2002). Secondly, it foretells the demise of the very existence of these rural homes and the villages in which they are embedded creating a circular logic, increasing the likelihood of this demise and hastening the process by which it happens as inward material and non-material investment is curtailed.

Notwithstanding the ongoing depopulation of the villages, those living there retain a high level of personal and emotional investment with their village especially when juxtaposed with the more distant relationships their children have.

You see my son prefer to work outside, but we like working here, it is our hometown after all, for example, you know everything here and people you meet are all acquaintance. But if you work outside, you live in the factory ... but you will not contact with the local people or people from other places, so we like working and living in the hometown

(Interview: Wang Zhou).

Everyone is going out. ... What is neighbour after all? What is the meaning of having relatives when you don't get to see them for years? Sometimes they come back visiting relatives like Spring Festival. But they are not at home in festivals like mid-autumn day, the tomb-sweeping day and other festivals. Relatives don't get to be together on festivals, because they are not home. The relations between

lineal relatives are still fine due to the blood, but the cousins don't feel so close with each other. They are not familiar with each other. ... They want to be at home. They miss their hometown

(Interview: Wang Chung).

The quotes reveal the value placed on personal connections embedded in place and the importance of retaining strong family ties centred on the idea of home. This is evident in the way their words touch upon the respondents' attachment to their home and village and their pride and contentment with their surroundings.

The views above, however, sit uneasily with another dominant description of the village as backward, conservative and ultimately dying.

Being out [of a rural area] is like, I feel my income is little, the kid out can never compete with other [urban] kids as for eating and wearing so we just go to school at home [in the village]

(Interview: Pan Li).

The best is in other places, not the rural. What can they [younger generation] do in the countryside? It's no use to planting crops only

(Interview: Pan Lijuan).

The people who are staying in the village don't go out for work, and they beg for food. There are children and adults begging for food

(Interview: Wang Hong-Li).

Despite the strong affinity for the village, ultimately many accept that life outside in more urban areas is an inevitable outcome for many of the younger generation, at least for the significant periods of their working lives.

Underlying these contradictions is a sharp appreciation of the perceived dualism between rural and urban areas that China's restructuring is facilitating and perpetuating. Views of why people leave the village by those who remain highlight the limited options that the younger generation (are thought to) have. Some residents stated that there is no future in the village and many of the younger generation have no interest in farming (interview: Wang Zhou; interview: Pan Lijuan; interview: Pan Ji). Similarly, amongst many interviewees, there was a belief that if you want to get on in life you must go outside to larger urban areas and not be farming in small rural villages (interview: Wang Chung; Interview: Pan Ji).

This vision of urban opportunity is strongly linked to aspirations for young and working-age adults, whilst the village is seen as a place for 'elders'. This dichotomy was a feature of a number of interviews both in the case study sites and in Shanghai. Indeed, a consistent theme and tension running through the interviews with migrants who were living in Shanghai was the village as concurrently somewhere that had been left behind (backward, underdeveloped, lacks opportunities, and hard) whilst also being idyllic (a place to retire to, to rest and relax).

How to say about the village? Mostly we have better environments, better air, and easier life in the village. Quiet and tranquil. For instance, in my hometown, the old would pass their late life there, bits of stroll now and some of fishing then, raising some chicks and ducks, that is rather comfortable life.

But Shanghai is a place for work, ambitions, and targets, isn't it?

(Interview: Wang Dao.)

Wang Dao presents the village as a place for elders, with a slower and more comfortable pace of life but also as a place of security and familiarity. By implication, the city, although dynamic, full of potential, and a desirable place for the younger generation, is also challenging and uncomfortable.

In sum, affective ties are ambiguous in Wanzhuang and Dongdian but whilst these villages may be being left behind they still play a vital role in anchoring increasingly precarious and marginalized lives (of migrants and non-mobile residents). Being earmarked for Village Redesign places renewed stresses upon rural livelihoods, challenging the ability of households to adapt as they change in form and organization, prematurely disrupting migration–development linkages, imperilling the medium-term viability of Wanzhuang and Dongdian, and eroding security of the ancestral rural home.

5 | DISCUSSION

Our findings show how the prospect of the NVR prevents village development and interacts with other dynamics to accelerate material and emotional precarity whilst also accentuating existing patterns of movement out of the villages. The uncertainty concerning the scheme is impacting on the villages and the residents in two main ways: it acts as a further incentive for people to migrate out of the villages whilst concurrently disincentivizing or prohibiting residents' ability to invest inwardly.

Our interest in this paper is not whether or when the NVR materializes in these specific villages and what its ultimate impact will be but rather that merely being designated for NVR (prematurely and perhaps needlessly) disrupts important migration–development linkages in ways that increase precarity for already precarious rural households, and threatens connections and flows of people, ideas and resources, that are necessary for rural locations to flourish. Below, we discuss how precarity is experienced in the wider NSC with a focus on migrant and non-migrant rural households, before moving on to look at what this means for the state reforming relations with its citizens.

5.1 | Experiencing precarity under rural modernization in the NSC

The mode of production encouraged by the state's macro-economic plans and the interaction with its vision for the country threatens to cut the taken-for-granted link between ancestral home and rural residency (Kochan, 2016) undermining households and whole communities. The idea of the ancestral home is crucial within Chinese society; it acts to maintain one's roots, identity and connections with their ancestors (e.g., access to burial sites); it is seen as fundamental to support a stable sense of self and belonging. Moreover, and this is particularly the case for migrants who are dislocated from their ancestral home, the idea of home acts as a fixed point and provides a social anchor in often quite turbulent social and emotional situations as well as providing a means to tap into a social collective membership (Kochan, 2016; Li & Chan, 2018).

Undermining links between ancestral homes and rural residence is significant for households for two main reasons. First, relocation processes underpin the commoditization of land, permitting concentration of ownership to support the scaling up of agriculture via agri-businesses, cooperatives or consolidated large family farms and concurrently increase the risk of dispossession, inequality and differentiation (Nguyen & Locke, 2014; Rigg et al., 2016; Rogers et al., 2021). The consequences of such actions are mixed. Some scholars report strongly negative outcomes with rural populations lacking land, work and a social floor (Sargeson, 2012). Others report more mixed (Cai et al., 2020; Chuang, 2015) or positive (Gu, 2022) outcomes. In weakening the links between land and rural populations, the state is undermining what had been an inalienable and untouchable element of rural livelihood security (Andreas & Zhan, 2016; Wang et al., 2013).

Second, through the remaking of the countryside, the state weakens a key aspect of the rural residents' identity; their links with the land, threatening the very idea of what it means to be 'rural' (Van Der Ploeg et al., 2014). Undermining the links between residence and ancestral home potentially challenges the sense of security of rural residents and ruptures the nostalgic idea of 'home' which forms a key part of the identity for rural residents and those rural migrants residing in urban areas (Gao et al., 2017; Sunam & Mccarthy, 2016). Taken together, these issues contribute

to a reworking of the relationship between migration and development for many rural householders (over and above the material and relational disruptions described in Sections 4.2 and 4.3) and threatens to take away the rural refuge of the floating population who have never had a place in the city (Van Der Ploeg et al., 2014).

Beyond the impact on individual precarious households, our evidence points towards the sustained and significant impact that rural policies have had on translocality and the migration–development linkages for remote villages and communities (rather than individual households). In the case study sites, policies that are aligned under the NSC agenda particularly around housing have acted as an impediment to development, contributing to the drivers of out migration and acting as a disincentive to return or inwardly invest. The effect, allied to the ageing village population, is stasis: the village is held in place, unable to move forward whilst it slowly decays as residents await greater clarity concerning their future and that of their village. Rural policies, grounded in a view of rural lives as more isolated, bounded and static, overlook and challenge the dynamic and connected nature of rural villages given form through people's mobility and their networked relationships (Chen, 2020).

5.2 | Remaking the rural peasant

Despite the increasing ease with which rural residents can now access urban opportunities, the ability of many rural people to utilize mobility to enhance their position within society has remained static or even gone backwards (Smith, 2014; Xiang, 2007b). Our findings contribute to the wider analysis of this process by showing how the manifestation of NSC on the ground (through the NVR) potentially exacerbates inequality for remote rural villages and already precarious rural households. But what does this mean for the state's attempts to remake the rural peasantry? Rural residents provide an essential function: they support the younger generation to be more mobile and pursue more urban livelihoods providing the flexible workforce demanded by and needed for the state to compete globally (Schneider, 2015; Xiang, 2007b). Beyond the commonly recognized economic, social and psychological impacts (both positive and negative) for translocal families (Ye, 2018), the NSC has other impacts which act to support wider state objectives, namely, the construction of a modern (and moral) rural citizenry and the redrawing of the social contract between these rural citizens and the state.

Community building and other initiatives given coherence under the NSC programmes are symbolic of the state's desire to shape a new modern (and moral) citizen and as such render legitimate the increasing precarity that some citizens experience. In transforming rural areas, the state needs to maintain its legitimacy as it facilitates the continued removal of peasants from rural land permitting the scaling up of agriculture whilst ensuring that the supply of flexible, low-cost labour in urban areas remains (Andreas & Zhan, 2016, p. 799; Bernstein, 2015). The modernizing agenda of civilizing and reconstituting rural villages justifies itself by framing rural livelihoods as backwards and in need of development (Ye, 2015). However, the contrast between the state's wider promotion of greater individualism for 'modern' citizens and its authoritarianism in reordering the homes and livelihoods of its citizens through the NVR is stark. Our evidence of the imposition of designation for redesign and related village-wide bans on housing development lends support to scholars who argue that we are seeing the state systematically withdrawing much of the support available during the pre-reform era (deregulation) whilst simultaneously inserting itself more powerfully into people's lives to develop modern and desirable rural citizens (reregulation) (Murphy, 2004, pp. 5, 19; Rigg & Owen, 2015, p. 183; Smith, 2014; Xiang, 2007b).

To maintain political legitimacy considering these changes in the social contract, the state offers up the implicit reward of the greater opportunities this affords. Both the opening up of new economic opportunities in urban areas to rural people (as 'entrepreneurial selves' [Chan & Enticott, 2019, p. 76]) and the rolling back of the burden of care and welfare back to the household reflect the penetration of a degree of neoliberal market logic (Nonini, 2008) in the way the state is seeking to redraw its relations with rural citizens. However, this logic is at odds with both the state's wider controls on *hukou*, as well as their designation of villages for redesign and their associated bans on housing development in these villages. So on the one hand, we are seeing a retreat of many instruments of central

state control over and provision for the individual and household (Schneider, 2015), whilst on the other, we are witnessing a strengthening and solidification of broader state aims of control in relation to the social mobility of the population (through, e.g., *suzhi* and *nongmin* discourses manifested in NSC and other state instruments). Thus, far from acting to support social mobility, the combined impact on redrawing the social contract is likely to restate and reaffirm the state's continued control, domination and regulation of the rural classes.

6 | CONCLUSION

Through our analysis, we show how the NVR is creating conditions to accelerate the disinvestment in the study villages, threatening emotional and material links to ancestral land and homes. Moreover, we argue that the disruption of translocal livelihoods and the migration–development nexus threatens the multi-sited relations that are necessary to support rural villages. Our analysis suggests that, if the positive migration–development links continue to be undermined and precarity deepens, the perceived legitimacy of the state's vision for its rural citizens and modernization may be brought into question. This has implications for the state's rural agenda in terms of its citizens and its ability to meet its goals of maintaining enough land to support agricultural self-sufficiency. This exploratory study in two locations in Anhui highlights some of the ongoing tensions that exist in rural China and alludes to larger unresolved issues concerning rural labour and land that are of real import as China continues to develop (Zhang et al., 2015). Further efforts are needed to explore and analyse the different ways in which the NSC is manifesting itself in other more 'remote' and in some senses forgotten locations with lower perceived potential and apparent need for change. Even though these locations are unlikely to be redesigned under the NVR, they are still experiencing significant impacts arising from the state's vision for modernization of the countryside. Such insights will help to deepen our understanding of how the state is remaking its power over labour and land in rural China, with particular attention on the growing contradictions between the market socialist vision for modern rural citizens and the apparently authoritarian approach by which the state seeks to 'redesign' villages as part of its broader modernization agenda for rural citizens and the countryside.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Mark Teboth (75%): conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing the original draft, writing review and editing, and funding acquisition. *Catherine Locke* (25%): conceptualization, writing the original draft, and writing review and editing.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest reported by the authors.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data generated through authors own research and is available on request.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ *Hukou*/户口 classification is a household registration system linking place of registered residence with provision of and access to social service provisions and is divided into two types. The first classification is the *hukou suozaidi*/户口所在地 (the place of *hukou*/户口 registration), based on a person's presumed regular residence and is either rural or urban. The second classification, *hukou leibie*/户口类别, is based on status or type of *hukou*/户口 and is either agricultural (*nongye*/农业) or non-agricultural (*feinongye*/非农业 or *chengzhen*/城镇 (Zhang, 2011).
- ² Originally, the household responsibility system granted contracts for 5 years. This was increased to 15 years in 1984 and 30 years in 1993 (Tilt, 2008). Land was allocated based on membership of the village and parcelled up according to household size. Egalitarian principles further subdivided each household's plot based on criteria such as soil fertility, access to irrigation and location. Subsequently, at a village level these allocations would be revisited to take into account changing village population (for instance, the last reallocation of land in the case study sites was during the 1990s). Within the household, as new families formed, the plots would be divided amongst siblings. This process of allocating land has resulted in highly fragmented and distributed plots of land for households (Tilt, 2008; Zhang & Donaldson, 2012).
- ³ To protect the anonymity of respondents, only pseudonyms are given.
- ⁴ For a migratory movement to be included within the research, it had to have occurred within the last 10 years for longer-term migration and 1 year for shorter-term migration from the date of the household survey (undertaken in June and July 2013). A longer-term migrant is defined as an adult (16 years or over) member of the household (defined as a usual resident of 3 months or more) who have left and not returned during the reference period. For those who have recently left, a minimum period away of 3 months or an intended period away of 3 months is used to discount short-term moves. A shorter-term migrant is defined as an adult (16 years or over) member of the household (usual resident of 3 months or more) who has been away for more than 1 week but less than 3 months at any point in the last year.
- ^a Based on proxy recall data when migrant was not present.

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