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From Rural Poverty to Urban Poverty: A Case Study in Shanxi

Mei Zhang

Abstract

In recent years there has been an enormous number of rural-urban migrants in China. In this study their social and economic status in destinations is studied based on a case study in Shanxi province of central China. Whilst rural-urban migration could bring the migrants out of the rural poverty, a key question is whether this will then bring them into urban poverty, from both social and economic viewpoints. A two-ended approach was used, namely, the studied migrants were followed from carefully sampled sending areas, so that their social and economic backgrounds were similar. The results show that rural-urban migrants in Shanxi are now generally in a position of urban poverty, and some key issues of improvements are then briefly discussed. (manuscript received July 26, 2006; accepted for publication January 30, 2007)

Keywords: China, Shanxi, rural migrants, hukou, rural poverty, urban poverty, social status, economic status

The Author

Dr. Mei Zhang¹ teaches at the School of East Asia Studies, University of Sheffield. She received her BA in sociology from Beijing University, and her PhD from the University of Cambridge. Her main research interests are rural-urban migration in China and urban environment. Contact address: m.zhang@sheffield.ac.uk

¹ The author is thankful for the supports from all the interviewees and the editor and reviewers of this manuscript for the useful suggestions.

Studie

Von der ländlichen in die städtische Armut: eine Fallstudie aus Shanxi

Mei Zhang

Abstract

In den vergangenen Jahren ist in der VR China die Zahl der Land-Stadt-Migranten enorm gestiegen. In diesem Beitrag werden ihr sozialer und wirtschaftlicher Status an den Zielorten auf der Basis einer Fallstudie aus der zentralchinesischen Provinz Shanxi untersucht. Während die Migration vom Land in die Stadt die Migranten aus der ländlichen Armut holen könnte, bleibt die Frage offen, ob sie sowohl vom sozialen als auch vom wirtschaftlichen Standpunkt aus gesehen stattdessen in städtische Armut geraten. Hierzu wurde ein zweiseitiger Ansatz verwendet: die untersuchten Migranten stammen aus denselben Ursprungsorten, so dass sie ähnliche soziale und wirtschaftlichen Hintergründe aufweisen. Die Ergebnisse der Fallstudie zeigen, dass die Land-Stadt-Migranten aus Shanxi nun im Allgemeinen in städtischer Armut leben. In dem Beitrag werden ferner einige zentrale Aspekte der Verbesserung ihres Status vorgestellt. (Manuskript eingereicht am 26.7.2006, zur Veröffentlichung angenommen am 30.1.2007)

Keywords: China, Shanxi, ländliche Migranten, hukou, ländliche Armut, städtische Armut, sozialer Status, wirtschaftlicher Status

Die Autorin

Dr. Mei Zhang unterrichtet an der School of East Asian Studies an der University of Sheffield. Sie schloss ihr Studium mit einem BA im Fach Soziologie an der Universität Beijing ab und promovierte an der University of Cambridge. Ihre Forschungsinteressen sind Land-Stadt-Migration in China und das städtische Umfeld. Kontakt: m.zhang@sheffield.ac.uk

1. Introduction

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, there were some periodic population movement to allow rural labour into urban construction projects and factory work (Taylor 1998). However, freedom of population movement was controlled by the late 1950s. Then the state established a stringent administrative system. Each person was issued a *hukou* which denoted the place of authorized residence and employment. People in urban areas and rural areas were rather considered an agricultural or a non-agricultural resident. Transfers from an agricultural *hukou* (household registration system) into a non-agricultural *hukou* were difficult and only limited for job assignment, marriage, and family reunion. This caused a significant social division between urban and rural areas, creating a dual economy and causing growing inequality between the incomes and living standards of urban and rural residents (Davin 1999). The economic reform of China developed by Deng Xiaoping brought a gradual relaxation of migration policies in the early 1980s. Cheap rural labor was needed in the cities, and temporary employment of rural residents in urban areas was authorized, although it was still very difficult to obtain an urban *hukou*. China's leaders remained wary of allowing free movement of workers and encouraged farmers to temporarily get into cities. In this way, the labour of rural residents could be shifted into the industrial sector and fuel economic growth without burdening the urban infrastructure and public services.

Rural urban migration in China has been, and still is, a feature of the changes accompanying the economic reforms. The number of labour migrants from rural to urban areas is enormous. According to the fifth national census which was conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics of China in 2000, at any one time there were about 121 million permanent and temporary migrants in China, and 88.4 million rural people were living in urban areas (NBSC 2002a). By the end of 2005 this figure was 200 millions including those in town and village enterprises (TVE) (*Renmin Ribao* 2006). The massive migration of rural labour contributes greatly to China's urbanisation level: the urbanisation rate currently stands at 1.4%, which means that about 20 million peasants become urban residents each year (Liu 2006).

An important reason for the internal migration is the differences in net income between rural and urban areas, as shown in Table 1, and differences among regions. In 2000 the ratio between the west, central and east regions was

100:192:300 (NBSC 2001). Whilst the main reason for internal migration is the intention of raising income, migrants could also offset the declining numbers of urban-born work force due to the family planning policy.

Table 1 Differences in net income per capita (CNY) between rural and urban areas in China

Year	1989	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Urban	1374	4839	5160	5425	5854	6280	6860	7703	8472	9422	10493
Rural	602	1926	2090	2162	2210	2253	2366	2476	2622	2936	3255
Ratio	2.28	2.51	2.47	2.51	2.65	2.79	2.90	3.11	3.23	3.21	3.23

Source: NBSC (1989-2005), own calculations.

There have been considerable investigations into migration, rural poverty and development in China (World Bank 1988; Davin 1996a, 1996b; Labour Bureau 1996; Huang 1997; Du and Bai 1997). A main focus of these studies, however, has been on the role of migration in resolving rural poverty, whereas the social and economic status of migrants in destinations has not been well understood. After a number of media reports, the social and economic rights of migrants in cities have attracted major attention and a government document on protecting rural workers' rights has recently been issued (State Council 2006). Moreover, most existing studies have concentrated on either southern China provinces, which typically reflect the Chinese economic reform since 1979, or provinces which are regarded as the poorest by certain international programmes. In contrast, the investigation of migration has been limited in China's central provinces where economic reform development has been slow and consequently rural poverty is significant. After a large-scale of development strategy of the western region, China will boost the development of its central region in line with its strategy to promote balanced development of various regions (*Renmin Ribao* 2006).

In this study, therefore, the social and economic status of rural-urban migrants in destinations is studied based on a case study in Shanxi province of central China. It can be argued that rural-urban migration might/could bring the migrants out of the rural poverty, a key question is whether it will then bring them into urban poverty, from both social and economic viewpoints. A significant feature of this study is its two-ended approach, namely, the studied migrants were followed from carefully sampled sending areas, so that their social and economic backgrounds were similar. In terms of destinations, not only large cities, but also medium and

small cities, were studied, considering both state owned enterprises (SOE) and TVEs (Zhang 2003).

This paper starts with a review of classic theories on rural-urban migration and poverty; it then presents the methodology and results of the case study.

2. Theories of Migration and Poverty

Internal migration is a well studied subject and a theoretical framework has been established. Theories of rural-urban migration can be broadly classified as micro and macro in their level. The micro level includes studies of social psychological factors differentiating migrants from non-migrants, together with theories concerning motivation, decision-making, satisfaction and identification. Micro theories focus on the guiding force behind individuals' choices.

The macro theories focus on the migration stream, identifying those conditions under which large-scale movements occur and describing the demographic, economic and social characteristics of the migration in aggregate terms. The macro level also includes most theories concerning the rural-urban migration adaptation process, economic and social integration, assimilation, etc, when regarded from a structure or culture perspective.

In macro theories there are two main viewpoints, the Lewis-Fei-Ranis model and the Todaro-Harris's model. The Lewis and Fei-Ranis (1961) models, developed in the late 1950s and 1960s, showed the positive effects of the shift of labour force from a rural surplus-labour agricultural sector to the urban industrial sector. Rapid internal migration was thought to be a desirable process by which surplus rural labour was withdrawn from traditional agriculture to provide cheap manpower to fuel a growing modern industrial complex. Rural-urban migration also contributes to the urban economy by supplying the unmet demand for labour in certain employment sectors. A related consequence is the role migration plays in determining wage levels. In most but not all of these sectors, if the country is over populated relative to its natural resources, the marginal productivity of labour is negligible, zero, or even negative. The subsistence wage at which this surplus labour is available for employment may be determined by a conventional view of the minimum required for subsistence; or it may be equal to the value of the average produced per capita in subsistence agriculture, plus a margin. The most important point is that mass immigration of unskilled labour does sometimes even raise output per head, but its effect can be to keep unskilled wages in all areas near the subsistence level of the poorest areas. The basic

message of the above models was that: invest in modern industry and let the traditional surplus labour, cheap food and forced saving (through terms of trade manipulation) allow an urban, modern economy to grow.

The Todaro-Harris's models are contrary to the Lewis-Fei-Ranis model. It was developed in the 1960's and it was a break with the traditional model of markets. It showed that the conventional models were inaccurate, and they needed to be adjusted in order to accurately fit the realities of developing countries. It was centred around the negative sides of rural-urban migration, for example, migrants increasing unemployment in their destination cities. This is still an accepted view despite criticism of the model by dissenters who view internal migration favourably, such as Galbraith (1979). This migration model and its extensions viewed the urban labour force as distributed between the relatively small modern sector and a large traditional sector (Todaro and Harris 1970). Todaro has pointed out that migration is stimulated primarily by rational economic considerations of relative benefits and costs, mostly financial, but also psychological. Two factors are important for migration decisions — the actual urban-rural wage difference and the probability of successfully obtaining employment in the modern urban sector. The probability of obtaining an urban job is inversely related to the urban unemployment rate and migration rates in excess of urban job opportunity growth rates are not only possible but rational and likely in the face of continued positive urban-rural expected income differences. High rates of urban unemployment are therefore inevitable outcomes of the serious imbalances of economic opportunities between the urban and rural areas of most underdeveloped countries. Todaro's theory was largely focused on the actual migrants as opposed to their effects on productivity. It was viewed to have heavily contributed to surplus labour in cities and to continue to increase the unemployment levels in urban areas. Moreover, rural-urban migration itself must act as the ultimate equilibrating force. With urban wages assumed to be inflexible in a downward direction, rural and urban 'expected' income can be equalised only by falling urban job possibilities resulting from rising urban unemployment. The Todaro-Harris model had a major impact not only on theoretical and empirical but also on policy-oriented debate about urban unemployment and development.

Whilst the above framework is of great significance in understanding the basic phenomena in migration, there are many special features in contemporary China, including its social and economic structures before and after the economic

reforms in 1978, its current integration with global economy, and the roles the government is playing.

Poverty can be divided into absolute poverty and relative poverty in China (Tong and Lin 1995). The absolute poverty refers to living conditions in which there is no guarantee of subsistence, people lack adequate clothing and food, and simple production is difficult or impossible to maintain. The relative poverty refers to a situation in which people have just adequate food and clothing but their living standard is below the recognised basic level, and simple production can be maintained but there is very little or no ability to extend production. Along with the deepening of the rural reform and the constant strengthening of development-oriented poverty relief, the number of people in absolute poverty had dropped year by year in China. In the meantime economic reforms in China during the last two decades have resulted in significant growth of both wealth and poverty, so there is a consider number of people in relative poverty, based on the World Bank's standard, namely lower than 1 US\$ dollar per day (Fan et al. 2003; Zhao and Pu 2003). In addition, various statistics and estimates place the current urban population below the poverty line at between 15 and 31 million (Tang 2001; Zhang 2000).

There are three related theories on poverty. The first two theories describe the discrimination experienced by the poor in the society. One is the theory of social deprivation. The concept of 'relative deprivation' came up in the UK in 1979, interpreting poverty as the socio-economic reality that individuals, families and groups 'lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities . . . their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities' (Townsend 1979). The other one is social exclusion, which refers to the exclusion of an individual from the various socio-economic resources that his/her fellow citizens have access and/or are entitled to (Jordan 1996; Oppenheim 1996, 1998; Townsend 1993; Amin 1992; Silver 1992).

The third one is the theory of capability, created by Amartya Sen. It is also used to explain the cause for poverty. Sen (1993) believes that one's ability in self-actualization has to be taken into consideration because the lack of capability is the real culprit for poverty. He indicated that 'real' equality of opportunities must be achieved through equality of capabilities (Sen 1992) and that capabilities are 'notions of freedom' and synonymous with opportunities (Sen 1987). Sen's

main contribution lies in his emphasis on the necessity to develop individual capability in order to solve problems of unemployment and the consequential poverty, in addition to offering material assistance to the poor (Sen 1992).

However, Sen's theory remains insufficient in explaining those poor rural-urban migrants in the urban areas, especially in current China. Many rural-urban migrants who find themselves stayed in poverty do not lack capability; they are poor as a result of the lack of rights which would enable them to realize their potential. In fact, many rural-urban migrants can work, but they are unable to find a job. Inadequate employment rights have a negative effect on the level of income and thus lead to poverty. While emphasizing the importance of individuals' capability, the role of external environment has been overlooked in Sen's theory. Effective solutions to poverty depend on comprehensive analyses of both factors. It is true that individuals can enhance their own ability through self-help, but it is also true that the government and society have responsibility for ensuring individuals' rights and providing certain opportunities (Hong 2005).

Currently there are some debates explaining the rise of urban poverty. Some scholars believe that the main cause of urban poverty is the competition in a market economy as a result of the open door policy in the ongoing economic transition in the midst of globalization (Guan 2001; Khan and Riskin 2001; Qian and Wong 2000; Wang et al. 2002). The unfair wealth distribution due to the restructuring of spatial and regional inequality by state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (Riskin et al. 2001; Wei 2000; Kiminami 1999; Khan and Riskin 1998; Johnston 1999; Bian and Logan 1996; Park et al. 2002; Wei 2002; Yao 1999; Lu and Wang 2002) and urban poverty is rooted in the drastic increase of unemployment and melting of the 'iron rice bowl' (Chun 2000; Leung and Wong 1999; Fung 2001; Zhai and Wang 2002). Some scholars believe that urban poverty is caused by the lack of social security and health insurance systems (Ka and Leung 2001; Saunders and Shang 2001; Duckett 2001; Turner 2002). Insufficient education and the poor quality of human capital have been regarded generating urban poverty among the Chinese populace (Rong and Shi 2001; Zhou et al. 2001; He 1987). Social exclusion and deprivation of certain members and groups in society have been blamed for urban poverty (Tang 2001; Hong 2005).

Generally speaking, there are two main groups that make up the poor urban population: urban residents who are classified as official urban poor population after the economic reform and institutional restructuring; and rural-urban migrants who are classified as unofficial urban poor population. While

the former urban poor group benefits from certain housing and low income protection, the latter group, making up 7.2-19% of the urban population (Cai 2003), is largely unprotected.

3. Case Study Methodology

A two-ended approach was used. The sending area considered in this case study was Shanxi province in central China, often referred to as the 'coal sea' because of its rich coal resources. Extensive environmental degradation is both an important cause and result of low productivity and severe poverty in the rainfall agricultural areas of the Loess Plateau. It is well known that China's population is increasing relatively fast compared with many other developed and developing countries. In 2000, the birth rate of Shanxi was 13.25 per 1,000, natural increase rate 7.48 per 1,000 (NBSC 2001). Based on the data of National Census, the gross domestic product (GDP) indices, the workforce supply and requirement between 2000 and 2015 in Shanxi is predicted by the author using the method of curve extension. The data from 2005 to 2015 are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Workforce supply and requirement between 2005 and 2015 in Shanxi

Year	Population (in million)					Ratio of workforce requirement and supply (%)
	Total workforce	Workers of working age 1)	New workers of working age per year 2)	Retired workers of working age per year	Workforce requirement 3)	
2005	21.6	21.2	0.63	0.25	16.6	76.88
2010	22.6	22.4	0.66	0.37	17.6	77.94
2015	24.0	23.6	0.69	0.44	18.6	77.54

Notes: ¹ The total workforce is greater than the workers of working age because there are some working who are under working age or over retirement age. ² New entrants into the workforce from young people reaching working age and from other new workers such as migrants. ³ The workforce requirement is estimated according to the increase of GDP.

Source: Own calculations.

As shown in Table 2, there are, and will be, plentiful workforce resources in Shanxi. The total workforce is increasing considerably per year. There will be about 440-690 thousands new workers of working age per year in spite of 210-440 thousands retiring annually. However, it is noted that the workforce

requirement is also increasing, and thus, the ratio of workforce requirement to workforce supply is approximately constant from 2005 to 2015. In other words, both SOEs and TVEs will be able to absorb 75-80% of the labourers. Nevertheless, in terms of absolute number, the high rate of increase in rural surplus labour will continue because of the rate of increase of the population as a whole. In Shanxi rural surplus labour is often caused by poor land and limited rural enterprises. Seasonal rural surplus labour is also an important phenomenon in northern China. In winter many peasants stay at home. Hence, leaving the village to find work is almost the only choice for the surplus labourers.

Three counties in the province, Daixian, Jingle and Wutai were selected, based on their economic level and migration situation. The industrial level in Shanxi is relatively high in many cities. However, the surrounding countryside remains backward. By using a multi-index evaluation system, the Statistical Bureau of Shanxi defined 50 counties as 'poverty counties' of the province, among 150. The evaluation system was based on geographical and economic conditions, as well as social and human factors. The 50 counties were divided into three categories: counties with traditional agricultural structure, counties with rich but unexploited natural resources, and counties with other resources such as tourist attractions. Daixian, Jingle and Wutai were among the 50 counties and belonged to the three categories respectively. The three counties studied are dominated by typical traditional agricultural economy. The level of industrial development is significantly lower than the national and provincial level. Each county was sampled randomly from each category.

Four administrative villages, one in Daixian, one in Jingle and two in Wutai were sampled. The selection of villages was based on factors such as the distance to cities, transport system, number of rural enterprises, migration situation and so on. The characters of the four villages studied are shown in Table 3. In total, 100 households with rural migrants were interviewed.

Table 3 Some background information on the four villages studied

County	Daixian	Jingle	Wutai	Wutai
Village	Dongrucun	Tongmengcun	Shicun	Dashicun
Population	2735	2988	2800	2878
No of Household	705	884	801	813
No of Migrants	About 500	560	About 500	Over 500
Drinking water	1 deep well, spent 70,000 CNY in 1997	1 well, no water 1), getting from 7.5km away	No problem	No problem
Electricity	Supplied	Occasionally supplied	No supply for lighting, ok for machines	Occasionally supplied
Doctor	one	none	none	none
Medicine	convenient	5-6km	5km	4km
No of Pupils	300	200	400	
Class/Teacher	6 class/ 3 teachers	4 class/ 1 teachers	8 class 2)/ 5 teachers	The only teacher just left
Shops	4	2	5	1
Year of first migrant	1973 (coal mine)	1987 (iron mine)	1978 (coal mine)	1979 (coal mine)
Village enterprise	Mill, 3 workers, closed 1996	Pig farm, 4 workers, closed 1996	None	None
Income /person/year	880 CNY	701 CNY	801 CNY	797 CNY

Notes: ¹ The village head said that his major task is to find 50,000 CNY for a deep well. He has tried for two years but no success. Nobody in the village wants to pay, and they hope to get poverty-alleviation funds. ² With middle school.

Source: Own calculations.

The migrants were then followed to their destination cities to study their working and living conditions and their social and economic rights, by carrying out detailed semi-structured interviews. In total 105 migrants were interviewed. Among them, 51% of were in Taiyuan - the capital city of Shanxi province, and 42% were in medium sized cities like Datong and relatively small cities like Changzhi, Yuanping and Xinzhou. Only 7% of the migrants were in Beijing and other

provinces. In other words, in contrast with migration in the rest of China generally, a significant feature of the studied region is that most migrants are within the province.

4. Social and Economic Status of Migrants

This section analyses social and economic status of migrants. In particular, the analysis corresponds to the recently published State Council 'Document on solving migrant workers' problems' (State Council 2006).

4.1. Job Sectors

In Chinese cities migrants are often seen as poor and under-educated, capable of selling their cheap labour by taking lowly-paid jobs that are dirty, difficult, dangerous and tedious, selling vegetables and small household items on streets, or doing repairs and menial work. This study shows a similar picture, as can be seen in Table 4, which lists the current job sectors of the migrants studied. In the table the number of migrants in each category is also shown.

Table 4 Job sectors of the studied migrants

Coal and coal industries (43)	Construction (31)	Manufacturing (15)	Others (16)
Miner	Porter Unskilled worker	Porter Unskilled worker	Catering porter Rubbish collector
Electrician Plumber Gas checker	Semi-skilled worker Woodworker Bricklayer Plumber	Semi-skilled worker Skilled worker	Domestic helper Waitress and waiter
Contractor	Contractor		Small business owner

Source: Own calculations.

China's complex political economy encompasses a wide range of industrial operations – from large-scale, relatively modernised, enterprises in the cities to tiny, unmechanised operations in villages. Thus, China's working conditions reflect international precedents ranging from pre-industrialisation to post-Second World War capitalism (Wright 2004). Depending on the ownership, the employers (*dantai*) in China can be divided into several groups, including SOE, TVE, private

unit, jointly owned unit, share holding unit, foreign invested unit, and Hong Kong or Taiwan invested unit. There are many differences between various types of enterprises, such as in working conditions, welfare, requirement for *hukou* and other documents, and contract length. Generally speaking, SOE and TVE are two main employers for rural workers. The transition from socialist planning to a largely market economy has involved a reduction in the state's commitment to China's urban working class. People in SOEs used to have secure employment, relatively good working conditions and political prominence, compared to TVEs but such differences are becoming less (Chen and Chan 1999), whereas the differences between job sectors become relatively important.

Among the interviewed migrants, 46% are working in SOEs. Traditionally these employers are more respectable than other kinds of employers, especially in the coal mining sector and related industries. At least in Shanxi, there is a tradition that state-owned coal and related industries recruit people directly from rural areas, partly because rural people normally work hard, and partly because urban people tend to prefer other job sectors. However, it should be noted that the majority of the migrants in the SOEs are 'contract workers', who are different from 'formal workers'. The situation that a high percentage of migrants are working in SOEs is rather different from the case in many cities in south China, where many rural migrants are working in labour intensive factories which are private enterprises, jointly owned enterprises, share holding enterprises, foreign invested enterprises, and Hong Kong or Taiwan invested enterprises.

TVEs are also respectable if the job is on a relatively long-term contract. 34% of the interviewed migrants are in this category. However, if the level of collective is low, say at village level, an enterprise is a less sought after employer because the financial resources and management system may not be stable. About 19% of the interviewed migrants are in private-owned enterprises.

In the best known and most influential theoretical model of labour migration, Todaro's model, it was indicated that the extent and rate of migration vary according to the probability of employment, i.e., the more job opportunities a city provides, the larger the scale of rural urban migration. However, by working in 'second class' job sectors, a large number of rural workers are often seen as losers in the process of China's economic reform (O'Leary 1998).

4.2. Wages

The 'Document on solving migrant workers' problems' (State Council 2006)

called for increased efforts to ensure rural labourers in cities earn decent pay and that it is paid on time.

Wages and living expenditure are certainly very important for migrants' economic position. In this study it was found that wages can be very different in various sectors. Those who work in state coal industries get three or four times more than those in some private sector jobs. The living expenditure of migrants also varies significantly from city to city. Generally speaking, the bigger a city is, the higher the cost of living. Migrants' wages are often unstable, relatively low and vary significantly from job to job. Since wages are often different each month, the studied migrants were asked their highest and lowest incomes per month. It is shown that for over 60% of the migrants, the average monthly income is lower than 600 CNY, which is considerably below the minimum income of the majority of urban workers. In Table 5 the average annual incomes for residents in cities and towns in Shanxi province and its capital city, Taiyuan, are shown. About 15% of them get over 1200 CNY per month. These migrants are normally contractors, or work in state coal industries with high profit. The remaining 25% migrant were not sure that they will get payment or not. It is interesting to note that these figures are generally similar to a nation-wide survey conducted by the State Council, which shows that 39% of the migrants are paid between 500 and 800 CNY a month, 29% between 300 and 500 CNY, 28% over 800 CNY, and 4% less than 300 CNY.

Table 5 Average annual income for residents in cities and towns in Shanxi province and its capital city, Taiyuan

Year	Shanxi province	Taiyuan
2000	4,724	4,842
2003	7,005	8,264
2004	7,909	9,395
2005	8,913	10,476

Source : Taiyuan Statistical Information Web (2006).

It is generally expected that the longer the migration period is, the higher the income is. A statistical analysis on the relationship between years of migration and wages based on the case study shows that there is a very slight tendency that the longer the migration, the higher the wage, but the correlation coefficient

is very low. In other words, it appears not to be the case that if migrants stay in a city for a longer time, they will change jobs several times to get a job with better wage. On the one hand, this is different from the situation in developed countries. On the other hand, this is different from the former situation in China. One reason for this situation is that migrants are normally treated as temporary workers without tenure. For most of them wages are determined by job sector, although there are many chances for people to become rich quickly. Another reason is that the type of work migrants get is mostly less technical or non-technical, so that there is no clear progression in skills.

In private-owned enterprises, everything is less standard. The wages can be very high, or extremely low. For example, a 17 year old boy works for a private restaurant for more than ten hours per day, and he only gets 200 CNY per month plus free food and bed. In the same restaurant, another boy does the same job but the wage is 400 CNY per month.

Along with surplus rural labour was withdrawn from traditional agriculture to provide cheap manpower to fuel a growing modern industrial complex (Fei and Ranis 1961), rural worker send back remittance to help the poor in the villages. Whilst the remittances from the studied migrants are considerably higher than the agricultural and related income, and have indeed helped their households financially, it is noted that the use of remittances is limited to some basic purposes, such as house building or refurbishing, and everyday expenses (Zhang 2003). Relatively less of the money is spent on farming and agricultural investments, due to the low level of investment potential in poor quality land, thus limiting the effectiveness of longer-term poverty alleviation.

4.3. Payment Frequency and Defaults on Payment

In the 'Document on solving migrant workers' problems' (State Council 2006) it is mentioned that a wage payment supervision system and a wage deposit system should be established to solve the issues of defaulting on and cutting wages to migrant workers. Employers with records of defaults and major projects are obliged to open special wage deposit accounts as a precaution against defaults. The document decrees increased punishment for employers who default on wage payments, noting companies may be ordered to halt construction or have their business licenses revoked in serious cases. It also stated that to increase the migrant worker's wage, a minimum wage should be introduced.

In addition to the amount of payment, the payment frequency is also important.

Normally if the payment is made each month, it is a relatively fixed job. With the interviewed migrants, only 9% have monthly-paid jobs. It is shown that 85% of them are paid per day, 2% per week and another 2% per year. As a disadvantaged group in the labour market, migrant workers are in an inferior position when negotiating with their employers. Defaults on payment are common in many places, particularly in the construction sector where migrant workers account for the majority of the labour force.

A widely publicised national campaign against defaults on payment for migrant workers was launched at the end of 2003 when a woman in rural Sichuan complained face-to-face to Premier Wen Jiabao about her husband's back payment. Subsequent media reports showed that numerous migrant workers have since benefited from the government-led campaign to defend their right to be paid in full and on time for their hard work.

4.4. Working hours

In the 'Document on solving migrant workers' problems' (State Council 2006) it is stated that discriminatory regulations and systematic obstacles should be removed so that they are treated on equally with urban workers, such as working hours and holiday.

In the Labour Law of Shanxi it is stipulated that a working day should not be longer than eight hours and a working week should not more than six days. Over-time work must be on a voluntary basis, and must be paid at 150% of the average daily wage. Also, working between 11pm to 6am or during holidays and weekends must be paid at 200% of the average daily wage. For the studied migrants, although 98% of them have fixed working hours per day, many of them work longer. 52% of them work eight hours per day, 7% less than eight hours, 41% more than eight hours per day, and 8.2% even work more than twelve hours per day. Generally speaking, except in SOEs, the use of migrants' physical power is characterised by uncertain working hours per day. Their working time is calculated by day rather than by hours or by physical effort.

It is interesting to note that 51.7% of the migrants are willing to work longer for more money. They said that they were born to suffer a life of poverty. In fact, most of them are unaware of their rights and the existence of the labour law. The majority of them just tolerate whatever working conditions they have because they do not want to lose their jobs by confronting their employers or complaining to the local labour bureau.

4.5. Working Conditions and Safety

The 'Document on solving migrant workers' problems' (State Council 2006) document addressed that migrant workers' welfare should be maintained. For migrant worker's occupational safety, the employers must follow safety regulations, and must inform new rural-urban migrant workers of safety regulations as well as equip them with all necessary safety equipment.

In most societies, changes in the working conditions of the industrial labour force closely reflect the position of workers within the broader political economy. Nichols (1997) argued that industrial health and safety, an important aspect of working conditions, reflects the balance between labour and capital in a society.

Although there are regulations governing the working environment and workers' safety, not every factory takes the regulations seriously. There are regular inspections from the local labour bureau, but the inspection is often ineffective. One reason is that the regular inspection is normally conducted during official working hours, and over-time work and the safety problem during this period are often ignored. Another reason is that some employers only show the positive side to the inspectors by well-prepared presentations.

Among the interviewed migrants, 78% think that their working environment is not good. This figure is rather high in comparison with the general figure in China, 62% (Zhou 1997). The breakdown of reasons why migrants think their working environment is bad are dangerous (30%); noisy (26%); dirty (13%) and too hot or cold (9%). In fact, rural workers quite commonly can only find jobs, which city residents do not want to take, and these jobs are normally dangerous, dirty and noisy.

Generally speaking, in the case study the working environment in SOEs are better than that in TVEs. Migrant workers in the TVE mines/construction term had an ambiguous attitude towards safety issues. To some extent the workers were attracted by the pay, and, when they were asked why they worked in such a dangerous environment, they replied that the wages were higher than the income from agriculture.

In China coal mining accounts for less than 4% of the broadly defined industrial workforce but over 45% of industrial fatalities (NBSC 2002b; Fu 2002). Fatalities from coal mining accidents are among the most important health and safety issues in China (Wright 2004). Among those accidents caused death, over 75% are rural-urban migrants, and the other two sectors of high

accident rate are manufacturing and construction (Trade Union 2006).

4.6. Professional Training

The 'Document on solving migrant workers' problems' (State Council 2006) indicated that migrant workers must be professionally trained, and have regularly health checks if they work in dangerous situation. In addition, it is required to give and improve professional training for migrant workers in sending areas and to provide funding or free tickets for training even by means of utilizing television and radio, and distant learning have been mentioned in first time.

In general newly employed workers tend to have higher injury rates than more experienced ones, although a significant feature of the interviewed rural-urban migrants is that they normally do not have special skills and therefore have to earn money by their physical strength. Generally speaking, there are three kinds of training possibilities for migrants, namely formal training, informal training and training courses. The results of the interviews show that 41% of the migrants had formal training, and 59% had informal training or no training. It is often necessary for migrants to have training before starting to work. Although there is a cost, training is an investment. This is useful for the first time migrants, and also useful for migrants wanting to change to a better job.

In most cases, a formal training is organised by employers before or after migrants start work. In the Labour Law it is mentioned that it is an employer's responsibility to give employees necessary training in safety awareness and general skills. For those 41% of migrants who had formal training, 76.3% of them had training before they started the first job, 13.2% after, and 4% both before and after. The rate of training in the studied case is relatively low in comparison with the general situation in China: 50% of migrants have formal training after they move into cities (Zhou 1997).

Training could also happen before finding a job. There is a tendency for more and more intermediary organisations to provide general training courses to give basic knowledge about living, finding jobs in the cities. There are also some special courses run by private sources, such as for sewing, cooking, hairdressing, or other skills. However, normally there is no guarantee of a job offer after the course.

Although 59% of the interviewed migrants had no formal training, many of them had informal training. In other words, they learn through their work. Informal training is particularly common in small construction teams and small

coal mines. Usually experienced workers show new workers basic skills through their work. No fee is needed for informal training. However, wages may be low and the working hours may be long. Job training without pay is usually beyond the capacity of poor rural households.

4.7. Welfare

In the 'Document on solving migrant workers' problems' (State Council 2006) it is indicated that for accident insurance, all employers must ensure all migrant workers have it as well as ensuring they renew their insurance on time. Employers must also ensure when a non-insured worker gets injured at the work to get compensation be paid treatment fees. For ensuring migrant workers have medical insurance for paying treatment for major diseases, employers should establish insurance for major diseases, mainly focusing on paying for hospital fees. The insurance fees should be paid for by the employers. Employers should find pension schemes for migrant workers. If the situation allows, the migrant workers should join the normal worker's pension scheme. The employers must pay for the pension fees. For improving migrant worker's living conditions, employers with many migrant workers should build and rent out accommodation for migrant workers or provide housing subsidy.

Welfare is certainly an important issue for migrant workers. In China, this normally includes accident injury insurance, medical insurance, accommodation, pension, and so on. It is noted that since the socialist system is still dominant in China, for a formal worker, his/her contribution towards welfare provision has been deducted directly from his/her income. For migrant workers, therefore, the situation may become complicated.

For the interviewed migrants, 37% of them do not have any accident injury insurance, medical insurance or accommodation allowance. Among the rest of them, 50% of migrants have accident injury insurance; 8% of them have accommodation allowance and 5% of them have medical insurance. Some employers pay this to insurance companies. If an accident happens, the insurance company will deal with it directly. If no insurance company is involved, normally the employer would pay 50% of the cost if a migrant worker is injured in an industrial accident. If the accident causes death, the payment will depend on the individual agreement between the migrant and the employer. The medical insurance normally covers serious illness. For those who do not have medical insurance, in some exceptional cases, the employers pay a certain proportion of

the medical expenses. The proportion varies from 10-60%, depending on the actual cost. The majority of migrants have to pay for any medical treatment by themselves. This could be a very heavy burden if expensive medical treatments are necessary.

Only 16% of the migrants have retirement pension. In most cases, pension schemes can be regarded as a form of forced saving. Some employers deduct 500-1,000 CNY per year from migrant workers' income, and then pay them back when they leave or retire. If the contract is relatively long, a migrant may be treated the same as a formal worker in terms of their pension scheme. In the studied cases, the average contract period for such migrants is 7.7 years. Currently the pension system in China is changing from being employer based to society based. In this way problems caused by the bad performance of individual employers can be diminished. It seems that this will also bring positive changes for migrants.

Formal workers normally have, or used to have, free/subsidised accommodation from the employer, although this policy is changing since the housing reform started. For the studied migrants, only 34% of them have the right to have free/subsidised accommodation from their employers. 38% of them are in temporary sheds on construction site. It is also interesting to note that 21% of them are living in private accommodation and 7% in others accommodation. This is a relatively new phenomenon, and is affecting the housing rental market in cities.

Living conditions are generally rather bad. Less than 30% of them live by themselves or with family. About 30% of the migrants share a room with more than five people. Among the studied migrants, the worst case is that of ten migrants sharing a room. Also, there are three cases of two migrants sharing a bed because they work different hours.

Compared with the poor migrants, the welfare conditions of official poor urban residents are considerably better. They receive the government's 'minimum living standard scheme' (*di bao*), which pays a basic livelihood with some form of aid. The government provides subsidy for laid-off workers, unemployment insurance, and housing subsidy for urban residents. Urban employers provide social pensions and medical aid for their formal staff. The lack of those rights and limited rights of mobility has rendered the poverty rate among the 'floating population', 50% higher than that among other urban residents (Hong 2005).

4.8. Social Aspects

In the 'Document on solving migrant workers' problems' (State Council 2006) it is stated that employers are urged to ensure migrant workers' rights to join trade unions in accordance with the law. Trade unions should ensure migrant workers fulfil their obligations and protect the rights of them.

In addition to the economic position and working conditions, social position is another very important issue for migrants (Solinger 1997). It seems that trade unions are one of the official organisations to protect rural workers' right although some argued that the trade unions in China, despite their formal responsibilities, have not played a strong role in protecting workers' right and interests. 33% of the interviewed migrants are members of such unions. Such unions are sometimes useful for helping with matters like welfare. However, in comparison with trade unions in Western countries, their power and influence are much less. Instead of being independent organisations, such unions in China are actually part of the employer's administrative infrastructure, and are indirectly led by the employer's director. In general, the official unions are closely integrated into the corporatist state, while unofficial unions are ruthlessly suppressed (Chan 1993). It is found that there is only a weak relationship between levels of unionisation and worker safety in China (Ding et al. 2002).

Rural migrants are loosely structured, lacking any community organisation comparable to the earlier *tongxianghui* and *lianyihui*.¹ 99% of the interviewed migrants do not belong to such an organisation, and 98% of them indicated that there is no such organisation in the city where they are working. Individual and small families are connected mainly through kinship, territorial and profession ties, without the support of any wider community. There is a growing range of non-governmental organization (NGO) type of support for migrants, such as Migrant Women Club in Beijing, and Fangyu Migrant Services in Guangdong. It is estimated that the number of the NGO for migrants is around 20-30 nationwide.

¹ Before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, various organisations for *laoxiang* (people from the same origin, which could be a village, a township, a county, or a province) were very common, such as *huiguan* (guild hall), *tongxianghui* (*laoxiang* association) and *lianyihui* (get-together association). These organisations performed multiple functions that affected both state and society. Since the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), Shanxi *tongxianghui* had been very powerful because many migrants from Shanxi had been extremely successful in the business and banking sector. Shanxi *tongxianghui*'s flag can be seen nearly everywhere across the big cities of the county.

Rural migrants are beneficial from this kind of originations, but they are still at a small scale and with many financial difficulties (Xu 2006).

The interviews included a question asking whom they would turn to for help if a migrant has difficulties. 19 people said that nobody could help. Only 30% chose their employer. This is very different from the situation in Mao's time. It is also worth noting that only one migrant chose the unions, and none chose local or hometown government. In contrast, 51 people think that friends are the most helpful.

With the increased number of migrant workers, legal standards for labour contracts have been introduced, such as the Labour Law of China and the Local Labour Law of Shanxi. According to the Labour Law of China, a written labour contract is needed, and this should include contract allotted time, details of work, wages and payments, working environment and labour protection, medical insurance and welfare, procedures in case of break of contract, and so on. The interview results show that the migrants who are in SOEs all have formal contracts. The contract period varies from one to five years. For the migrants in other types of employers, some of them have oral contracts with contractors and some of them do not have any contract. A migrant said that neither he nor his employer wants to sign a contract because this is more flexible for both sides.

A question was asked to all the interviewed migrants about their view on their social and economic position in comparison with city residents. 47.6% of the interviewees think that their social position is lower than that of city residents, and 28.6% of the interviewees think that their economic position is lower. Only 34.4% of the interviewees think that they have same social and economic status as city residents and a rare 3.8% of the interviewees think they have higher economic status than city residents. It is noted that nobody think their social status is higher in the cities. The results indicate that there is still a tendency for migrants to feel they are low class people in the cities. Certainly, some other factors, such as education level or vocational skills, also contribute to the social position of migrants.

The interviews included a question about differences between formal workers and migrants in various aspects. The result shows that 26.7% of the interviewees think that there is no difference, but 31.4% of the interviewees think that formal workers have a higher income and 33.3% of the interviewees think formal workers have more stable working positions. 9.5% of the interviewees think that there would be a change in their working environment or social position if they

became a formal worker. Overall, it seems that the effect of *hukou* status still exists, but is less important than it used to be.

The rural-urban migration influx has fundamentally changed the social, spatial and economic landscapes of the Chinese cities, making the urban scene much more varied, lively and dynamic, but less safe and orderly than that of the Maoist era (Davin 1996b). According to a recent survey in Beijing (Zhang 2006), people tend to agree that increased rural urban migrants make the urban environment worse. Using a five scale evaluation system, with -2, strongly disagree; 1, disagree; 0 neutral; 1, agree; and 2, strongly disagree, a mean score of 0.6 was obtained. It is interesting to note that Beijing residents tend to agree more that migrants make the urban environment worse, with a significantly higher score than both temporal residents and visitors ($p < 0.05$). In terms of income, it seems that there is no significant difference between groups.

5. Discussions and Conclusions

Traditionally, migrants are portrayed as the lower class in a supposedly two-class urban society where the permanent residents, with urban *hukou*, are the privileged upper class who enjoy security, socialist medicine, almost-free housing and heavily subsidised food and urban services. Such urban entitlements are unavailable to peasants who are depicted as a large but implicitly undifferentiated group with little hope of breaking through the *hukou* barriers. Although such a system has been changed considerably, through this study it is clear that the situation of rural-urban migrants has not been improved. Whilst the remittance they are generating might help them to improve rural poverty, they are now generally in a position of urban poverty, both in terms of social and economic positions.

It seems that the fundamental cause for rural-urban migrants falling in urban poverty is the lack of rights. Sen's theory seems neglecting the issue of rights, which is important for all kinds of exclusion and deprivation. The poor are socially excluded not mainly due to their lack of ability but because of the lack of fair rights. One believes that improvement of civil rights is a gradual process that starts with certain basic freedoms before enjoying political rights and social rights which entail the provision of medical aid, unemployment benefits, housing subsidy and education assistance to the disadvantaged groups (Marshall, 1985). In China, the poor rural urban migrants suffer from not only social exclusion, but also from serious violation of their rights. Although urban poverty may not

stem solely from social exclusion, and those who are excluded may not be all poor but those without fair rights are invariably poor.

Rural-urban migration plays an important role in the development of urban areas. Migrants are very important for the processing, manufacturing, construction, and mining industries, as well as in domestic and services sectors. Without them most cities cannot move. On the other hand, people have tended to see migrants in a negative light, linking them with such problems as increasing crime rates, disordered (*luan*) street scenes and disregard for family planning. Many local urban residents are also worried that increasing rural urban migrants put great pressure on urban environment (Zhang 2006).

It is vital to recognise and resolve the problems faced by rural-urban migrants. Whilst in the State Council's 'Document on solving migrant workers' problems' (State Council 2006), a number of issues have been addressed, including wage increase, on-time payment, minimum wage, removing discriminatory regulations and systematic obstacles, occupational safety, professional and skill training, enforcement of accident insurance policy, medical insurance, pension schemes, improvement of living conditions, and protection of various rights, including the right for their children to enrol in local schools without paying any extra fees, there is a long way to go to turn these into solid actions and regulations/laws.

The selection of jobs and living places by migrants is rational, and once this rationality is accepted it can be seen that there is a great need for innovation in institutions and socio-economic organisations. Most of the negative aspects of labour migration are the result of distorted policies. The key to turning rural-urban migration into a positive element in economic development lies in whether or not the government can adapt to the inevitable trends in economic development and social structure, meet the requirement for labour migration, guide such migration according to its development, and provide the necessary management and services.

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