

# China's "New Generation" Rural-Urban Migrants: Migration Motivation and Migration Patterns

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## **Abstract:**

The majority of China's roughly 145 million rural-urban migrants were born after 1980, making this population the "new generation" of internal migrant workers. Having been directly influenced by China's rapid economic growth and recent socio-demographic policy changes, this cohort of rural-urban migrants have different migration motivations compared to their father's generation, and demonstrate interesting migration patterns. The paper provides a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the new generation migrants as it reveals the young migrants' social goals, expectations, employment choices, and sociocultural integration in cities.

This research uses in-depth interview data collected in December 2006 and February 2007 in Guangzhou City and Bozhou rural areas. The first part of this research examines the primary migration motivation and reasons for migrants to relocate or change jobs. A variety of non-economic migration reasons were found, which expresses distinct new-generation characteristics such as being tired of school, being attracted by the city life or exploring the world. In terms of relocation and changing job reasons, intolerance of over-loaded jobs and adverse working conditions were frequently cited by the young migrants. They were also found to strategically change jobs to align with personal and career interests, which used to be a luxury for rural-urban migrants.

The second part of the research explores a typology of the new generation migrants according to the social migration patterns: Career Builders, Family Helpers, Emotional Explorers and Lost Followers, with stories and quotes from each prototype. Then, the paper discusses how young migrants transfer from one type to another as they stay in the cities longer.

## **Key Words:**

China, rural-to-urban migration, internal migration, new-generation migrants, post 1980, migration motivation.

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## I. Background:

In 2009, there were 145 million rural-urban migrants in China, accounting for about 11 percent of the total population<sup>1</sup>. Among them, an estimated 85 million were born after 1980<sup>2</sup> (another source has indicated this number as 100 million in 2010<sup>3</sup>) - a period when three distinct government policies converged to shape the circumstances for increased rural-to-urban migration within China: the controversial One Child Policy was firmly implemented, the economic policy Open and Reform took place, and the *Hukou* (Residence Registration) System began to reform. The rural-urban migrants born after 1980s (and who have lived in the city for more than 6 months) are referred as "new generation" migration<sup>4</sup> and this population is becoming the main force of China's migrant labor.

First, after its introduction in 1979, the controversial One Child Policy, which promoted late marriage and postponed child-bearing and limited the number of children born in rural families to 1.5 (two for family that has a first-born girl, otherwise one), was firmly implemented and shifted the vast rural China household structure<sup>5</sup> - and thus, agricultural workforce - dramatically to fewer children.

Second, the *Hukou* System - a residence registration system devised in the 1950s to record and control internal migration and has ultimately created an institutional division and disparity between the city and the countryside population - began to loosen. As China's urbanization proceeds, the *Hukou* System has more and more hindered the rural-urban labor flow and therefore a reform began in mid-1980 to address the demand of both the market and the willing peasants and to embrace "an increasingly globalized mode of economic development".<sup>6</sup> A series of studies on contemporary China calculated that the urban-to-rural income ratio is almost 3 (well above Asian upper range of 1.8 in the 1990s) and the gap is not eliminated by rural-urban migration.<sup>7</sup> The disparity also lies in access to social resources, such as health care<sup>8</sup> and education system<sup>9</sup>, and perceptions of justice<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> "新生代农民工的数量、结构 and 特点 (Numbers, Structure and Characteristics of New Generation Migrant Workers in China)."

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "中国社科院法治蓝皮书总结 2010 中国刑事犯罪九特征中国社科院 2011 法治蓝皮书-法制网 (Blue Book of Rule of Law documents or reports by Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) ."

<sup>4</sup> "新生代农民工的数量、结构 and 特点 (Numbers, Structure and Characteristics of New Generation Migrant Workers in China)."

<sup>5</sup> "中华人民共和国人口与计划生育法 (Population and Family Planning Law of P.R. China)."

<sup>6</sup> Fan, *China on the Move: Migration, the state, and the household*. P 52-53

<sup>7</sup> Sicular, Yue, and Gustafsson, "How Large Is China's Rural-Urban Income Gap?"

<sup>8</sup> Yip, "Disparities in Health Care and Health Status: the rural-urban gap and beyond."

<sup>9</sup> Hannum, Wang, and Adams, "Rural-Urban Disparities in Access to Primary and Secondary Education under Market Reforms."

<sup>10</sup> Wang, "Boundaries of Inequality: perceptions of distributive justice among urbanities, migrants, and peasants."

As the *Hukou* system became loosened and inter China population movements became easier, China has been experiencing a possibly largest population movement in the world. Because many of these "new generation" migrants' parents have already joined the rural-urban outflow, some of them were born in the cities and some of them were once "left behind children" themselves.

Third, at the same time, China's "Reform and Open" economic reform policy was already on track for unprecedented economic growth and ultimately resulted in a booming economy with increased incomes across China and large foreign investments directed to the manufacturing industry in eastern urban areas. Slower income growth for rural families, increased demand for cheap labor in China's new manufacturing sector<sup>11</sup>, and booming development that encroached on rural lands pushed a large amount of rural surplus labor to the cities.

According to a recent report by the China National Bureau of Statistics, 44.4 percent of new generation migrant workers are employed in the manufacturing industry compared to 31.5 percent of the previous generation. Construction, which was traditionally the primary magnet for rural-urban migrants, now draws just 9.8 percent of new generation workers compared to 27.8 percent of the previous generation. This is because "the new generation migrants tend to choose more decent, safer and promising career positions."<sup>12</sup>

New generation migrants are young, lack experience in the agricultural sector as well as in city life, and face a variety of challenges. The National Bureau of Statistics report found that the first migrating age of migrants born between 1980 and 1990 is 21.1, while the age for those who were born after 1990 is 17.2 – considerably younger<sup>13</sup>. Having migrated just after finishing high school, migrants face high pressure from work, low satisfaction in terms of their wages, unsure self-identification (villager or citizen), and an overall lack of happiness.

News and media are already paying close attention to this rising young migrant group. For example, the shocking tragedy of the 13-suicide string in a factory owned by possibly the largest employer in China, a Taiwanese Foxconn Company in Shenzhen City brought these "new generation migrants" under the spotlight<sup>14</sup>. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences published the Blue Book of Rule of Law Documents pointed out that in 2010, about one third of the urban crimes were related to the "new generation"

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<sup>11</sup> Li, "Population Migration and Urbanization in China: A Comparative Analysis of the 1990 Population Census and the 1995 National One Percent Sample Population Survey."

<sup>12</sup> "新生代农民工的数量、结构和特点 (Numbers, Structure and Characteristics of New Generation Migrant Workers in China)."

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> "Suicides at Foxconn: Light and death | The Economist."

migrants.<sup>15</sup>

There is still much to learn about this cohort of rural-urban migrants, however. They may have more individualistic goals and higher expectations than the previous generation, and thus might demonstrate different migrating patterns, particularly in terms of their motivations for migrating, choice of jobs, socioeconomic integration in cities, and their go-return patterns. This article explores some of these issues by analyzing recently collected survey data.

## II. Data and Methodology

Analysis in this paper is based on survey and narratives. In December 2006 and February 2007, the author and field-work groups from School of Social Development and Public Policy, Beijing Normal University and Jinan University, Guangzhou conducted 200 in-depth interviews with migrant workers in Guangzhou and the rural areas of Bozhou. Interviewees were randomly selected on the street, railway station, or from the village houses. For example, we tossed a coin three times to generate a 0-8 number to decide which person standing in a long ticket line to talk to, or which house in a row of village housing to enter. 15-20 RMB was given to each interviewee as compensation. We were rejected about half of the times we tried. Among all 200 interviewees, 86 were born after 1980 and they are the object of this paper. Audio records were made during each interview, and later word-to-word transferred into transcripts by a professional agent. The transcripts were analyzed with the aid of qualitative analysis software (Atlas T.I.).

Guangzhou was chosen because it is a major labor-receiving city in southern China. Bozhou is on the border of Anhui and Henan Provinces, both of which are among the most heavily populated and labor-sending provinces in central China. Interviews were completed in Spring Festival period when most of the migrant workers were resting at home.

## III. Migration Motivation

China's rural-urban population movement is largely viewed as a response to the market reform<sup>16</sup> and as it is described in the traditional Todaro model,<sup>17</sup> better employment opportunities in destination play the main determinant of migration decision. For the

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<sup>15</sup> “中国社科院法治蓝皮书总结 2010 中国刑事犯罪九特征中国社科院 2011 法治蓝皮书-法制网 (Blue Book of Rule of Law documents or reports by Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) .”

<sup>16</sup> Liang, “The Age of Migration in China.”

<sup>17</sup> Todaro, “A Model of Labor Migration and Urban Unemployment in Less Developed Countries.”

"new generation" migrants, economic motivation is still indubitably the primary motivation of the rural-urban outflow.

The 1990 and 2000 censuses both included a question asking migrants to choose one option best describing their migration motivation. In the China census, two dichotomies are used to category migrants' motivation: self-initiated or state-sponsored; economic or social (life-cycle). The specific options such as "job transfer/assignment", "industry training", or "family unification" are provided to choose from.<sup>18</sup> In our survey, this question was structured as a "why" question and the first reason migrant mentioned was recorded as the primary reason. Thus, though economic reason may well be the fundamental motivation, it is worth paying attention to young migrants answer since it largely reflects their reasoning about migration.

### ***A. First Migration Motivation:***

In the interviews, we asked each of the migrant workers the question that why they first decided to migrate out of the village. Instead of being pushed by the bad economic status in the village, many of them are pulled by the opportunities and the excitement of the city life. The following four types of answers are frequently mentioned by the migrating youth:

#### **1. Being tired of school**

Rather than economic pressure, being tired of school is one of the most frequent answers to the first migration motivation question. Many of our interviewees expressed little interest in school and they consider that as the direct factor that pushed them out of the village. Although China has been implementing nine-year compulsory education for several decades, large amounts of rural youth did not complete their 9th grade before they went to the city seeking jobs. In China, the enrollment in junior and senior school is strictly based on age and residential area, which makes it very difficult for drop-outs to go back to school and continue from where they stopped. There is no such thing as GED there to score high-school drop-outs and somehow bridges them to community schools. Once one drops out of school, it is almost impossible for him/her to come back.

Attending skill training school thus becomes a very important path for the migrant workers who want to improve their professional knowledge and skills. The most popular training schools these migrants attend are in computer, sewing, construction, beauty. Some factories provide on-the-job training for some unique technique, for

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<sup>18</sup> Fan, *China on the Move: Migration, the state, and the household*. Pp. 55-57

example, operating a computer-assisted sewing machine. Sometimes training schools and companies co-operate training course with the promise that after graduation, a job in that certain company will be provided. This form is very popular in the village.

As the interview went on, we usually found that the economic reason lies profoundly in the decision-making process, though it seems not to be the first motivation that reflected in those youths' mind when they were asked. The other motivations are sometimes hard to separate.

*Q: At that time (2006), why did you decide to migrate out?*

*A: Well, my school grades were not good, and we just went out to work.*

*Q: Did you want to continue in school?*

*A: No, I didn't. It took me two year to complete 6<sup>th</sup> grade... School is very hard for me. If I take the 6<sup>th</sup> grade again, I would be laughed at.*

*Q: But you could still go to junior high school without very good grades, couldn't you?*

*A: (the interviewee's Mom answered instead): It was because our family was in lack of money. We can't afford sending both her and her elder sister to school for that long.*

*A (Mom) : Her sister has better grades and we can only choose one to stay in school. Neither of our 3 children have land. The whole family only has two adults' land... No land.*

In this case, Linlin, the 16-year girl we interviewed from Bozhou's village was working with her parents in Shanghai while her elder sister was attending school at the village. She first migrated even before she finished primary school. Linlin's mother would not let me interview Linlin without her present because she was concerned that Linlin would say something politically wrong. From the girl's answer, we can tell that her motivation of migration is to get rid of school. However, her mother tends to blame the family economic pressure, which seems to be the real reason that she had to migrate. The different angles within the same family show the different ways of thinking between the two generations.

## **2. Being attracted by the city life**

The earlier migrants return to the villages during vacation. They tell the stories of city life, show off their materials goods and demonstrate how to dress in a more fashionable way. As the media broadcast and communication spreads through the rural areas, the youth in the villages learn about life beyond the village from all channels.

Migrating to the city is a major route for the rural youth today, and it could be dangerous because it presents a big distraction for young people to focus on their school.

In Bozhou, a 25 years young man named Zhu, gave up the opportunity of going to college because of migration (I am going to continue with Zhu's story in the later paper).

*Q: So you came out before finishing senior high school?*

*A: Yeah. At that time, you can say that I was lured by the money. Since everyone else was migrating, I rushed into it too. Actually my grades at school were pretty good.*

*Q: So why didn't you continue school? Did you ever plan to go to college?*

*A: Sure. I had always been planning to go to college till the final year of senior high. I was a little bit distracted then: my family has introduced me to a girl. Also, one of my fellows migrated working in Dalian and came back with a cellphone. A cellphone in the village was really a luxury at that time – maybe his was an old one – I don't know. Anyways I borrowed it once and I was looking at this thing and saying to myself: wait a minute, he had worked in the city for only a few months and he can afford this. Why don't I go too? ... My grades were good. I was in key senior high school and I was top 5-10 in my class.*

*Q: That was pretty good record. If you continue, what kind of college would you have made it to?*

*A: I was planning to go to Nursing School.*

*Q: You mentioned that you had a girlfriend?*

*A: Yeah. At the beginning, my wife (my girlfriend then) was my classmate in junior high school. But she went out of the village to work after graduation (from junior high). And she made money. That makes me feel bad, I mean, I feel that people, including her and her family, will look down upon me because I was still in school and not making any money. So I started not to like school.*

*Q: Got you. So have you ever regretted over that decision?*

*A: Absolutely. For example, now I am working in a factory in Suzhou. I feel so disadvantaged because I don't know how to use a computer. My salary is 2000 RMB and that is far from enough. People in our factory are mostly college graduates and their basic salary is above 2000. Plus call-back pay they get 4000-5000 per month. Because they went to college.*

From Zhu's case we can tell that the pulling force of abundant material plays an important role in motivating rural youth to seek jobs in the city. Also, local peer pressure and the uncertainty about education investment are jeopardizing rural youth opportunities to go for higher education.

### **3. "Just for fun" – for Curiosity and Freedom**

Quite a few of young migrants share the "for fun", "to explore the world" type of



migration motivation. Some emphasized their curiosity, while others emphasized the pursuit of freedom.

Some of the youth choose to leave the village because they want to break the routine life in the village, the "control" from the parents, the arranged career or marriage. Migrating out is their way of rebellion.

Migrating for the purpose of broadening the vision is generally a positive and meaningful motivation for rural youth. This reflects the young villagers' entrepreneurship and ambition, and it will lead to more communication and facilitate integration between the country and the city.

The "for fun" type of motivations were rarely found among the elder generation migrant workers. And thus could be the differentiating motivation for the young migrants. Without seriously concerning the family's economic demand, or discussing with family what kind of job to take and where to go, these youth migrate to the city light heartedly.

Unfortunately, a lot of these young people are not well prepared for the migration journey. For some squab rural youth with little education and life experience, this journey could end up to be disappointing, unexpectedly difficult or even dangerous.

*A: the village is dead; the city is much more fun.*

*A: going out is fun! Staying in school is not as comfortable.*

*A: There were nobody to play with in the village. All of my friends were gone (migrating).*

*People would laugh at me if I didn't.*

*A: It was boring at home.*

### ***B. Secondary Migration Motivation - reasons for changing jobs or working places***

Second migration includes either a location or a job change after the first migration job. In the interview we asked the interviewees to reconstruct their migration history and asked them the reason of each job or working place's change. Questions were structured openly. Motivations of secondary migration of the young migrant workers also contain a variety of non-economic reasons. In the previous research about this rural-urban migrants' secondary migration, scholars have found that major non-economic reasons of changing a job involved "the harshness of the management", "unfairness of the management", "overload of work without call-back pay", "for learning more skills and techniques", "for better individual development", etc. These were all commonly found in our interviews. In addition, I have discovered some reasons such as "for fun", "to be

with friends", or because they are "bored with the current job/place", which have the "new generation trademarks".

## **1. For individual interest and career development**

For the rural-urban migrants who are under economical pressure, it is a luxury to pursue the career they are really interested. But some of today's young migrants are looking for jobs following their burning passion. In this case, Cheng, a 24-year-old young man clearly expressed how he pursued his interest as his career. When he first migrated he found a kitchen job through his cousin. But after about a year, he has saved enough money to take a professional training before he become a hairdresser in a hair salon. He said he has always been interested in the fashion and hair-styling instead of working in the restaurant kitchen.

*Q: Why did you leap from cater industry to hairdressing?*

*A: To be honest, I never liked working in the kitchen. At that time (when I first moved into the city), I didn't have a choice. The only one I knew here (in Guangzhou) was my cousin (who worked in a restaurant). I think hairdressing fits me much better.*

When we interviewed Cheng, he was already a chief hairdresser in a decent hair salon in Guangzhou City (one of the busiest and developed cities in China). When asked how he moved up in the industry so fast, he told us his secret: after the three-month training, he found a chore job in a medium-sized hair salon. After a few months when he felt more confident, he changed to a salon with less prestige but this time, he was a hairdresser. He gained more experience as a hairdresser and then he changed to a more prestige salon while keeping his hairdresser position. Cheng was planning to take an advanced hair-styling training course from Vidal Sassoon in Beijing. His goal is to open his own hair salon in a major city.

Some young migrants like Cheng have a very well conceived strategy of launching in the field that they are interested in and strategy of moving up the career ladder. These migrants' career development should be paid more attention to because their social class mobility is the key test to the efficiency and justice of China's social mobility mechanism.

## **2. For Fun, Freedom and Randomly Changing**

Young migrants who share this secondary migration reason put more emphasize on their personality, leisure time, balance between work and play, and their right to enjoy life:

*Q: Why did you quit that job?*

*A: (working in the factory) I didn't have my own time. Doing this (small business) is better, more flexible schedule.*

*A: It was just boring! Want a change.*

*A: At the beginning it was fun, but as time goes by I was bored. I learnt nothing. Didn't wanna continue.*

This kind of second migration motivation is consistent with the stereotype of the young people born and grown up in the city.

### **3. Low Tolerance of Over-loaded Work or Being Looked Down Upon**

*Q: ...So when you were in Meizhou, you thought that it was too hard to be a waitress?*

*A: I don't really mind hard working, but I can't go by being looked down upon.*

*Q: Why did you decide to come here?*

*A: That job is not for human being. You will die.*

Many years, people have associated rural-urban migration with the image of totally tolerant of any task work, and never complain about being looked down upon. We observe that it is not necessarily true with today's migrants. Since life in the villages has been generally improved in most places (plus the scarce of land), the only child (or one of the only two children) is not any more used to the heavy labor agricultural work at home. As a result, when they start to migrate, they tend to choose light labor jobs and choose to work with dignity.

In addition, we found that not every young migrant remit back to the village. Actually, a considerable portion of them do not or rarely remit. Some of them even take financial aid from their parents.

## IV. Patterns of Migration

The "new generation" rural-urban migrant population is a very heterogeneous group. After months of interviewing and transcript reading, I generated four representative social migration patterns these youth follow: Career Builder, Family Helper, Emotional Explorer and Lost Follower.

As shown in the figure, each vector is labeled with four or five migration characteristics. The opposite directions represent two extreme behaviors of one characteristic, and each pattern is defined in a separate quarter. Two patterns that share direction of vector share the characteristics on that vector. For example, a typical Career Builder and a typical Emotional Explorer both tend to have higher education level or better at using training (same features); while a typical Career Builder tends to remit or save more but a typical Emotional Explorer tends to remit or save less (opposite feature).

### Social Migration Patterns

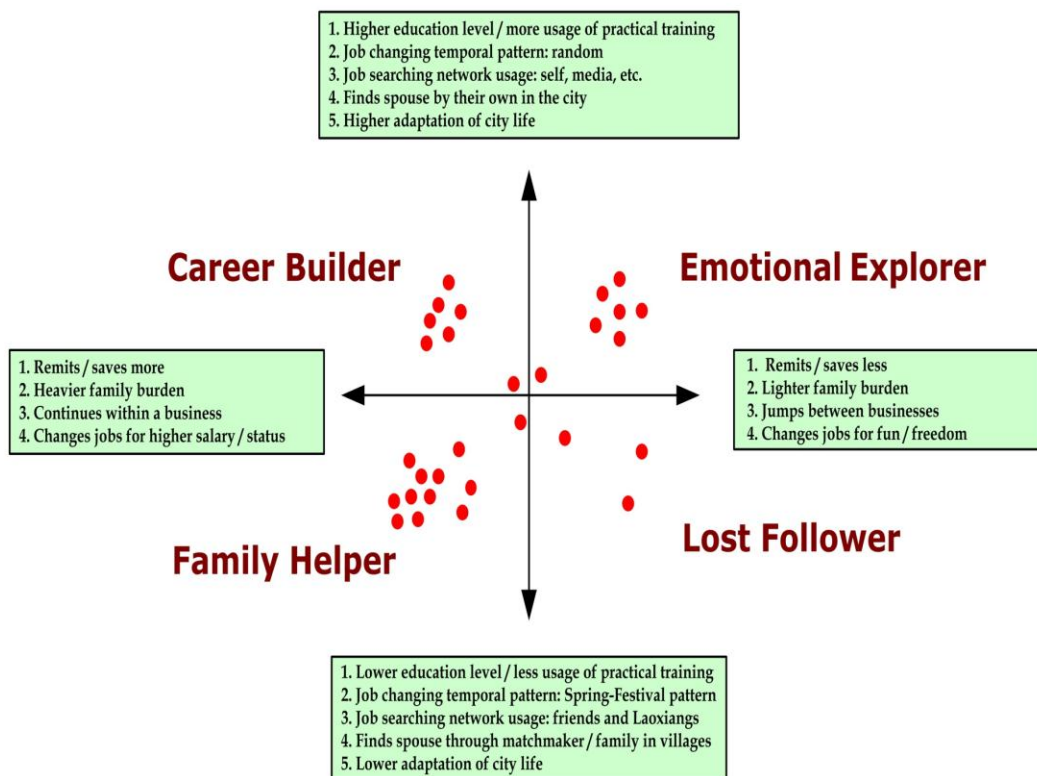


Figure. A Typology of Social Migration Patterns

Theoretically, this quartered model divides the young migrant population into four mutually exclusive types. However, the division is only suggestive, since young

migrants change their social migration patterns as they become more mature.

## ***A. Prototypes of Each Social Migration Pattern***

### **1. Career Builder**

Going back to migrant Cheng's story: he represents the type of youth who plans his/her career and takes action strategically. These people usually operate independently in their job-seeking process; they often have achieved a relatively high level of education and are able to quickly and consciously gather professional knowledge and skills during their migration process; they also tend to stay within the same business.

Cheng volunteered to be interviewed after observing me interviewing other migrants in Shipai Village, Guangzhou City, probably because of the compensation I promised to pay. Born in 1982, he was at that time a chief hair dresser in a salon. He was tall, quiet, and dressed stylishly. The interview was a very efficient one, because he was able to give prompt answers while watching the time. "We'd better go through basic information quickly," Cheng said to me. He even filled the "family information" section by himself in order to save time.

Growing up in a village in Sichuan Province with divorced parents, at the age of 13 and after graduating from elementary school, he left his hometown and began to work part-time in a small grocery in Chengdu City, where his father was living. In 2001, Cheng went to Guangzhou City to work in a restaurant, where one of his cousins was working. By 2005, he had changed about ten restaurants and hotels, and he had moved up from kitchen hand to chef. Then he left the catering industry and attended a hair dressers' school to acquire the skills of hair dressing. After successfully launching into the fashion industry, he "zigzagged" his way to the top of the ladder. He intended to acquire more skills until he could open his own salon.

Cheng went home only once during the six-year migration. He sends about 300 Yuan to his parents on their birthdays. He did visit his elder sister (his only sibling) once in Zhongqing City; at the time she was studying in a college there. What is impressive is that he sponsored his sister for all four years of her college study, which cost 20,000 to 30,000 in total. Helping siblings with school tuition does occur among other migrant workers. But, this was really remarkable because the two siblings varied a lot in their educational levels, and the elder one was almost totally sponsored by the younger. They were very attached to each other, and he even planned to finally start his career and settle in Zhongqing, where his sister was working at the time of the interview.

From Cheng's story, I can see clearly his career building process. The education and training experience played a key role in helping him launch into the business he likes.

Obviously, he was fully aware of the importance of education and was inclined to further his training during his career climbing. Utilizing professional training to change one's situation is found in other migrants' cases too and it proves to be a very efficient way to promote one's career development.

The Career Builder is the core type because he/she is already aware of the social ladder and is prepared to grasp the opportunities that present themselves. This type of migrants is the most efficient group as career managers. They are of special interest to policy makers in China, because they are seen as the potential elite group stuck in the bottom of China's rural-urban binary society structure, thus their access to the upper classes is crucial to social justice. If they are not provided the opportunities to climb the social ladder, they might become restless and potentially destructive to society.

## **2. Family Helper**

The Family Helper group mostly inherits the traits of the traditional Chinese rural-urban migrants, who send home every cent they save and lead a hard life in the city. The chief concern of these migrants is their family members in the village. Since the economic motivation is the primary reason for Family Helper migrants to move to the city, earning, saving and remitting cash is their main behavior.

A 19-year old girl, Guo in Bozhou, was working in a clothing factory with her twin sister. They started migrating two years ago, through their uncle, who was a manager in that factory. The twins brought 10,000 CHY to their Mom at the end of 2006. The factory was in the suburbs of Hangzhou City, and provided meals and dorms for workers. They did not need to leave the factory area and they did not have any free time. Thus they seldom spent the money they earned. They worked 10 hours per day, with 2 days off per month. Migration life had been made very simple for them.

Most migrants of this type prefer a relatively stable working environment, like a factory job, and they usually migrate together with somebody they already know. They relocate only to earn a higher salary or to attain better working conditions. In fact, switching jobs or cities after the Spring Festival (the Chinese New Year) is a very common pattern found among Family Helpers: Employers will usually liquidate the payment before the end of a lunar year and migrants returning home to for the holiday will exchange information and decide where to go the following year.

Family Helper migrants are not necessarily the main bread earners of the family, though some certainly are, but their employment and life in the city is often heavily dependent on the financial situation of the family back home. They seem to weigh a "wage job" more over career ambition, skill improvement or adventurous. We interviewed as many female as male young migrants who demonstrated a "Family Helper" pattern. Traditionally, females in the rural areas have many disadvantages due

to intrahousehold gender hierarchy and when they migrate to the cities, they are often engaged in low-status, low-paid industrial jobs<sup>19</sup>. Many employers, such as factories and restaurants, prefer to hire female workers because they are usually easier to manage compared to the male counterparts, and more capable of conducting tedious assembling line type of jobs that require a lot of patience and long hours.<sup>20</sup>

Migrants that tend to continue within a certain business or employer have better opportunity to climb up the career ladder since they can easily accumulate skills and experience, extend social capital, etc. For example, Shang, 23, was a stakeholder in a restaurant in Beijing by the time we interviewed him. In the past several years, he had been moved from a waiter, a restaurant cashier, a manager, and finally restaurant co-owner and those working experiences led to his current position. Unfortunately, many migrants have not realized the advantage of remaining in one business. We see in a greater number of cases that skills gathered from one job were totally abandoned because of random job and business changes. Thus, migrant workers who choose a job for the mere sake of a relatively stable labor relationship and change job every lunar year are usually stuck in the low status of labor market.

Migrants with extremely heavy family burden will usually have to tread a fine line between legal and illegal activities, and many work more than one job in order to remit as much as possible. Li, 25, had a younger brother with disability and a mother who was not able to work. Her grandmother had just passed away. When we met her she was working in a small antique shop in Shipai Village, Guangzhou. She told us she also had another job in a night club. During her 7 years of migration she had been working in many different places and positions, usually several jobs at the same time. There was no continuity in her working history: she just applied for the job that allowed her to earn more money.

Some migrants show a hybrid remittance behavior, which can be placed between those of Career Builder and Family Helper: their remittance is saved by the parents for the migrant's future use, such as his or her marriage or to fund his or her post-migration life. For example, one migrant sent money home every month but his mother saved the money for him instead of using it. His mother reported to him frequently how much more money he needed to marry a girl or to start a small grocery store back in the village.

### **3. Emotional Explorer**

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<sup>19</sup> Huang, "Gender, hukou, and the occupational attainment of female migrants in China (1985-1990)."

<sup>20</sup> Lee, "Engendering the Worlds of Labor: Women Workers, Labor Markets, and Production Politics in the South China Economic Miracle."

Emotional Explorers occupy the quadrant opposite of Family Helpers because their behavior is vastly different. They often resemble the prototype of the one-child generation, which is typically described as spoiled and egotistical.

A 21-year old male migrant worker, Xiong, had worked in 5 cities during his 6 years of migration history. He worked as factory worker, waiter, bars tender, and foreman in restaurants.

"I never sent a penny back home – actually it is never enough for myself! For example, this summer, the low season, when we don't have to work for extra hours, I go out with my friends for a drink and a snack at night. Plus I need to buy clothes, cigarettes – my salary never seems enough. I am on debt almost every month."

He "follows his heart" to apply for new jobs in different places: "The reason I went to Meizhou (for my third job) was because one of my working fellows was from there. We have been friends for one year and he decided to go home. I thought it would be fun to go there with him. So I quit the job and followed him to Meizhou. After a few days I spent all the money I had. I went to a hotel there and got a job."

"And how did I end up in Guangzhou? Well, while I was in Meizhou, I had a lot of free time that I spent chatting on the internet. I got to know this girl who worked in Guangzhou. We had been calling each other 'husband' and 'wife' on line for half a year before she asked me to visit her. I brought my two months' salary – about 4000 RMB – and came here to meet her. We had fun together. After a week or so, I woke up one morning and found that she was gone. I had no idea where to find her. And I only had 200 RMB left in my pocket. I said to myself: it is time to find a new job now." Later that day Xiong found his current job – a deliveryman for a small supermarket in Guangzhou.

"I was not cheated. I never thought that way. Everyone gets what he needs... My marriage status? Can't you tell? ... How could I be married? I don't even have a girlfriend. I can't even support myself, how can you expect me to support a girlfriend? I will marry at least at an age of 30."

"Do whatever you wanna do. Don't care about the wage. If you can learn something, the wage means nothing. Because the purpose you come out from the village is to learn things, not for the money."

Respondents classified in this group often explained that they seldom or never remitted funds to their families and even found that their salaries were not sufficient for sustaining the urban lifestyle they desired. Their motivation for relocating cities or workplaces often lied in the realm of the emotional, either for fun, to alleviate boredom, or to follow friends or a love interest. Compared to Family Helpers, who change jobs



more rhythmically (around lunar year end for example), Emotional Explorers change jobs more randomly. Though we see little planning in both types of migrants. Thus, Emotional Explorers' migration patterns and attitudes towards life and relationships seem to diverge from traditional Chinese rural-urban migrants' values.

Most of the young migrants' spouses/fiancées are from the same hometown or province. They also prefer dating someone who is from the same region. Specifically, many young migrants accepted a girl or a boy back in the village introduced to them by the family as a fiancée or fiancé. They may both work in different cities, and meet with each other during the holidays. If everything goes well, they get married in the village. Then they may choose to migrate together until the woman gets pregnant and stops working for a few years. Some migrants have met their prospective partner in the city through village-fellow workers network. Dating or being married to the city-born was not very commonly found in our interviews.

#### **4. Lost Follower**

Fewer new generation migrants from the study fell into the category of Lost Follower, and those who did likely were too young to develop into any of the other three patterns. Lost Followers commonly follow relatives or friends when they migrate.

For example, Linlin, a girl in Bozhou born in 1990, was then working in the handicraft article factory in Shanghai with her mother. Her father has also worked in Shanghai for more than ten years, doing waste recycling. Zhang told me that study does not interest her at all - she could not graduate from elementary school even with two extra years. Now she lives with parents and can earn some money and she felt relieved. Zhang does not have much knowledge about her contract and wage, nor much thought about working condition, because her mother manages that for her and covers all her living expense. Neither does she think about the future.

When the young migrant is not well prepared, is not knowledgeable enough to protect themselves, and is not under the umbrella of their relatives or friends, the migration journey can become dangerous. Besides a basic academic training of reading, counting and professional skills, the preparations also include proper documents (e.g., a Citizen Identity Card), common sense (e.g., first aid, direction and basic geography), and usage of public safety resources (e.g., police and government).

An extreme example is Bai. We met this 18-year old male migrant worker from YunNan Province in Guangzhou railway station, while he was scrabbling about in the garbage for food. We were shocked to learn his real age since with his shabby clothes and dirty face, he looked like in his 50s. He told us the story how he was cheated out of hometown, sold into a black brick factory and abused there. After seeing one of his

fellow workers being beaten to death he ran away and walked alone the railway up to Guangzhou. He could not remember phone number that he could reach his family (the whole community shared one phone). He could not ask for help from the government because he did not have (never applied for) a Citizen Identity Card. This was too fancy a story to believe in today's China so we decided to ignore this case. However two months after the interview we read headlines in newspapers that the black brick factories were found in China, where young rural-urban migrant workers were trafficked and made into slavery and even died from overload work. Like Bai, most of them are undocumented young people with limited preparation and knowledge but an urban migration dream.

Migrants in this category may be illiterate or innumerate might lack identification documents, may not have enough built up experience to guide them. This makes them especially vulnerable to human trafficking, exploitation, abuse victimization by criminals and engaging in crimes themselves. The factory dorms and city villages (urban slums) have high density of inexperienced, energetic and headlong migrant workers. This helps explaining the high rate of the urban crimes is related to the "new generation" migrants along with "discrimination, limited accessibility to occupational and educational opportunities, disparity in economic and politics, absence of social protection and welfare, and cultural and psychological shock when moving to the city", as the Chinese Academy of Social Science pointed out.<sup>21</sup>

Social network usage, such as asking for help from relatives, friends, or fellow-villagers when searching for job and house or lending money, is a very important and efficient method for new migrant workers to solve problems. Career builders and emotional explorers don't use existing network (such as relatives and fellow-villagers) as frequently as family helpers and lost followers do. Instead, they tend to depend more on themselves, free market (for example, advertisements) or the newly built network (friends they make during migration). Generally speaking, the higher education level one bears, the more mixed resources one uses. The independence comparison between a "career builder" and a "lost follower" reinforces the finding that as "the migration network develops and matures, the selectivity of migrants declines"<sup>2223</sup>. That is, the maturity of social network enables more migrants to migrate (following).

The migration motivations and patterns of all four types of migrants reflect the self-undermining dynamics that de Haas proposed in his theoretical inquiry of migration process<sup>24</sup>. In de Haas' theory, the starters of migration are the pioneers, followed by more people who migrate under the "Herd effects." More people migrate as the

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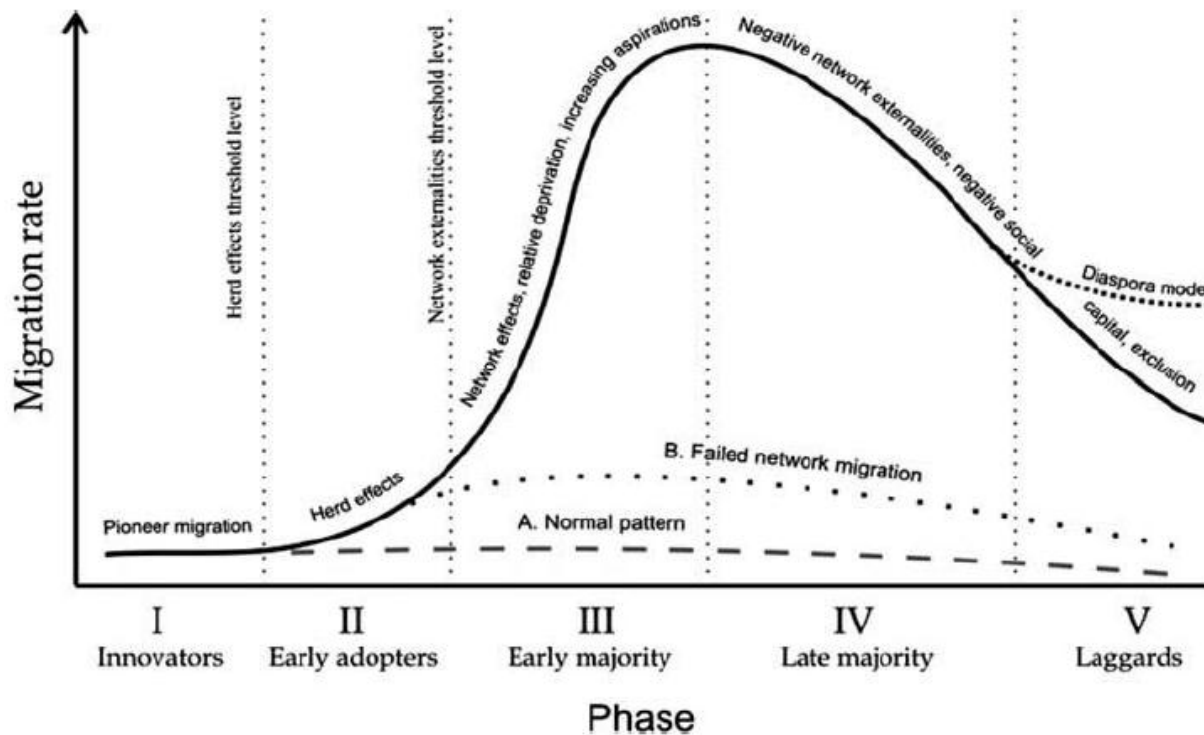
<sup>21</sup> "中国社科院法治蓝皮书总结 2010 中国刑事犯罪九特征中国社科院 2011 法治蓝皮书-法制网 (Blue Book of Rule of Law documents or reports by Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) ."

<sup>22</sup> Fan, *China on the Move: Migration, the state, and the household*. P69

<sup>23</sup> Massey et al., "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal."

<sup>24</sup> de Haas, "Migration transitions - a theoretical and empirical inquiry into the developmental drivers of international migration."

network develops. The volume of migration reaches the peak as the network matures and starts to become weak. Fewer people will still migrate after that due to the "exclusion" effects. Adapting de Haas theory to the Bozhou young migrants: those who find jobs and places more independently demonstrate a "pioneer" migration spirit; while those who are following the fellow villagers are most likely migrations happening under the network effect. Finally, "no one else is left in village" exerts an exclusion effect on the left over rural youth and motivated them to migrate. It may have shown a sign that Bozhou rural-urban migration has reached the laggard mode.



Appendix: de Haas figure 3. Page 20

## ***B. Working and Growing –Transition from One Social Pattern to Another***

Theoretically, the four types are exclusive, but since people and environment change, it is highly possible one could transfer from one type to another as the accretion of age and migrating experience.

### **1. From Lost to Family Helper**

It is observable that as many young migrant workers grow up, their life and work experience increase. They gradually know how to find a job and save money in a more efficient way. We have plenty of cases of Family Helper, who are used to be lost, because they gradually become more familiar with the job and save or remit more.

### **2. From Family Helper to Explorer for Fun**

Most of young migrant workers start migration life with remitting and helping their families. However, after a few years or so, some of them become to exploring about. As they live in the city longer, their spending behavior varies and their expenditure increases more rapidly than their wage does. This results in a big change of their remittance behavior. Wu is such an example. He had to first migrate at an age of 16 because his family has two younger siblings to take care of. He worked in a toy factory for almost 4 years, until his younger siblings grew up and were able to stand on their own feet. Then, he began to question his life and decided to change a difference. He left that factory and went to other cities and he did not remit to his family any longer.

As young migrants in the city are getting older, their remittance will grow as well". However, it is not always true in our interviews. As a matter of fact, some young migrants remit at the early stage of migration, but as they stay in the city for longer, their life expenses are expending more quickly than their salary is. At a result, they remit less

### **3. From Explorer to Career builder**

It happens to the Emotional Explorers that sometimes after jumping between variety of places and jobs, they settle in a certain business or place and their career paths crystallize. Zhu, as I mentioned before, beginning his migrating journey in his final senior high year, has migrating worked in 8 cities. He was once a combination of family helper and an explorer – he remits every month, but he acts highly independently in terms of finding jobs and places. But in 2005, when he married his fiancée, whom he had been dating since junior high, he started to change this pattern. He stayed in his hometown for a year; at the same time he attended a 6-month computer training program in Bozhou (which is hour-long drive from his hometown). After the program

he was assigned to a job in Acer computer company, Suzhou, as part of the program contract. He now has been working in Suzhou for half a year and he has been already promoted as an assembling line manager. He tells me that he would like to continue in this company and he is looking forward to migrate his whole family - his wife, son, parents and an aunt to Suzhou, since his father and aunt are running a restaurant near Suzhou already and his wife is currently not working. He said his recent goal is to buy a laptop and continue to learn computer skills.

#### **4. The Complete of the Circle**

We also see that some new generation migrants have already completed the full rural-urban migration cycle of leaving the village, following others, helping family, exploring the wide world, building their career, returning home, and getting married. One may even repeat all or part of this cycle again, as the migration journey does not stop when a migrant returns to the village. Once a migrant gets married and has children, they may well decide to move to the city again. Research suggests that, as a migrant's role within their family changes, so too will their migration motivations, destinations, and patterns.

A survey carried in Jilin Province asked migrant workers about their return intention. Surprisingly, the majority said they would prefer going back to the village<sup>25</sup>. Whether this returning will differ from the old and the new generation of migrants remains an interesting research question for future study.

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<sup>25</sup> "Urbanisation: Where do you live? | The Economist."

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