Women's Nonagricultural Employment in Rural China

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Abstract

This study uses in-depth interviews collected from three villages in China during 2000-2009 to investigate to what extent women are involved in nonagricultural employment, how they acquire such jobs, and how their employment strategies are affected by market and family factors. Along with the growth of non-agricultural employment in rural China, there has been a revival of traditional division of labor between men and women. But rural China does not converge on a uniform pattern of employment. Instead, women's employment choices are shaped by the characteristics of local farming system, the availability of external jobs and home-based work, the resources for home business, and local policies on land property and economic development. The study looks at the family behavior as the adaptation of cultural rules, including perceptions of womanhood and the role of the family, to the changing political and economic circumstances.

Research Question

China has the world's largest agricultural economy. Since reforms introduced a market economy at the end of the 1970s, diverse economic opportunities have been created in rural areas, particularly that of nonagricultural employment. At the same time, rural households, instead of collective organizations, began to act as the basic unit of production and consumption. Gender differences in employment may also become more salient. Some studies report improved economic positions of women (Michelson and Parish 2000). Others find that women continue to be or have become more disadvantaged under the economic reform (Bian and Logan 1996), partly due to the revival of patriarchal traditions when the state withdraws control of individual lives (Croll 1983).

In response to the industrialization of the countryside, the rise of the private sector, and the increase of migration, a tendency has been noted that women continue taking care of the family and also take over the farming responsibility, when men begin to seek new economic opportunities outside of agriculture. Consequently, women are over-represented in agricultural fieldwork (Chen 2004). However, there is also evidence of the

declining proportion of farmwork being done by women over the late 1990s (de Brauw 2003).

To understand how new economic opportunities are allocated in transitional rural China, this study uses in-depth interviews collected from four villages in China during 2000-2009 to investigate to what extent women are involved in nonagricultural employment in rural China, how they acquire such jobs, and how their employment strategies are affected by market and family factors.

Theoretical Framework

Rational Choice of Peasants

Ethnographic studies have documented the complex social and cultural backgrounds in peasantry societies under which the goal of profit maximization may not be prioritized in people's choices. As suggested by the notion of "moral economy" (James Scott, 1979), peasants desire the security of collective sharing particularly for protections against starvation. However, Samuel Popkin (1979) argues against the concept of morally enveloped communities and suggests that peasants' collective involvement is based on rational calculations rather than moral obligations. According to Popkin, moral peasants are in fact individual rational actors who build their individual choices on a calculated assessment.

The debate of moral economy versus rational peasants speaks to the management of labor in the Chinese peasantry economy. Even after the socialist regime transformed traditional village collective organizations and collectivized individual peasant households into production teams and communes in the hope of an agricultural utopian society, there have remained interest conflicts and frictions between collectives and peasants. For peasants who made more labor contribution in the collective, it seemed not rational to turn their wealth accumulation into welfare support for their fellow villagers. To solve the problems derived from the collective farming system, the size of production teams had been adjusted to be smaller, the payments were calculated on labor participation

measured by work points, and the socialist regime ended up allowing a tiny private sector of sideline to complement the collective agricultural sector.

The return from collective farming to household production in rural China necessitates reexamination of the peasant household as an economic unit, based on which Nee points to the importance of "peasant household individualism" (Victor Nee, in Parish 1985, 165). Nee suggests peasants are more likely to prefer household goals than individualistic and community goals, if the household division of labor is adequate as a production unit (Nee 1985, 167). Otherwise, peasants would seek cooperative work arrangements under certain conditions that contribute to a moral economy. In other words, the rationality of peasants should be analyzed on a region-specific or condition-specific base.

Nee suggests some of the conditions that have affected labor management in rural China, such as the welfare funds, health care, and the collective insurance. Due to the usually minimal welfare system, peasants need to depend on family as a source of basic security and well-being. Another factor is the economy of scale, as well as the modernization of agriculture, which related with what kind of division of labor is most effective. For example, the large-scale coordination does not contribute to efficiency in wetland rice agriculture when work is mainly done by hands and feet. In addition, the regulation on extraction of agricultural surpluses and the mobilization for infrastructure construction also affect the way peasants rationalize labor use (Nee 1985, 183).

The classic rational choice approach in economics has emphasized more on the individual-based rationality, while overlooks the continuing importance of the peasant family. However, some economists extend their analytical framework by viewing the family as a rational actor. Instead of arguing between the levels of economic unit, they consider family as a fundamental sphere where work is negotiated. Based on comparative advantages, men's specialization in paid work and women's specialization in the domestic sphere can be justified by the maximization of the household utility (Becker 1981). But taking the changing amount of human capital into account, women's increasing education level raises the opportunity cost of not working outside home, thus

women's education has a positive impact on their labor participation (Sharda and Nangle 1981; Desai and Waite 1991; Bielby and Bielby 1992; Drobnic, Blossfeld and Rohwer 1999).

When applying the rational choice approach of family economics in rural China, in addition to the human capital of family members, this project will also take into consideration political capital as another credential (Nee 1989, 1996) as shaping employment patterns in the Chinese context. Moreover, the classical "external paid work vs. unpaid family work" dichotomy may overshadow the "on farm vs. off farm" divide in rural areas, which is under a continuous process of negotiation along with the economic expansion. This study will focus on this outcome variable as an angel to reexamine the rational choices of peasants.

Gender, Family, and Work

Because employment is negotiated at the household level, many studies suggest including the family context in the theoretical framework. The first characteristic to examine is the presence of young children, by which married women's employment is often interrupted (Cohen and Bianchi 1999; Yi and Chien 2002; Hu 2008). Another factor is the presence of grandparents, which is found to reduce the housework hours of the couple with wage jobs (Chen 2004, 559). The common practice of grandparenting (Short and Sun 2004) also enables mother's career investment. Other family characteristics can be related with socioeconomic status, which either makes working outside necessary (Yi and Chien 2002) or makes being housewives affordable (Hu 2008, 32).

Theories of family role model focus on gendered positions in the household. The traditional patriarchal role model had dominated the pre-revolutionary Chinese households, and the socialist reconstruction of families targeted at "egalitarian" or even "neo-traditional" models. Full-time housewives became rare, but at the same time, the "double burden" problem about women's full-time work and home responsibilities stood out, as the sharing of household responsibilities was never part of the Marxist ideology (Blau and Ferber 1986, 335; Bian 1987; Wang and Li 1982). Such problems may have

resulted in women's return to the domestic sphere in the reform era. In contrast to the United States with an increase in labor participation of married women in the late half of the 20th century, China witnessed a reverse change from the socialist model to a more traditional division of labor. In the context of economic expansion, women may see farming as part of their "inside work (Chen 2004)," as men have led the expansion of household business (Entwisle et al. 1995). This study will incorporate spouses' employment and other socioeconomic characteristics to explore potential role models.

Developmental Politics

Changes in family role models are related with the withdrawal of the state from people's lives. But developmental politics remains important in shaping the country's industrial structures and labor market conditions. Some developmental policies, such as the rural-urban divide, created material conditions conductive to traditional family ties (Davis and Harrel 1993, 1). Due to changes in policy repertoires, gender equalizing programs gradually gave way to national development projects. Added by the lack of family friendly policies (Blau and Ferber 1986), the market transition may have led women to lose out (Honig and Hershatter 1998; Zuo 2003). But in response to the demand of labor markets, female labor participation rates can be high (Hu 2008, 32). For instance, Taiwan's labor participation rates of married women are high because of the labor-intensive, small-scale nature of firms; whereas in Korea, the government-sponsored capital-intensive industries favor male instead of female labor (Brinton, Lee and Parish 1995).

The unique economic structure and developmental trajectory reflect the role of government in growth, even in a country like China that undergoes a deregulation process. As the notion of "developmental state" suggests, state apparatus with strong administrative structures can serve national developmental ambitions instead of local or class interests. The overall control of the command economy from the 1950s to the 1970s have played an important role in establishing the agricultural machinery stations, banks and credit coops, and other social institutions such as schools and clinics in rural areas. However, one of the goals of Chinese agricultural policies and institutions, as in many

other late-developing countries, had been to use agriculture sacrifice to fund industrialization by draining agriculture. As a result, urban residents enjoyed more resources than peasants, and industrial investment were made based on cheap agricultural products and particularly depressed grain prices, all of which contributed to "economic distortions" derived from government interventions. Such an urban bias also contributed to the initial drive of peasants' move away from the farming sector when the state oscillated from heavy-handed control to encouragement of the autonomy of small peasant communities and households.

Due to the withering away of the interventionist government and the decentralization process in China, local politics plays an important role in shaping developmental pathways. Local leaders may pass on autonomy to villagers but some hesitates, maintaining control. The changing developmental practices may also serve bureaucratic interests, but the improvement of local economic performance had been one most important goal of local office, which is often used to evaluate the administrative capability of local officials. As a result, regions may vary in land policies, property structures, social institutions, as well as infrastructures that serve agriculture and other economic sectors, which all contribute to the distinct developmental patterns, thus employment patterns of peasants.

Based on the review of existing theoretical perspectives, the study will include individual, family, and market characteristics in analysis. Employment seems to become a matter of "choice" (Hu 2008, 23) but is still related with economic development, gender norms, and welfare regimes (Fuwa 2004). This paper develops an analytical framework that focuses on the different processes of industrialization and urbanization in the three villages as the setting in which employment patterns have been shaped. This study looks at the growth of new economic opportunities as resulting from the interaction between the formal policy changes and the grassroots initiatives, using family adaptive strategy (Moen and Wethington 1992) as a useful tool to link individual actions with social change, and to examine how individuals position themselves in the market is interwoven with how family responses to structural changes.

Sample Villages

The sample villages represent two distinct regions in China: coastal areas and inland areas. The villages have around the average level of income in the region where they are located, though some of them are closer to model villages held up by government for others to emulate and some are more nearly average or even below average for their region or the nation as a whole and have received government assistance. This study uses pseudonyms for villages and persons under investigation.

The selection of both inland and coastal villages reflects the concern to cover distinct levels of rural industrialization, which has become an important index of economic performance of localities. The existence of nonagricultural sectors and the types of nonagricultural sectors in the local economy have a substantive influence on rural employment patterns. Coastal villages experienced a relatively early process of industrialization compared with inland villages. In addition to the degree of industrialization, another important dimension is urbanization. In the recent decades, government-initiated large-scale land development projects have contributed to the rapid urbanization processes, which made a big difference in rural areas where local industries are less developed. Respectively, one sample village that experienced such large-scale urbanization processes and the other two did not have such experiences.

The three villages reflect the regional variations in economic structures, characterized by different agricultural yields, income levels, the variety of crops, collective or private sidelines, and so on. Economic structures, together with developmental pathways, determine what kind of labor and what kind of human capital and experience are valued in the labor market, and thus shaped the particular work experiences in these villages. Such structural variations resulted from not only locations and resources, but also the processes of policy implementation and grassroots reactions during processes of industrialization and urbanization.

Bei Village: Prosperous Private Business

Bei Village locates in the Zhejiang Province. As other south coastal villages, Bei Village has a long grain-growing history, while at the same time some peasant households specialized in wine-making as an important source of family income. But all of such family sideline activities had been repressed under the collective agricultural units since the mid 1950s. The de-collectivization of farms began to be implemented in Bei Village in 1979, and collective enterprises in wine-making, textile, and other manufacture sectors also mushroomed taking advantage of the opening-up of the market. The industrialization process was later increasingly dominated by the rapid growth of private factories and household workshops particularly in the 1980s and 1990s.

The nature of the peasant-farm bond has its continuity before and after the market-oriented transition. In Bei Village, such peasant-farm bond has been characterized by the low ratio of land to population. As land was typically small plots and work were mostly done by hands and feet, collective policies and collective farms were hardly effective in terms of the economy of scale. According to the archive titled "Historical Scratch of Agricultural Output in Bei Village," the amount of land per capital was 1.03 mu in 1962, and 0.85 mu in 1982. Though farming has been a highly labor intensive task in traditional grain-growing areas, there continues to be a demand for the accommodation of surplus labor from the farming sector.

In the situation of labor squeeze and the insufficient return under the collective farming system, many peasants lost enthusiasm to contribute to collective farms but were more motivated to devote themselves to private sideline and became "free riders" in the production teams. Due to the local tradition of making rice wine, labor with relevant skills were welcomed in the state- or collective-owned wine industry in the nearby city or towns. As a compromise of agricultural collective policies, some factories were allowed to recruit peasants with specific skills as temporary workers, whose labor theoretically belonged to rural production teams and whose wages could be transformed into work points in exchange of food supply and other benefits from production teams. Without permission from the rural collectives such as production teams, peasants could not migrate freely for job opportunities, partly to guarantee the collective quota delivery

targets to be met. The unpermitted behaviors in pursuit of profits were risky, as the sales of grain, edible oils, and other commodities were all controlled by the state and the collectives. As a result, any attempt of run private business, being rare at that time, such as being a carpenter or joining a construction worker group, was mostly conducted under the hat of collective assignments. Such economic activities prepared peasants for the rural industrialization process under the new farming arrangement, which allows peasant families to release labor surplus from family farms into nonagricultural sectors.

The "leaving the farm for job opportunities" situation, however, did not apply to women under the collective farming system. Most of the nonlocal jobs, such as wine-making and construction, were considered typical "men's work." However, women were even less motivated to engage in collective farming compared with men. Compared with areas with higher land-population ratio, a common practice among densely populated coastal areas is to devalue female labor in the labor-intensive farming system. Though the socialist regime embraced the ideology gender equality by motivating women into collective production system and public decision-making process, women's participation might not be considered equally in local practices, partly due to women's physical limits and partly because of patriarchal traditions. In Bei Village, Women's highest work point was 4, whereas men could reach the full point of 10. Despite all the adverse situations, local women found different ways to maximize their earnings, and Yu is one of them.

"I started learning needlework at the age of 14 (1966). There were two instructors from the town who used to distribute such tasks and they came to teach us who signed up for that…for more than 20 days. My home was the most convenient; next to their reception place…they got the needlework tasks from the lace and textile factory. We were close to them, so we could get…then they came to exchange blank pieces for products, and pay you for one or two pieces, around 4 yuan per week…We worked on it day and night. We had not had local factories yet, people just worked in the production team, and we spent all the rest of time sewing."

The rise of home-based work occurred when the urban manufacture centers in the coastal areas began to look for cheap female labor to undertake part of the production procedure in a flexible work arrangement. Taking advantage of her political capital by active participation in local youth leagues and her connection with factory representatives, Yu became a rising star in organizing women's efforts to make money and was late selected into the local office as an assistant for the women's representative. As the organizer of women's needlework, she told us that right after the ending of collective farming, there had been a tendency opposite to the feminization of agriculture. "We women only went to the farms in busy seasons. At other times men were on the farms, and we were at home sewing." Several other interviewees emphasized that women's home-based work was more profitable than men's farmwork. As suggested by the local saying, "three hoes cannot make as much money as three needles."

But men also increasingly lost their interest in farming when the options were broadened from farming or being underground migrant workers to those created by the mushrooming local enterprises. Responding to the open-up policy of central government, coastal areas are the first to place economic development ahead of other goals and encourage the growth of rural industry as an engine to improve economic performance. Though the rural enterprises were mostly under the collective "red" hat at the beginning, the state-owned shares of the local economy decreased rapidly in the 1980s. The availability of local jobs made it possible for men to become workers without migration. Furthermore, many of the local enterprises welcomed female labor in particular, such as in textile industries. As a result, many women withdrew from home-based work and entered external job markets.

Along with the emergence of local industries and mixed domestic modes of production, many families adopted a flexible way of labor division, letting anyone with a moment at hand to work a little bit on the family farm. Due to the domination of manual work rather than machinery in the farming system, peasants' bond to their farms is on a more regular base and they need to work on their small farms from time to time. Thus a job beyond the

walking distance is not preferable and at least one family member should stay close enough to land, most of the time the elderly and women.

In addition to the farming customs, the family-based land assignments also prohibited the concentration of land and the specialization in the farming sector, when farms are small and peasants were not allowed to rent or outsource farms at the beginning of the reform. Despite the deregulation policies, peasants were not supposed to leave their assigned farms and abandon farming responsibilities throughout the 1980s. As a result, peasant households could not leave the farming sector completely; otherwise the land might be taken back. Such administrative measures were conducted in the 1980s to prevent the break of the peasant-farm bond, against the pull out effect derived from the revived rural markets. The restriction varied across areas, and the bottom line changed from the fulfillment of state grain-purchase quotas to the maintaining of a minimum level of labor investment on farming. In Bei Village, such restrictions were loosened rapidly after the local implementation of development-centered policies, which was in turn accelerated by the industrialization processes, because the agricultural extraction was able to be fulfilled by profits from the village collective economy. This interactive process undermined the overall attachment of peasants to the farming land.

But from another point of view, labor flows were not enough to fuel the take-off of rural industries. Beginning with little accumulation of economic capital, local enterprises had relied on employees to conduct a collective form of investment, and as a common practice, peasants need to make a deposit to be recruited as workers. Yu recalled that the first factories emerged around 1979 required a deposit of 1500 or 1300 to get in, which was too much for her. Yu's political and social capital did not help her to enter other enterprises, because they were established at the township level or conducted by someone who was out of the reach of her social network. In fact, most village women did not find an entry into local industries until the village established its first enterprise producing electronic cords in 1981. At the beginning, the enterprise combined disseminated home-based manual work with workshop-based processing, and later assimilated the manual part into the workshop procedure.

Such industry welcomed female labor because women were considered having more patience and being better at delicate and swiftly manual operations. But not every woman could enter the enterprise. According to a cadre at that time, this village enterprise prioritized three categories of women in labor recruitment. The first category was the wives of village cadres. The second was those who could put a deposit of 300 yuan, or in other words, being able to bring in economic resource with them. Another category prioritized was the parents of single children. In short, to get such cherished work opportunities, local social connections mattered a lot, and economic capital also played an important role. Being the parents of single children was equivalent to some kind of political capital, however, because having one child was rare at that time, who were exemplars to other villagers as the first ones to followed the government's one-child policy.

Yu was under the third category. As a young candidate of female cadres, she chose to have no more children after having one daughter. After entering the enterprise, she was soon differentiated from other workers by taking over the responsibility of distributing materials and collecting half-products from home-based work stations and handing them over to big workshops, until the home-based work stations were replaced by concentrated workshops.

"I worked there for two years (1981-1983), and they asked me to be in charge of workshops instead, and around the same time I was also promoted to be the women's representative in the village council. I worked for the village and for the enterprise at the same time."

Though Yu began from the similar starting point with other female workers who entered the enterprise using social connections or other resources, some other aspects soon stood out in the internal stratification among workers. First, one's capability of participating in the management of technical advancement, marketing, and human resource, largely determined by education, skills, and work experience, was a key criterion to be promoted.

As the theoretical owner of the village enterprises, the village collective tended to let cadres to join the managerial level of the enterprise. But those who were not qualified for the job gradually quitted from the leading positions. In contrast, some people with relevant knowledge and experience were counted on to understand market fluctuation and make profits out of business, regardless of cadre backgrounds. It is also the case for other collective enterprises, as many local people have family traditions in related industries (e.g. wine-making), or business experience and market exposure (e.g. textile-trading). As a result, collective enterprises in Bei Village maintained the relative independence from the village office; the founding and succeeding managers, gradually became a group of "economic elites" in the village, which is different from the group of cadres as "political elites." Second, as the group of "economic elites" backed up by human capital and social connections taking shape, the personal connections with these economic elites became important, particularly after 1999 when the enterprise was officially privatized.

But for most women, their jobs do not evolve into a life-long career, because their employment was frequently disrupted by family obligations and life events. Many women quitted job when they got married or had babies, or even when they had grandchildren. Though many of them reported that they returned to work or planned to return when allowed by family conditions (e.g. when children reached the age to go to kindergarten), their positions in the labor market had been relocated in the temporary-employed, lower-paid category. Yet their loss in earnings could often be made up by male family members, due to the ample work opportunities in the local market. Particularly when the husband's job is time-consuming and labor intensive, women need not only to take care of the family, but also to take over the husband's share of farming task. As such, there is a revival of the traditional division of labor, under the new definitions of work opportunities. Though some women such as Yu are successful in establishing their own careers, their husbands may not appreciate the monetary contributions to the family from the wives to the same extent that women feel thankful to a hard-working husband. This understanding has entered the villagers' common sense. Yu explained why she was still a manager but not a "boss" in this way,

"Our boss was a salesman for a couple of years (around 1985), and then was promoted to manage the whole enterprise. A professional from Shanghai suggested to appoint me to be the salesperson…the village leader at that time said, not a woman, even her husband would not agree. In fact my work had also involved business travels with other mangers to Shanghai… I regretted, if I was in that position, I would be a boss as well. Everything was controlled by them. In fact I knew every sector to run an enterprise…otherwise you cannot be someone in charge."

Yu regretted that she was not aggressive enough at that time, but she also realized that without her husband's support, she could not devote herself fully into her career development, which is unfortunately the fact. Yu told us that her husband used to work in a good work unit due to his urban connections, but she felt that his pride was hurt by the fact that his income was surpassed by hers. The expectations for Yu to act as an ordinary woman from the family and the community to some extent prevented Yu to take further challenges in the market, which also meant economic risks, such as becoming an independent business person.

Ironically, some women who were less successful and whose ambition was only to become a worker, find another exciting entry into the market in a new phase starting from the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, which was characterized by the prosperity of independent private business. This is a third type of nonagricultural work in addition to home-based work and formal employment, rose almost the same time with the emergence of rural collective industries but peaked with the privatization of collective enterprises in the 1990s. In the first wave of rural industrialization, peasants were trained to be workers and managers in the collective enterprises, and gained connections to run independent business. More important, they became "braver" in the market and willing to take risks. Wen is one of the women who dropped out of a factory and started home business with her husband.

"I worked in the factory for 10 years, until we started our business in 1994…My husband used to be a migrant worker doing corrosion protection industry, and worked as a chef for

a while…Then we opened our own restaurant, beside the department of motor vehicles, and drivers would stop for meals frequently. It was very tiring but we made good income…After two years we turned to other business, selling buns for breakfast in the town, and later take over part of the school cafeteria on a lease."

In the Bei Village, it is common that local people find formal jobs in factories are not as profitable as private business. Home business also include household workshops: some are derived from traditional skills such as food processing, some are based on their connections with urban manufacture centers or foreign enterprises and produce products such as small supplies for electronic devices. In addition, some families are specialized in the trade business of clothes and shoes between the coastal manufacture base and the inland market after the first wave of rural industrialization. Such private business often involves both the husband and the wife to take different responsibilities, based on what they are good at and what they are willing to do. Yet such conceptions also partly reflect the traditional family pattern of "men working outside, women working inside," as men tended to take over the marketing sphere and women tended to be in charge of internal management of finance and products.

The adjustment in policy repertoires also stimulated the rapid development of private sectors. To solve the dilemma between the development of local industries and the state's commitments to improve agricultural productivity and to guarantee the cheap supply of staple commodities, the local government gradually removed restrictions on farming one's own land in the 1990s, and tacitly allowed rural families to lease and rent farms from each other for a period of time, with the titles of smallholdings remained. In 2004, Bei Village was included in the greenbelt area of the city in the government's new blueprint. As a great portion of land was taken by the local government to plant trees, the farming burden is further removed from peasants. It also freed women to some extent from the regular visits to their small plots of land and helped to convert them into full-time workers or business persons. Though the households still hold small pieces of land, they are often used to grow vegetables by the elderly in the family who have limited work opportunities.

Yi Village: Rising Labor Migration

The inland villages differ sharply from the coastal ones in economic conditions, some related with natural endowments, others shaped by economic development. Compared with the grain-growing system, Yi Village is typical of the dryland farming system. Constrained by the access to water, peasants in Yi Village tend to grow crops of wheat, soybean, Chinese broccoli or peanut in turn, with fewer crop cycles and less labor investment. However, there is little local industry as the exit for surplus labor to move away from the farming sector, except for several quarries. Yet located in Hebei Province and not far from urban centers including Beijing, Yi Village has some advantage in exporting migrant workers. As farming is an "easy" task and most available jobs are not local, women and the elderly frequently become the ones in charge of major farming responsibilities, though young women are also very active in the search of external jobs in addition to men. Typically, the household's cash income in the Yi Village is mostly derived from the emigration of male labor force, supplemented by home-based work for stay-at-home women.

One outstanding characteristic of the dryland farming system is the relatively large scale of land and the low labor intensiveness. On the one hand, though dryland farming areas had been forced to grow grain for some time, these areas were in general characterized with less labor-intensive farming style, and faced less pressure imposed by the scarcity of land. In contrast with the heavily manual farming areas, it is possible to use machinery to further reduce the labor investment. In Yi Village, the professional technicians are hired to harvest crops for almost every household in the village using machines. In such cases, peasants can be migrant workers in the rest of the year and only return to the village for the busy seasons, or they can ask their wives to handle the transactions with agricultural technicians. On the other hand, local people feel no need to try alternative earning opportunities, and only a few of them, most of the time men, have pioneered in off farm sectors. Equally as profound, the state has turned to non-coercive measures to encourage agricultural production, compared with the era of command economy when the rural areas were under the strong state extractive capacity and peasants' self-interests were neglected in the allocation of resources. Since 2004, the agricultural tax obligation was

gradually removed as one of the factors that discouraged peasants from farming, and governments also issue subsidies as a way to pull labor force back to the farming sector.

In addition to the typical dryland farming system where the peasant-land bond is somewhat loose and more on a seasonal base, there is another popular use of land—planting trees, which further free peasants from the farming obligation and the tenancy responsibility. It is allowed by the local governments because Yi Village is located in the north protecting forest area, and people can choose between planting trees or growing crops on their farms. Both uses are rewarded by state subsidies, as the state has made efforts to halt soil degradation and to encourage agricultural production. Yet from the peasants' point of view, it is difficult to get the tree subsidy because the baseline requirement is 15 mu (about one hectare or 10,000 square meters or 2.47 acres). But it is still not a bad choice to grow trees because even if they could not get the agricultural subsidy, they benefit from saving their time and energy on the farm.

In fact, peasants often get the agricultural subsidy even though they plant trees on part of the farm, because the criteria of getting the agricultural subsidy are loose in local communities. Three of the households I visited in the Yi Village planted trees on part of their farm, so that the overall farming task can be easily taken care of by women when men work as migrant workers. Such division of labor also exists between generations of women, when the mother-in-law takes care of the farm, and the daughter-in-law works as a waitress in her brother's small restaurant.

However, external job opportunities for villagers in Yi Village are mostly not local, which favor young and educated people more and would only recruit those who can move freely and devote themselves to the job for a relatively long time. Concerning these factors, men and unmarried young women are more of ideal workers compared with married women and old people. Given such situations, married women may opt out of the external labor market because of their family commitments, or be forced out because they are not favored by employers.

But there are still some opportunities provided by urban manufacture centers for home-based work that allows those who are "left behind" to engage in the activities for extra earnings. Such opportunities make a big difference for wives who stay at home to take care of the farming task when the workload is not heavy. Without such opportunities, they often use the spare time and energy to raise livestock or grow vegetables for self-consumption, or even play popular card games and Mahjong. When such opportunities exist, women may even choose to ignore or transfer the farming tasks and concentrate on the home-based work to earn more cash income. In sum, when job opportunities provided by local enterprises were limited, the off farm employment chances for men were usually not local, and that for women were often home-based, if there was any. The urban industries' reach into the villages for home-based female labor took place in inland areas around the 1980s. The process occurred earlier coastal areas, and it took time for cloth and other kinds of manufacture factories to begin penetrating the inland heavy-industry areas.

Along with the industrialization process of rural communities, the home-based work, mainly undertaken by women, lost its attractiveness when more local formal jobs became available. In the coastal village where there was a mushrooming of township and village enterprises in local communities in the 1980s, both men and women entered the off farm labor force in great scales. However, the home-based industry remains popular in those areas where local industry is not fully developed and many women are left behind and form a regular labor pool for such work activities. But the home-based handicraft work opportunities come and go in an unpredictable way due to market fluctuations, and many women also tried searching for formal job opportunities if allowed by family conditions.

In the Yi Village, a few households bought pick-ups and other vehicles to undertake the transportation tasks of sands and stones for the project of road construction across the local county. Before that, some family business also emerged as agricultural related sidelines, such as running orchards or food processing, but in general private enterprises and home business do not prosper in this village due to the limits of resources, investments, markets, and skills. Guo, a 42-year-old woman who married from another

village in the same county, complained that this village is not comparable with her natal village, where there is a tradition of family business of making handicrafts and ink products. Guo used to help with her parents running a family food-processing workshop before getting married, and she felt that Yi Village did not create good opportunities for women to accommodate family and work. Xing, a 41-year-old woman, however, managed to participate in the management of a local quarry for several years in the 1990s, when the quarry was run by her father-in-law. In Yi Village, because the local entrepreneurial dynamics has been rare, only those who are well connected and their family members can get such work opportunities.

In addition to local economic structures, the gender norms also shape local employment patterns. The cultural expectations on men to be economically established to support the family, combined with aspiration of young people to try urban life and their unwillingness to farm, result in the wide-spread practice for young men to look for off farm jobs. In Yi Village, young men will not be competitive in the local marriage market unless they can build decent housing before marriage. Given the fact that the farming sector does not yields enough cash income, in order to prepare for the housing building, young men have to work hard as migrant workers or run successful business, whereas their parents will take care of the farm when they are away. After men get married, many of them remain to be migrant workers or involved in other kinds of off farm work to meet the family need of cash income. As such, the pro-agriculture policies had limited effects given the existing tendency of labor management, and governments were continuously modifying economic policies, which could further minimize the labor investment on farms.

In contrast, there is rarely such expectation to be economically established for unmarried women. However, young women are also attracted by the outside world. Meanwhile, young women can earn considerable income in many light industry factories and service sectors. As such, families may be happy to let their daughters work in nonagricultural jobs and contribute to the family welfare before marriage, as their daughters will eventually marry into other families. In other words, women may transfer the farming

task to older family members for a period of time to be employed in off farm jobs, but there is less expectation for women to work outside the farm after marriage. When it is important for the family to retain the property title of the land and keep the last means of making a living in the unpredictable market environment, women are likely to take over the farm from other family members who are perceived to be able to make more money from the market. When women get married and age, they may lose competitiveness and have family commitments, thus their jobs are less likely to be developed into a lifelong career.

Ning Village: on the Edge of Urban Expansion

Ning Village used to be in the similar position with Yi Village given the typical dryland farming system and a late start of local industrialization process. Peasants only needed to concentrate on farming for a short time during the year such as in the harvest season, and could spend the rest of the year as migrant workers. Yet since 2004, Ning village has been included in a large land development project initiated by the municipality government. With their land taken away to construct an industrial park with a focus on automobile sectors and to establish other urban infrastructures and facilities, peasants were imposed the identity of "urban residents" overnight.

Similar with Yi Village, Ning Village belongs to dryland farming area, which used to have 3067 mu of registered farming land with 2 mu of land per capita. Because Ning Village is located in an area that is less constrained by the access to water compared with other inland areas, peasants mainly relied on farming before the 1980s. After the collective farms were assigned to individual households, other agriculture-derived work opportunities also emerged. Different from coastal areas that characterized by small plots of land where the functioning unit of local economy is often the whole village (around 500 households), in Ning Village, the economic characteristics at the level of production teams (renamed as villagers teams after de-collectivization, around 50 households) stood out since the 1980s. Some teams developed the advantage in raising livestocks or growing vegetables, some became famous in making rice noodles, and others tended to undertake transportation tasks for the local market. Such side-industry was developed

based on social networks and local resources, as well as close cooperation between family members. An interviewed couple used to trade in and trade out vegetables in the county, and the wife is proud that she was able to do calculations of changes quickly and accurately compared with her husband. But such business was mostly derived from the agricultural sector and targeted at nearby urban markets, and not very profitable after many households started doing the same business.

Laosun and his wife is a couple who spent their twenties and thirties in the collective farming system. After the family farm was assigned, they started growing vegetables for sale. They soon realized that they could get rich based on "money from the land," and it was much quicker to get a big saving and to build a new house by "going outside to work."

"People started going out to work from the 1980s. But our kids were small at that time. Because it is a suburban area, we carried our vegetables to the city using bicycles…Until the 1990s, our kids were big enough, and I went to the nearby city and found a job in a construction project. I followed the boss, and did some management work for him. My wife grew vegetables at home. It was necessary to have someone on both sides…We built our new house in 1997."

In response to the pull-out effect of migrant labor markets, local governments tried different measures to prevent the loss of agricultural labor and to improve agricultural incomes, such as advising turning farmland into agricultural greenhouses. After the introduction of greenhouses, peasants needed to invest more on agriculture and they see a chance of making profits from selling the greenhouse vegetables to the urban market. As a result, some families adjusted their work pattern by men taking over the farming task and women became temporary or low-pay workers. But some families would not adopt such employment patterns because the husband was already well established in his nonagricultural job. Despite the pro-agriculture policies, the work pattern of "men working outside, women working inside" is still dominant. In a few families, both the husband and the wife were looking for external jobs, and in some others, the wife wanted

to quit farming due to family responsibilities, they let other family members or neighbors to take over their family farms, though the land was still under their names theoretically, and local offices adopted a "let-go" attitude towards such private semi-transactions.

The work pattern of the husband as a migrant worker and the wife as a left-behind farmer had been typical in Ning Village until the farming land was gradually taken away by the land development project. Though young girls could easily find a job in manufacture or service sectors in the cities, married women mostly stayed at home. Such a family division of labor was partly due to the low labor-intensiveness of farming tasks, which contributed to the loose peasant-land bond, and partly due to the lack of local industries, which could have recruit women workers as well as men. But even under such situations, it is still possible for women to develop their independent careers if backed up by certain education level and work experiences, and such women were considered very special.

Yue is one of women who managed to build her career even with all the family obligations after getting married. She has middle school education and had worked as a elementary school teacher for a while before she got married in 1996. Though she quitted her job with a common expectation that "my husband would lead our family to get ahead of others and I would take care of stuff at home," it did not work out that way. Due to her husband's health problem, he quitted his job as a migrant worker and joined Yue in raising pigs at the backyard and also farming the land at the same time. Then Yue found that the village council was recruiting a personal in charge of organizing women's activities. She saw a chance and discussed with her husband.

"The recruitment, here is my chance. It is not a job that you need to be in the office nine to five, you can finish it at home. I would not apply for a job that required too much service. I don't have that much energy. But this job, I can take care of family and work at the same time. My husband was very supportive as well. Just to distribute pamphlets and ask women to register for all kinds of things."

In Yue's case, her human capital and the experience of teaching helped her to get the job, rather than social connections, as she was a woman newly married into the village. But to get other kinds of jobs, local networks mattered a lot. Particularly for young girls, they often relied on people's introduction and recommendations to find a job in a nearby city. But their employment was often terminated at the time when they got married, as the family obligations might conflict with their independent career. Even now a female cadre and women's representative in the village, Yue described her endeavors as a result of "having no other choices." She still need to tradeoff between work requirements and family obligations and do not want to give up one for the other. The tradeoff was more difficult when they still had farming land, and what really freed up Yue from farming tasks and gave a boost to her family economy is the land development projects. Ning Village was included in the blueprint of urban expansion from the 1990s, and small pieces of land that were close to the nearby city was taken by several development projects to build industrial zones in 1995 and in 2001. The monetary compensation level in 1995 was 8000 yuan per mu, and the price of land increased rapidly as a result of land market and villagers' demands. Particularly after the large-scale land development projects were conducted after 2004, the land price reached and surpassed 30,000 yuan per mu.

But the land development projects were not as empowering for other women who did not have an external job but work on their family farms, and they felt deprived and lost particularly at the beginning of the land development waves. Many of them did not have education, work experience or expectation to facilitate job search after losing land. Even for those men and women who were migrant workers, they tended to see family farms as their final secured means to make a living, which they could return to in case they lost external jobs. The anxiety contributed to the various expressions of discontent among villagers and the continuing negotiations between developers and the village council or other groups as the representative of villagers. Because such developmental projects are mostly sponsored by local governments to stimulate economy and catch up with exemplar areas with better economic performance, villagers found it most effective to protest in front of government offices. Since 2004, such sporadic protests have led to the

governments most concerns and consequently, the governments' intermediation often resulted in the further give-in of developers, i.e. increased amount of compensation, or new types of compensation such as the elderly pension. Interestingly, women aged above 45 were most active in such protests because they had most time "to waste," and one of the women told us, "I would go to sit in front of their office, but I would not let my husband go, because it would affect his earning and social status."

One of the most common complains to the developers was that they did not provide employment opportunities to villagers who lost land. When the first piece of land was taken away to build a factory in 1995, the developer promised to recruit local villagers to work in the factory, according to several of the interviewees, and they felt cheated when they did not enter the factory eventually. But in the following waves of land development, despite the increasing amount of compensation, it became less and less possible to include employment into the compensation package. In other words, landless peasants need to find their own way into the transplanted labor market instead of get jobs as a way of compensation, and land development does not necessarily lead to smooth job transfer.

Some interviewees did find more job opportunities after land development. Yue's husband found a job in a service center in the newly built industrial park, and a younger male interviewee was recruited as a driver by a firm. But as in the selection process in labor migration from the village to urban centers, the move from family farm to transplanted industrial zones is not easy for those who are old, not well educated, or with heavy family obligations. Different from the agricultural sector in which farming experience is valued more than other aspects of human capital, nonagricultural sectors put more emphasis on age, education, and related work experience. In general, married women are not as competitive as men and young women, and women's jobs are more temporary and relatively not well paid. Some women in their forties said that the only job they could find was to clean the floors and to collect trash for the buildings, and they were tired of being asked to sign in and being monitored by someone during the work. In contrast, given the early industrialization process, women workers in Bei Village had

more training in those “modern” sectors and their life pace have been faster compared with their counterparts in areas lack of local entrepreneurial dynamics.

But with the monetary compensations at hand, peasant families were also able to start small business which they felt that they had more control over. As one interviewee suggested, it is wiser not to just use up the monetary compensation but to build a sustainable means of living. Some villagers began to run restaurants and convenient stores. One young woman rented a counter in a department store to sell small accessories, where she met her future husband who was doing a similar business, and they combine and expand their business after marriage. As private sectors in other rural areas, home business often involve the efforts of both the husband and the wife, and home business often benefit from the close cooperation and mutual trust between the couple. But given the penetration of urban industries and the emergence of new opportunities, some home business is characterized as men’s work or women’s work. For example, some families bought vehicles and took up the private business of transportation or taxi, and most drivers are men. Another rising home business following land development is to rent housing to newcomers to the industrial park or local relocated people, and most housing-renting is managed by women.

As a family in a whole, villagers who lost land or have less land strategize and coordinate economic activities in new ways. Some tried to get more compensation from dismantled housing in addition to the loss of land, and they built extra housing in a short time anticipating further land development progress. Another response targeting at more compensation is to take back land that was cultivated by others, which aroused many disputes over the ownership of land as both sides recognized the sky-rocketing of land prices. Some peasants who used to invest only the minimum level of labor on farms to maintain the title of land under their own names also established greenhouses on farms, as greenhouse corresponds to more compensation than ordinary farmland. Meanwhile, the crops in those greenhouses could be less labor-intensive, such as grape or fruit trees, so that some family members, mostly men, could still work in external jobs.

The intentional and strategic division of labor for farming, external jobs, part-time jobs, home business also reflect gender and age norms. For example, renting housing is similar to the task of housekeeping, and is often considered as belonging to "women's sphere." Also women above middle ages are also expected to take the responsibility of grand-parenting so that their daughter-in-law can explore market opportunities. Such practices of labor division cross sexes and between generations are seen as best for the entire family. Leaving the farming and family tasks to the older generation, many young people who are better educated and have more ambition in careers have not even touched hoes in their lives. Laosun's three daughters had all been migrant workers for a while and met their husbands in the work places, and then returned to the village to settle down after getting married. They started small business in a shopping street which would be part of the industrial park under construction at that time, selling electronic products, and they had been in this business for seven years when interviewed in 2002. Laosun resigned from his migrant jobs and took over the farms together with his wife that were left behind by young people, and also was responsible for agricultural extractions, until the land was taken by developers.

In sum, the pace and scale of job transfer fueled by an imposed process of industrialization and urbanization depends on the extent to which the farming sector is attractive or burdensome, and whether peasants, both men and women, can be seen as deprived of or freed from the farming task. With land development still on its way, it is yet to be discovered to what extent men and women are relocated in nonagricultural sectors, but the conception of deprivation or empowerment is largely determined by how rural people prepared themselves for industrialization and land development.

Discussion

This study uses in-depth interviews collected from four villages in China during 2000-2009 to investigate to what extent women are involved in nonagricultural employment in rural China, how they acquire such jobs, and how their employment strategies are affected by market and family factors. Along with the growth of non-agricultural

employment in rural China, there has been a revival of traditional division of labor between men and women, as well as the diversification of family work patterns.

In Bei Village, though the wet rice cultivation is labor intensive, many peasants have managed to be engaged in part-time or full-time work in local enterprises. In the 1980s peasants were not allowed to abandon their family farms, but since the 1990s peasants began to rent or outsource their farmland to managerial farmers or migrant workers. The industrial zone in the village also absorbs hundred of migrant workers from inland rural areas, and many locals have become entrepreneurs and businessmen who travel a lot for external markets. Though both men and women have been active in local industrial labor force, recently more women choose to be housewives because they can afford to do that.

Despite the high extent of market penetration, the regulations on land use in addition to farming have become more restrict. The industrial and service sectors have difficulties getting permissions from the governments to establish or expand workshops and business centers. The Self-built housing on farming land is in general prohibited and peasants have to join the collective endeavor to build housing compacts to get the government permission. At the same time, the expanding urban planning projects have resulted in the closer connection between the village and the nearby commercial town centers, and the inclusion of the village into the greenbelt of the city, with the local landscape being gradually urbanized.

Compared with coastal villages with high population to land ratios, population in Yi Village is less dense. Due to the advantage of scale in agriculture, the use of machinery on those relatively big farms makes the farming tasks even more convenient. But such a convenience has not been transformed into the increase in productivity and income, as people do not feel the pressure of squeeze as in areas with high population densities. Instead of investing the time and energy saved by using machinery somewhere else to make more money, there is a tendency that the left-over women and even men become fans of mahjong games. The lack of land pressure is also related with relatively loose land policies, and there has not been any land development projects to drive up the land

prices. Some quarries even gained informal permission from individual peasant households via negotiation to occupy their farms for some years at a cheap rent.

The rapid urbanization process in Ning Village deprived peasants of land yet generated a new set of employment opportunities for them. The transplantation of enterprises enabled people to work locally instead of searching for job opportunities that are "far away." But the labor movement from agricultural to nonagricultural sectors is selective, and certain groups of people have been marginalized in the labor market, particularly women in and above middle age. Some of the villagers find jobs in the companies and work units that are relocated in the newly established industrial park, some find chances to run small business by renting a counter in supermarkets or department stores, but they are often men and unmarried women. Others felt overwhelmed by the rapid urbanization process, particularly middle-age women, who would never be laid off from their family farms but now have to adjust themselves to the urban life and the rigid work schedules.

In sum, both men and women have found more opportunities to move out of the farming sector given the processes of rural industrialization, the rise of the private sector, and the increase of migration. But under the typical family farming system that was reinstated in the beginning of the 1980s, households act as the basic unit of production and consumption, one spouse may find nonagricultural work while the other, mostly the wife, is likely to undertake farming responsibilities. But instead of converging on a uniform pattern of employment, rural China displays a variety of family behaviors in response to local economic conditions. The farming system, characterized by certain crop cycles, land scales and labor intensiveness, determines whether women are ideal agricultural labor, to what extent they are tied to land, and how much spare time and energy they have to devote to off farm work.

Local economic structures also determine the availability of off farm work for women, including that of external jobs, home-based work, and home business. External jobs that are women dominated include those in manufacture factories and service sectors, but women may lose their competitiveness when they get married and age, and they may also

opt out of the external labor market because of family commitments. Women's lack of education and thus career accomplishments is in turn related with the family's strategy to let daughters start working at an early age so that they could contribute more in terms of cash income before marriage. The external jobs taken by married women are often temporary and not well paid, which works as a supplementary instead of a major source of income for the family. For women who are "left behind" in villages, they may engage in home-based work provided by urban manufacture centers. Home business often involves close cooperation between men and women in the family, such as in the trade business and food-processing or manufacture workshops. But some of them such as the renting of housing are often considered as belonging to "women's sphere," and some of them such as transportation have been taken for granted as "men's job." The availability of all these three kinds of nonagricultural activities is subject to historical changes in economic structures as well as regional variations.

Though the tendency of women being more or less excluded from the "modern" sectors appears to document a return to procommunist traditions, the observed employment choices are deliberate reactions to local economic policies as well. Theoretically collectively owned by the rural communities, land is assigned on a family base and is only adjusted when the local agents of state authority agree to do so. Most rural families are operating in a political economy of family tenancy, and peasants cannot exclude the authority of the state or the collectives from the land property. Peasant families risk losing land when they leave the farm uncultivated or rent it, and they turn to let some family members, most of the time women, maintain a minimum level of labor investment on the farm. Their strategies are also influenced by the local policies of expanding protected forests, building agricultural greenhouses, and conducting land development projects. By making the most out of these policies, not only men but also women managed at least partly to move out of the farming sector, and women often undertake multiple tasks such as farming, housekeeping, and home-based work.

Instead of predicting the rise of the "modern family" characterized by the decline of corporate kin groups and the individualization of choices, or the revival of cultural

preferences that had dominated the prerevolutionary Chinese family, the study looks at the family behavior as the adaptation of cultural rules to the changing political and economic circumstances. Such an adaptation process is derived from and also affects people's perceptions of manhood and womanhood, as well as the role of the family. In addition, though constrained by economic structures and politics, people's employment choice is also a reflection of their life histories, as well as the related experience, skills, and knowledge.

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