

## Article

# Exploring and Analyzing Factors of Migrant Worker's Difficulty to Return Hometown: Focusing on Countryside

Xuandi Zhu \*, Peiqin Yuan and Changliang Lu \*

School of Urban Construction, Yangtze University, Jingzhou 434000, Hubei, China

\* Correspondence: xuandi0701071@outlook.com (X. Zhu); +86-13508629141 (X. Zhu);  
luchangliang@yangtzeu.edu.cn (C. Lu), +86-18995851460 (C. Lu)

Received: Aug 20, 2022; Accepted: Sep 20, 2022; Published: Sep 30, 2022

**Abstract:** In China's development, a continuous and irreversible trend has emerged in rural areas—the one-way flow of rural labor to urban areas. Besides, it is difficult for those who have left to return to their hometowns. Through a questionnaire survey of rural migrant workers in Ankang City, Shaanxi Province, we explore the gap between migrant workers and rural workers in terms of employment and entrepreneurship and analyze what affects the motivation to return to rural areas such as the inequality of resources between urban and rural areas, the choice of employment industry, and makes suggestions for future development. The result helps find the solution of the problem of rural entrepreneurship.

**Keywords:** Difficulty in returning to hometown, Hollowing out of villages, Employment of migrant workers, Questionnaire survey, Rural predicament

## 1. Introduction

Even before the reform and opening up of China's rural areas, a "migration" had begun and continued to this day. A large number of rural laborers have moved to the cities, and more young adults are choosing to leave to work. The young who drop out of school in rural areas leave the areas to work with their parents, and most college students prefer to stay in first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen after graduation, leaving a large number of children and old men stranded in rural areas. Thus, the countryside loses its workforce 1. Over time, rural areas are gradually hollowing out, and the gap between urban and rural aggravates 2. It becomes more difficult for migrant workers to return to their hometowns for employment and entrepreneurship.

China has always attached importance to rural areas' and farmers' problems. Especially in the 19th Party Congress, the strategy of rural revitalization was announced, and the return of migrant workers to their hometowns became an important trend of labor mobility in China since then 3. At present, Chinese academics have empirically analyzed the intention of a new generation of migrant workers to return to their hometowns to start their businesses 4. Wang took the lead in proposing the concept of migrant workers 5, tapping into the many factors of rural problems 6. Liu and Li argued that the return of migrant farmers to their hometowns for employment is a matter of critical development 6. Most scholars are studying how to make migrant workers stay in the city for a long time from the aspect of urban economic development, focusing on the driving factors of employment demand and pull factors of entrepreneurial resources 8. In contrast, we studied the reasons why it is difficult for migrant workers to return to their hometowns from the aspects of rural labor drain, development stagnation, rural revitalization policy, and the quality of migrant workers' skills to provide a reference for future research on the motivation of migrant workers to return to their hometowns for employment and entrepreneurship.

## 2. Methods

Traditional agriculture is the main economic source in the central and western regions of China. Village F is also a typical farming village dominated by the export of human resources. The questionnaire was created for people in village F. The questions were created from several aspects such as rural population mobility willingness, income level, employment and entrepreneurship difficulty, and rural revitalization policy support. Then, the data was analyzed and summarized for understanding what affects the migrant workers' return to their hometowns. A combination of household visits and a group survey was adopted in this study, and respondents were instructed to fill out the questionnaire to collect their responses on-site. The interviewees had different occupations, ages, and genders. The valid questionnaires accounted for 82.5% of the total questionnaires distributed. Considering the geographical and comprehensive characteristics of rural areas, interviews and a questionnaire survey were used.

### 3. Questionnaire Survey

#### 3.1. Age and Quality Skills

Young and middle-aged people around 40 years old are the majority of migrant workers who work outside with 9.1% of workers under 22 years old and 30.0% of workers between 22 and 35 years old. Due to the low income, slow economic development, and relatively disadvantaged geographical location, 6.1% of migrant workers are over 60 years old. In industrialization, migrant workers need to have professional skills and basic knowledge to work. 2020 Migrant Worker Monitoring Survey showed that the percentage of migrant workers with a college education kept increasing. However, the education level of migrant workers in Village F was generally at elementary schools, and their basic literacy was also generally low. 18.1% of them had elementary school education, 45.4% had junior high school education, 32.3% had high school education or above, and 3.0% of workers had no education. This reflected the overall low education level of the rural population in the western region, so most of the migrant workers chose simple manual labor jobs but not highly technical and professional works.

#### 3.2. Employment Opportunities and Choices for Migrant Workers

54.5% of the migrant workers chose to work in the manufacturing, construction, and service industries, which is a general trend. According to the report of the 2020 Migrant Worker Monitoring Survey (Table 1), the tertiary industry was the main employment choice of migrant workers and the proportion increased year by year. In the city, migrant workers have freer and more flexible employment opportunities and choices. There are a weak economic base and market demand in rural areas, and limited social networks also exist due to the long-term absence of migrant workers from their hometowns. 62.7% of migrant workers said that they were not familiar with village people after returning to their hometowns, and their relationship with friends was not properly maintained. This made them miss a lot of employment information. At the same time, it was common to delay the payment of wages in rural areas, which makes migrant workers discouraged from returning to their hometowns.

**Table 1.** Education level and industry distribution of migrant workers (the 2020 Migrant Worker Monitoring Survey Report).

	2019	2020	Increase or Decrease
Primary Industry	0.4	0.4	0.0
Secondary Industry	48.6	48.2	-0.5
Of which: manufacturing	27.4	27.3	-0.1
Construction	18.7	18.3	-0.4
Tertiary Industry	51.0	51.5	0.5
Of which: wholesale and retail trade	12.0	12.2	0.2
Transportation, storage and postal industry	6.9	6.9	0.0
Accommodation & Catering	6.9	6.5	-0.4
Residential services repair and other services	12.3	12.4	0.1
Other	12.9	13.5	0.6

#### 3.3. Diversity of Urbanization and Its Impact

As the level of economic development continues to rise, the living conditions of migrant workers have improved, and the education of their children has also improved owing to government subsidies. Migrant workers who experience the diverse social environment of the city have a growing sense of belonging and adaptability, and their life needs no longer remain at the superficial level, but have more specific expectations including recreation and family relationships. Migrant workers say that their returning to their hometown depends not only on the change in salary and income but also living and spiritual needs. As consumption and demand continue to increase (Fig. 1), daily leisure and recreational activities become frequent and diverse. People's criteria for family happiness become similar: 33.3% of people want to have good food, good clothing, and good housing, 6.1% want to travel and have leisure and recreational activities, and 48.4% want to have health and safety in their families. Therefore, at the level of consumption and enjoyment, people show their desire for the economy and to leave their hometown.

#### 3.4. Insufficient Conditions for Returning

Due to various factors such as human resources, transportation, culture, resources, and capital, rural areas cannot provide a similar entrepreneurial environment as cities. Under China's efforts to develop the countryside over the years, a lot of human and financial resources have been invested to improve public services and infrastructure in rural areas. China has also promulgated a

series of initiatives and institutional safeguards for employment and entrepreneurship in the countryside. However, there is still a large gap between the countryside and the cities, especially in the type of industry for starting a business. This is one of the obstacles in rural areas. The local government lacks special and entrepreneurial programs, policies, and subsidies, which is untenable for entrepreneurs in the early stages of their business. Most entrepreneurs still need loans or borrowing from friends and relatives for start-up capital and maintaining the balance of income and expenses. In rural areas, with the inherent concept of "money comes from work", entrepreneurship is not supported, and it is difficult to have support from society, friends, relatives, and elders to have a stable job and income. Once again, there is also a lack of policy sensitivity, content expression, micromanipulation, and market information for migrant workers who also lack entrepreneurial access, education, skill quality, and adaptability. Unlike entrepreneurship in the traditional sense, migrant workers who return to their hometowns want to start their businesses due to their inability in the city, the revitalization of the countryside, and their homesickness. However, these factors are not enough to support the whole process of their new entrepreneurship. Individual entrepreneurs with insufficient psychological quality face challenging competition, the lack of scale and liquidity of a business, and the unpredictability of the market, all of which make it difficult for migrant workers to survive.

### 3.5. Impact of Rural Revitalization on Returning Home

In 2017, the 19th Party Congress made a significant decision to implement the rural revitalization strategy, which put forward a new idea for the solution of the "three rural problems" and pointed out a new direction for the future development of the countryside. In the report, General Secretary Xi Jinping also emphasized that "the key step of rural revitalization is talent revitalization". The youth is the main force in the future development of the countryside. However, the younger generation lacks attention to the specific policies of the rural revitalization strategy.

The youth do not have a deep understanding of policies related to rural revitalization, "only know the surface but not the inside". 63.6% of the interviewed villagers said that they were not clear about the policy of rural revitalization and thought that rural revitalization was just a slogan (Fig. 2). Even though the relevant policies have little with them, it is the macro-strategic policy of the country in the context of the new era. Many villagers also said that they were not sure how to use the policy preferences in practice and thought that the policy support was not enough to make villagers participate in the great project of rural revitalization.

The youth lack a sense of responsibility for building their hometown and have a low awareness of service to society. "Although the city of gold is happy, it is better to return to the hometown, although the paradise is good, not a place to stay for a long time". The countryside is an important part of a country for the basic support for human survival and the backbone of a country's construction as it provides a constant impetus for the development of society. In the survey (Fig. 3), 18.1% of the villagers said they did not care about building their hometowns and changing the status quo of their families. Meanwhile, they believe that both the "Chinese dream" of achieving great rejuvenation and their life aspirations are too distant and not directly related. They thought to have not enough medical care, education, and retirement plan or support. 69.7% of the villagers want to change the status quo, but they do not know where to start, as they do not have access to the environment of entrepreneurship. Thus, they choose to go to cities to work even though they are "surviving in the cracks". Therefore, in the extent of policy benefits and all aspects of economic life needs, the government's policies are far from being sufficient to support the return of employment and entrepreneurship. In the survey, "low economic income conditions" and "insufficient personal skills" are hurdles for starting a business.

Therefore, the reluctance of villagers to return to their hometowns for employment and entrepreneurship is not only due to their lack of understanding of rural revitalization and low service awareness but also due to their lack of self-sufficiency, self-consciousness, and deep-rooted traditional thinking. This prevents them from trying new entrepreneurship and employment in rural revitalization under the socialist market economy.

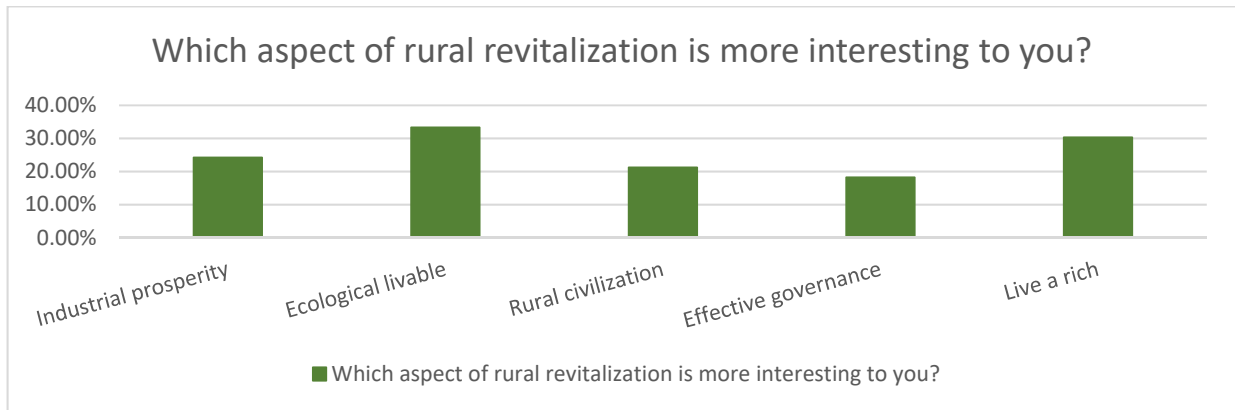


Fig. 1. Motivation of rural vitalization.

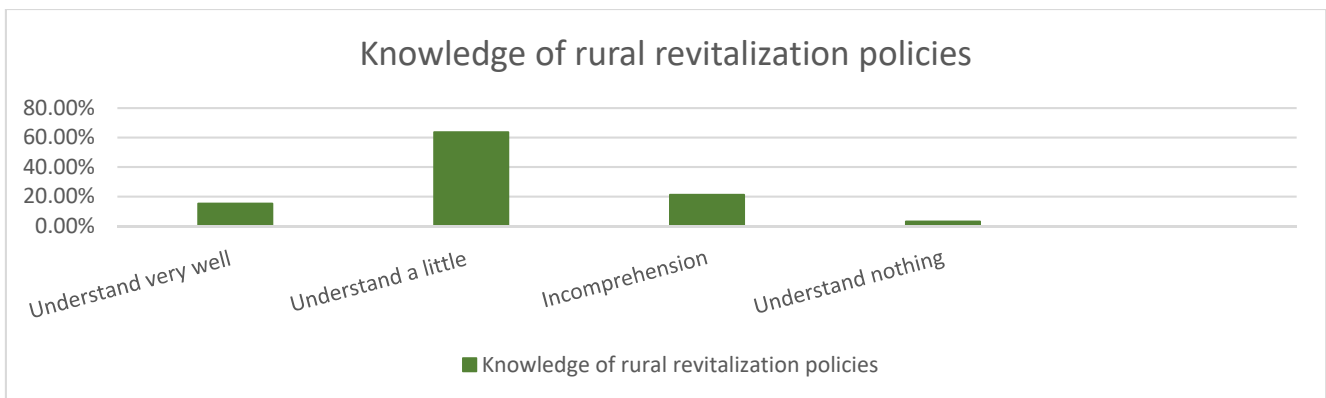


Fig. 2. Understanding the rural revitalization policies.

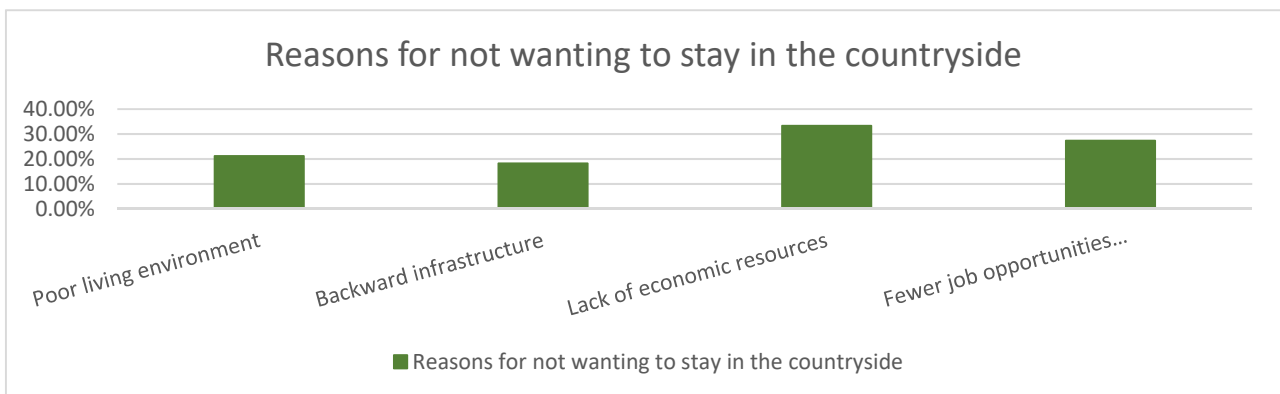


Fig. 3. Reasons to leave their hometown.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

In the future, the countryside will have changed agricultural development. However, migrant workers should not be the "marginalized people" between urban and rural areas. The need for rural construction and the emotional bond of the migrant workers to it needs to be considered. In the long run, encouraging and promoting migrant workers to return to their hometowns for rural revitalization play an important role in improving urban-rural relations. Preferential policies for rural revitalization and market production and operation need to be offered. The integration of various resources in multiple ways must become the main force to promote rural revitalization. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to analyze the difficulties of farmers returning to their hometowns through questionnaires.

The government, as an exerciser of public power, has an important social responsibility. Therefore, it needs to accelerate to improve and optimize the market environment for entrepreneurship and the infrastructure (transportation, electricity and communication facilities, and medical and health care level) for the strongest backup guarantee for entrepreneurship and the gap removal between urban and rural areas. The government needs to publicize the rural revitalization policy in place. Firstly, in the process of rural construction, subsidies, preferential policies, and the selection of industries for returnees to start a business must be effectively arranged to protect them at the government level. The government must set up a special loan program for the entrepreneurship of returnees and establish an efficient social financing system. Finally, the government needs to set up designated services for entrepreneurship and employment of migrant workers, providing policy consultation, employment guidance, employment information publication, and so on, set up green channels for the protection of rights and interests of migrant workers and arbitration, and provide legal aid services for labor disputes.

Migrant workers encounter a variety of unexpected situations and challenges, which accumulate psychological imbalance and obstacles and inevitably lead to self disorder. This results in lower self-efficacy and achievement. Therefore, entrepreneurs need to participate in complete skill training and entrepreneurial psychological guidance and master the appropriate professional skills to understand the relevant technology and knowledge. Entrepreneurs must have enthusiasm, ability, and adaptability to respond to market changes and competition. They need to be aware of the risks and opportunities to avoid and reduce the losses of possible business failure.

Through the study and analysis of rural migrant workers' entrepreneurial behavior in terms of practical problems and future development requirements, we conclude that encouraging and guiding them to return to their hometowns for employment and entrepreneurship can be done by promoting the symbiotic development of urban and rural areas. Then, the goal of "two hundred years" can be achieved.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, X. Zhu; methodology, X. Zhu; formal analysis, X. Zhu; investigation, P. Yuan; data curation, P. Yuan; writing—original draft preparation, X. Zhu; writing—review and editing, X. Zhu; supervision, C. Lu. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research did not receive external funding.

**Acknowledgments:** We would like to thank anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions for improving this paper.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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