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Transfer of Rural Surplus Labor and Vocational Education

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Abstract The paper introduces about the rural surplus labor transfer. According to the paper, the transfer of rural surplus labor in China presents such fundamental characteristics as randomness and non-thoroughness, scope and field constraint, and hysteretic nature of employment and industrial structure conversion. Besides, the causes of the difficulties in the transfer of rural surplus labor lie in the barriers from the system and policy, structural imbalance of industry and low quality of rural labor. The paper studies the correlation between the quality and the transfer of rural surplus labor FORCE in a systematical way from three aspects, which are the correlations between rural labor quality and the transfer difficulty & speed, the transfer scope & field and the employment stability & income after transfer respectively. Moreover, the paper carries out analysis of the special effects of vocational education on the transfer of rural surplus labor in China, which shows that vocational education is a help in the improvement of cultural qualities, labor skills and physical & mental health of rural labor.

Key words Rural surplus labor, Labor quality, Vocational education, China

The root of the issues concerning agriculture, farmer and rural area lies in the imbalance between the enormous rural labor and a relatively small labor workload. That is, where the enormous rural labor is transferred and how to make the transfer go smooth. Traditional theories about the transfer of labor neglect transfer ability and diversity of the quality of labor, which means that the traditional theories presupposes that the quality of rural labor is just the same as that of urban labor and once all conditions met, the rural labor can be transferred on a short notice. However, the quality of rural labor in China is by no means optimistic for 81% of the hundreds of millions of rural surplus labor are with an educational background of below junior high and those who received professional skill training account for only 28%, justifying the current difficulties arising in the transfer of rural surplus labor^[1]. Therefore, the quality of labor is one of the important factors that restrain the transfer of rural labor. Right based on the conclusion, the paper studies the correlation between the quality and the transfer of rural surplus labor and analyzes the special influence of vocational education on improving the quality of rural labor in the hope of resolving the root of problems existing in the current transfer of rural surplus labor.

1 The status of the transfer of rural surplus labor in China in the new period

In China, the mass transfer of rural surplus labor emerges after the Reform and Opening up. The implementation of the

Household Contract Responsibility System freed some farmers from their land so that they could seek employment in industries other than agriculture. Since the year 1978, the rural labor has been going through mass transfer in an irreversible manner. According to statistics, from 1978 to 2006, the rural labor force transferred to non-agricultural industry amounted to 0.65 billion with an annual transfer of 23.21 million^[2].

1.1 The fundamental characteristics of the transfer of rural surplus labor in China

1.1.1 The randomness and non-thoroughness of the transfer. Currently, China's economic system is being under the transition from traditional planned economy to market economy when a unified national labor market has not yet formed. The rural surplus labor transfers in the form of "Flood of Rural Laborers" with the market, blind and spontaneous. Without necessary guidance and service from the government, there's an overall randomness in the transfer of rural labor. Besides, the transfer is non-thorough with the transferred rural surplus labor still engaged in agricultural work. Generally speaking, rural laborers working in cities are usually the main labor resource of a family. They have to return regularly or irregularly to their homeland for agricultural production as well as take the money they earn home, which makes them a worker and farmer. According to the data collected through a sampling survey by the General Rural Survey Corp, in the year 2002, the rural labor transferred into the second and third industries accounted for 7.3% of the total rural labor of the nation while labor returned from non-agricultural industries accounted for 24.2% of the total transferred rural labor. This serves as an evidence of the non-thoroughness of the transfer of rural surplus labor^[3].

1.1.2 The restraint of transfer scope and fields. The nation has been strictly implementing the household register administration system separating urban and rural areas since the

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1950s, leading to the double-dimensional economic and social structure on the system level. Worse more, the sharp rise in the unemployment of urban citizens owing to the reform of economic system of recent years makes it even harder for rural surplus labor to be employed in cities. Since the Reform and Opening up, township corporations have been a main channel of absorbing rural surplus labor. However, as showed in the past few years, the absorption of rural surplus labor by township corporations is decreasing. From 1990 to 1998, rural laborers employed by township corporations were only 4 million annually. Both the reduction of employment by town-located corporations and the unfavorable urban systems result in an extremely limited space for the transfer of rural surplus labor. At present, the majority of rural labor goes to labor intensive industries, building industry and service industry. According to statistics, in the year 2008, rural surplus labor working in the secondary and the tertiary industries accounted for 40% and 60% respectively while those engaged in the industry, building industry and catering industry accounted for up to 80%^[4].

1.1.3 The lag nature of employment and industrial structure conversion. Under the dual influence of the industrialization that gives priority to the development of heavy industry and the dual household registration system, the industry and employment structures turned out a serious distortion. The transfer of labor in China, especially rural labor, is not only lag but also does not keep pace with the development of social economy and the adjustment of economic structure at all. According to data, great change has taken place on the structure of three industries in China since the 1980s. The percentage of the first industry dropped to 10.7% in 2008 from 30.1% in 1980; the secondary industry fell to 47.5% from 48.5%; the tertiary industry rose up to 4.8% from 21.4%. Although the change indicates that the industrialization in China has made significant progress, the employment structure doesn't change at an corresponding rate. Employment in the first industry remains large while that in the tertiary industry stays relatively small. The contradiction between industry structure and employment structure acts as a drawback to the urbanization and industrialization of China, to the harmony between rural and urban areas and to the transfer of abundant rural labor.

1.2 Causes of the problems in the transfer of rural surplus labor The characteristics manifesting themselves in the transfer of rural surplus labor suggests that the transfer has encountered tremendous obstructions and thus restrain the continuous transfer of rural surplus labor. According to preliminary survey and analysis, there are mainly three unfavorable factors.

1.2.1 Barriers from system and policy. The first and foremost factor blocking the transfer of rural surplus labor goes to the two-dimensional household registration system and current land policy. The current household registration system mainly includes household registration administration system, household transfer policy and relative administration system, and systems attached to the household registration system concerning housing, employment, medical care, education and social security. These systems lead to the apparent inequality between farmers

and urban citizens in social status and welfares. It is such inequality that sets obstacles for rural labor working and living in cities, the appropriate and organized transfer of rural labor, and the development of rural economy and social stability. Moreover, the current land policy is also unfavorable to the transfer of rural labor. The rural land policy is reflected by the household contract responsibility system based on the collective ownership of land. In rural areas, the land is equally distributed by capita and the per capita arable area is small, which prevents rural labor from complete separation from land and transferring to other industries or from full employment and better payment.

1.2.2 The imbalance of the industry structure. The tertiary industry is supposed to provide the most job opportunities. However, in China, the tertiary industry is not well developed with relatively fewer people engaged in it. In 2008, people working in the tertiary industry made up only 34% of the employed of the nation, while, by sharp contrast, the percentage was up to 81.2% in American even back to the year of 1997 and in some other developing countries the percentage was 50%^[5]. Regarding the pace of development, by the year 2008, the secondary industry had increased by 13.4% while the tertiary industry only by 12.6%. Obviously, the development of the tertiary industry lags behind that of the secondary industry. Worse still, the distribution of people engaged in the tertiary industry is unreasonable. That is, people involved in traditional service business are much more than those engaged in the burgeoning service industry. To be more specific, the number of workers providing services for consumers in life service industry is larger than that of workers providing services for manufacturers or factories in producer services. Such employment structure and form directly make harder the transfer of rural surplus labor to cities.

1.2.3 The low quality of rural labor. Although rural education has undergone remarkable development, the cultural background of rural labor is still not optimistic. Among rural surplus labor, those receiving education above junior high account for only 19% and those receiving professional skill training less than 28%^[1]. The rural labor transferred in the past few years are with a poor educational background as well. These facts show that the rural labor, ill-educated and with low vocational skills, can't meet the requirements of modern high-tech industry, in spite of the richness of rural labor resource of China. The low quality of rural labor confronting them with the difficulty of seeking employment in the transfer to non-agricultural industries and thus they have to get involved in extremely fierce competitions to get a job in low level industry, bringing about the imbalance between numerous transferred rural labor and relatively much fewer job opportunities for them. Meanwhile, the ill-educated rural labor with backward concepts tends to be conservative and lack of the spirit of investment and innovation. In some rural areas, people still regard the land as their only means of earning a livelihood, which restricts the transfer of some rural surplus labor to a great extent.

Besides, such factors as low-level urbanization and the

rigorous employment situation of urban areas themselves, the sluggish development of labor market, and unsound intermediary organizations are also a drawback to the transfer of rural surplus labor. However, the key factor restricting the transfer of rural surplus labor is the low quality of rural labor.

2 The relativity analysis of rural labor quality and transfer

2.1 The quality of rural labor and the difficulty & speed of the transfer of rural labor Ill-educated and ill-skilled rural labor tends to be conservative and reluctant to accept new things, which confines themselves to a small number of fields relying on traditional experience. Therefore, it's hard for them to seek new job opportunities and adapt themselves to a new way of working and living after the transfer; those with higher cultural quality and better skills are more open to new things, more confident and creative, and thus much easier to be transferred. According to the research of Gale Johnson, the low quality of the large population of rural laborers increases the costs of their transferring to cities and city management while the improvement in the quality of rural labor can not only moderate the emotional resistance of urban citizens against moving in rural labor but also help rural labor adapt to the urban life and thus reduce the cost of city management^[6]. The history of the transfer of rural labor in China also proves that the higher of the quality of rural labor, the easier of their transfer.

Since the Reform and Opening up of China, with the rapid development of economy and society, rural population, especially rural laborers, has been undergoing considerable progress. In the year 2006, among the rural labor of 16 years of age or above, 9.5% are of illiteracy or semi-literacy; 41.1% attended primary school; 45.1% junior high school; 4.1% senior high school or special secondary school; 0.2% junior college or above. As showed of the figures, those with an educational background of junior high school or below accounted for 95.7%, which is top of the history of rural education and above the nation's average of the same year^[7]. However, the proportion of those attending senior high school or receiving higher education was much lower than the average of the nation and urban areas. There is a big gap between education in rural and urban areas. The backward education in rural areas results in an overall low quality of rural labor and thus is an important factor restricting the scope and speed of rural labor transfer.

When it comes to the educational background structure of rural surplus labor transferred, the number of the better-educated is much larger than that of the worse-educated. According to the sample survey of Zhejiang Provincial Rural Survey Corp, among the transferred rural labor of Zhejiang Province during 1995 until 2001, the annual average transfer rate of rural labor attending primary school or below was 5.5% while the annual average transfer rates of rural labor attending junior high school, and senior high school or above 7.4% and 8.9% respectively (referring to Table 1)^[7]. Therefore, such conclusion can be drawn here that the more education rural laborers receive, the faster they are transferred.

Table 1 The annual average transfer rates of rural labor with different levels of education background in Zhejiang Province (1995 – 2001) %

Educational background	1995	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Illiteracy and semi-literacy	1.2	1.1	0.5	5.2	2.7	1.8
Primary school	2.5	2.7	2.2	7.3	3.1	2.7
Junior high school	6.6	8.2	2.0	9.5	7.6	4.2
Senior high school	7.3	11.0	11.1	11.3	9.8	3.1

2.2 The quality of rural labor and the orientation and fields of rural labor transfer The educational background of rural labor is one of the important factors that decide the orientation and distance of the transfer of rural labor. Statistics suggest that rural labor working in developed cities receives higher education than in developing cities. In the year 2006, of all rural laborers working in the eastern cities of China, those attending junior high school or receiving higher education accounted for 84.1%. The percentage was 82.4% and 80.1% in middle and western parts of China in the same year. This can be justified by the fact that rural laborers are generally required more of in their education background and skills to seek employment in more developed cities.

Regarding the influence of education on the distance of transfer, studies from abroad have shown that the degree of education background and the distance of transfer are proportional. The conclusion has also been shared by the research carried out by Professor Liqiang from Tsinghua University. That is, rural labor with higher education tends to go further in distance and vice versa^[8], which can be seen in Table 2. In reality, the more education rural laborers receive, the fewer of them going directly ahead into agricultural production and the more of them working in secondary and tertiary industries. Besides, the more education rural laborers receive, the longer they engage in non-agricultural business. The educational background of rural labor also has a direct impact on whether they can manage a new work type and apply new technology in a skilled way. According to the distribution of employment of transferred rural labor, the main industries they engage in are industry, building industry, service industry and commerce. Take the year 2002 for instance, rural labor going into these industries accounts for 76% of all transferred rural labor in China, suggesting rural labor is ill-educated in China^[9]. The more education rural laborers receive, the more easily for them to adapt to new work and master a new work type, a new technique and a new piece of equipment. Therefore, the quality of rural labor in education and vocational skills does affect the employment fields of rural labor.

Table 2 The relationship between the educational background of rural labor and the distance of their transfer

Year	Correlation coefficient	Statistical significance	Samples
2000	0.113 *	0.016	455
2002	0.152 **	0.009	290

Note: the number marked with * is $P < 0.15$; the one marked with ** is $P < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

2.3 The quality of rural labor and the employment stability and income status of rural labor after transfer

The quality of rural labor has a considerable influence on the employment stability of rural labor after transfer as one of the key influencing factors. Among the returning population of transferred rural labor in the year 2006, those attending junior high school or below made up 88.33%, those attending junior high school only 9.47% and those attending special secondary school, junior college or above a least percentage^[10]. As showed of the figures, rural labor receiving more education is in more stable employment. In addition, rural labor of higher quality is generally more skillful in work, more capable in developing social resources and more creative, and thus more likely to be accepted by the cities or industries. According to the research on the transfer of rural labor by Chen Jiyuan, rural labor of high quality takes the lead in separating themselves from agriculture. Besides, the better rural labor is educated, the longer and more stable their transfer maintains; rural labor of high quality intends to maintain long-term transfer while those of low quality temporary transfer with the majority of them engaged in both agriculture and non-agricultural industries. The research suggests that the quality of rural labor decides not only their determination of leaving agriculture but also the stability of their employment after transfer.

The income of rural labor depends on their investment in improving personal quality (receiving education as a main means) in the first place. That explains why some scholar believes that one way to fight poverty is to improve the quality of transferred rural labor. As suggested of the figures in a sample survey of rural residents, the average amount of cash transferred rural labor takes home of high linear positive correlation to their educational background. In the year 2000, for every single year longer the transferred rural labor receives education, the amount of cash rural labor remitted home was 198 yuan more, increasing by 49 yuan compared to the year 1999. The transferred rural labor receiving training remits and brings home more cash on average than the average level of total transferred rural labor by 13.7%. It can be seen here that the personal quality of transferred rural labor has a more and more manifest influence on their income. As investigated by the authors, workers in the six township enterprises in Bazhong City of Sichuan Province earn a monthly salary of 835 yuan on average. Most workers' salary ranges from 700 to 900 yuan a month. Among the much fewer with a monthly pay of above 900 yuan, 67.8% of them graduated from technical schools where they have received vocational skill training. The only three workers attending junior college also earn a monthly salary of more than 900 yuan. This can be explained by that the educational background is of positive correlation with labor productivity and the correlation coefficient reaches 0.73^[11]. Better-educated rural labor contributes more to the rise in labor productivity, which leads to the their higher income.

3 The role of vocational education in the transfer of rural labor

Vocational education forms an important part in the educa-

tional system of China. The basic task of vocational education is to improve the quality of rural labor and thus contribute to the development of social productive forces. As is previously mentioned, the key drawback to the transfer of rural labor lies in the low quality of rural labor. Not equipped with knowledge or skills required in the upgrading of industrial structure and developing of newly booming industries, the transferred rural labor becomes a group of people with no vocational abilities in cities. In essence, the transfer of rural labor to non-agricultural industries and cities is the role shift of rural labor from farmers in countryside to workers or citizens in a city. To achieve such shift, vocational education and training have to equip rural labor with necessary cultural knowledge and vocational skills so that they will meet the requirements of market. Therefore, vocational education plays an irreplaceable role in the improvement of rural labor quality and the transfer of rural labor.

3.1 Improving the quality of rural labor in cultural background Scientific & cultural knowledge has a broad and rich sphere that involves varieties of disciplines, including humanities, social science, natural science as well as methodology. They are an integral part of proper knowledge structure and good scientific & cultural cultivation to an education receiver. Scientific & cultural cultivation suggests a way of thinking and ability of solving problems. In individuals' cultivation structure, scientific & cultural cultivation is fundamental and necessary for individuals in developing good social adaptability. Compared with people receiving regular education, those receiving vocational education are with relatively poor scientific & cultural knowledge. Therefore, improving scientific & cultural cultivation is an important task of vocational education.

In China, the current situation and quality of prospective labor in rural areas are not optimistic. In the year 2005, there were 40 309 500 people attending senior high school nationwide. Estimated by the gross enrolment rate of 52.7%, more than 35 000 000 junior high school graduates stepped into society, the majority of them from rural areas. This suggests that a considerable number of rural teenagers didn't acquire much basic scientific & cultural knowledge, contributing to the increasing population of low-quality rural labor. Devoid of basic scientific & cultural knowledge, these teenagers tended to fail in competition with better-educated laid-off workers when they were hunting a job in cities. On the other hand, low quality of rural labor makes their transfer closely related to the economic cycle, for ill-educated rural labor can only choose to be manual workers in basic construction or transportation sector where job opportunities have much to do with the market. Thus vocational education aiming at rural labor should by no means exclude scientific & cultural knowledge while highlighting vocational skill training.

3.2 Improving the quality of rural labor in skills Since the basic feature of vocation is technique, the most important part of vocational education is practical skill training. That is, the basic function of vocational education is to help each rural laborer master certain kind of professional technique. In the transfer of rural labor, that whether they will be regarded as qualified for certain job in cities relies on whether they grasp the skills required by the job. Therefore, for rural labor going to cit-

ies, if they want to engage in certain vocation, they have to be equipped with certain skills accordingly ahead, which can be achieved by receiving vocational education.

In modern society stressing ability, efficiency and benefits, rural people only receiving the nine-year compulsory education are far from readiness for competitions and challenges. That's why vocational education comes into existence and maintains. At present, rural labor is mainly transferred to processing, building and service industries where manual workers are in large demand. Therefore, vocational skill training, even in a short time, can improve their adaptability effectively. According to a survey, in Sichuan, rural labor receiving vocational skill training is easier to get a job and better-paid than those without the training in cities. The average annual income of the trained rural labor can reach 4 800 yuan while that of the untrained is only about 3 300 yuan. The former earned more than the latter by nearly 50%^[12]. Obviously, it's urgent as well as necessary to train the transferred rural labor in their vocational skills.

3.3 Improving the physical & mental quality of rural labor

Good physical and mental quality is not only the basis for people to finish vocational education and become qualified for their future job but also indispensable for rural labor to be healthy and all-round.

Physical quality refers to the state of physical structure and functioning, the basis for people to engage in activities. In vocational education, students of different ages & physiological characteristics are supposed to meet corresponding standards of physical exercises of the nation. Moreover, vocational education should help its receivers develop special physical abilities as required by certain particular occupation, such as construction where being capable of aerial & hard work and standing harsh weather are required of workers and restaurant services where the endurance of lower limbs are required. Given the current situation of productive forces in China, physical health remains essential in livelihood earning for rural labor.

Mental quality refers to the degree of the harmony between individuals' inner world and the outer world and whether individuals can adapt to social norms and meet vocational requirements. That is, individuals' psychological status. As the reform and opening up goes further and the society changes constantly, the pace of life is accelerating in China. However, deeply influenced by the traditional small-scale peasant economic system, rural labor tends to cling conservatively to the old system, stress agriculture over commerce, hate to leave his native land, believe in fate and have difficulties adapting to the transformation of society. Thus the vocational education serving pro-

spective transferred rural labor is significant in changing its learners' concepts so that they can adapt themselves to the modern competitive market.

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