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# Employed Farmers in the Pearl River Delta and Related Issues

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**Abstract** As a special weak group in agricultural floating population, employed farmers make special historic contribution to socio-economic development of the Pearl River Delta. However, employed farmers are faced with survival difficulties, which lead to a series of social issues. From historical origin, current situations and social issues, we put forward countermeasures to solve problems of employed farmers; solve the household registration of employed farmers; raise the compensation standard of land expropriation and demolition; cancel the admission threshold; provide reemployment guidance; and establish management funds of employed farmers.

**Key words** Employed farmers, Agricultural floating farmers, The Pearl River Delta

The Pearl River Delta develops rapidly from the 1980s. In less than 20 years, it has developed to be a highly open industrial society from a closed agricultural society. In the transformation from extensive to intensive operation, traditional agriculture to modern industry, and separation to integration of urban and rural areas, considerable achievements have been made, but there is also a series of social issues. Employed farmer is one of the typical cases.

This special type of agricultural floating population mainly appears in the Pearl River Delta where the economy is well developed. The development of employed farmers is the course of constant integration and conflict with this region. This course leads to complicated economic and social issues, which concern not only benefits of employed farmers, stable development of the region, but also social equity and justice of the whole Pearl River Delta. These historical issues are parts of issues concerning agriculture, farmers and countryside, so it should draw attention of related departments, to seek the optimum solution.

## 1 Appearance and reasons of employed farmers in the Pearl River Delta

**1.1 Appearance** The phenomenon of employed farmers appeared at the end of 1970s to the beginning of 1980s. Employed farmers inject great vitality into soaring economy of the Pearl River Delta, and eliminate the hidden trouble of desolate cultivated land<sup>[1]</sup>. With deepening of reform and opening-up, the secondary industry and tertiary industry burgeon in rural ar-

eas of the Pearl River Delta, social wealth also rises rapidly, while the unbalanced development of all regions and classes is more and more obvious. To seek maximal benefits, a lot of farmers abandon field and turn to other industries. Then, large area of cultivated land becomes desolate, and the state fails to complete the task of grain requisition by purchase. In this situation, grass-roots cadres of the Pearl River Delta employ farmers from Guangxi, Hunan, Hubei, Jiangxi, Sichuan provinces, North Guangdong and West Guangdong to plough. These farmers are called employed farmers.

There is no uniform definition for concept of employed farmers, and in local government documents, its definition is different. For example, Tanzhou Township of Zhongshan City defines employed farmers as "other city farmers who voluntarily sign written (or verbal) employment contract of land cultivation with township, village committee and production team, and take charge of delivering state requisition grain"<sup>[2]</sup>. Jiangmen City defines employed farmers as "those farmers who come from other places, are engaged in agricultural production, and voluntarily sign employment contract of land cultivation with township, villages or peasant households, and responsible for delivering state requisition grain"<sup>[3]</sup>. Zhuhai City gives its definition of employed farmers in a more broad way. It defines employed farmers as who come to Zhuhai, sign contract and have applied temporary residence permit, to cultivate land, contract planting, raising and carry out developmental production<sup>[4]</sup>. In academic circle, employed farmers are farmers who abandon their own land and go to regions where the economy is relatively developed and land is relatively fertile, to cultivate land for others<sup>[5]</sup>; or those persons who come from other places, but get attached to urban and market economy, and conduct agricultural production through hiring land<sup>[6]</sup>. In sum, we define employed farmers as persons who are engaged in agricultural

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production, come from other places, and sign contract with rural grass-roots organizations or peasant households, to cultivate land for local farmers, pay land rent and deliver state requisition grain. Employed farmers are mainly distributed in economically developed cities of the Pearl River Delta, such as Guangzhou, Zhongshan, Zhuhai, Jiangmen, Dongguan, and Huizhou. Some are employed by village cadres, for example, Yunnan Village of Jiangmen City. Some are employed by individual, for example, single household "employed farmer" in Zhuhai and Dongguan. These employed farmers migrate to cities, work in cities and bear children in cities, but the cities still keep estranging them. Especially in recent years, with frequent occurrence of social security and land conflict, the inflow places even refuse to accept employed farmers.

## 1.2 Reasons

**1.2.1 System reason.** In the early days of foundation, to ensure industrialization progress and primitive accumulation of capital, China set up series of related systems (such as domicile migration system and social security system), which separate urban and rural people and form urban-rural dual structure. These systems not only limit population flow, but also result in great difference of living environment and resources, then a lot of farmers hope to go to cities for better livelihood.

**1.2.2 Policy reason.** For the purpose of reform and opening-up, China provides great preferential policies for development of the Pearl River Delta. Farmers originally engaged in agricultural production have larger development space. Some of them leave their hometown and go to cities, some go to coastal areas to do business, and some even stow away to Hong Kong and Macao. As a result, it leads to loss of many rural labor forces and waste of much cultivated land. The Pearl River Delta is an important grain-producing area in South China, it must complete the annual task of state requisition grain. Therefore, introduction of employed farmers is a good solution to matter of great urgency. This is also the direct reason for appearance of employed farmers.

**1.2.3 Economic reason.** Employed farmers are low in educational level and lack skills. Although having field and house in their hometown, they still receive meager income due to remote location, single crop and separate cultivation. After they flow to the Pearl River Delta and engage in agricultural production, their living conditions are improved to some extent. Therefore, with encouragement of "promise of household registration" policy, most employed farmers sell their family belongings, return field and house, and move the whole family to other places.

Under the pressure of system and economy, employed farmers have to engage in farming in cities. They come to cities with beautiful hopes, but they are faced with great difficulties in the course of integration and conflict with cities.

## 2 Situations and difficulties of employed farmers in the Pearl River Delta

**2.1 Basic situations** In the early 1980s, few employed farmers were attracted by rural grass-roots cadres of the Pearl River Delta. For example, only 1 732 households of employed

farmers (totally 8 213 people) flew to Zhongshan City before 1989. Later, a mature cultivated land supply and demand market gradually forms in the Pearl River Delta. More and more other place farmers go to this area through getting in touch with local farmers or those employed farmers who have already settled down. Now, about 5 000 households (30 000 persons) in Zhongshan City are employed farmers. Those farmers mainly come from mountain areas of south, north and west of Guangdong Province, and rural areas of Hunan and Jiangxi provinces<sup>[7]</sup>. Zhuhai and Shenzhen are special economic zones, immigrants and people from other places have exceeded local population, and there is no exact statistic for number of employed farmers, only Baoan district of Shenzhen may have several thousand people<sup>[8]</sup>. Employed farmers of Zhuhai are mainly distributed in production teams subordinate to farms in western areas of the city, take up 8% to 10% of the total population of each production team, and mainly come from Xinyi and Ludong of Guangdong, and Guangxi. In the whole area of Pearl River Delta, there are about 200 000 to 300 000 employed farmers, however, the official number is only 100 000.

Employed farmers in the Pearl River Delta are mainly planting vegetables and fruits, and raising pigs and fishes, but different areas have different characteristics. For example, vegetable supply market of Dongguan is mainly supported by employed farmers in the form of small capital business, while in western area of Zhuhai City, the sugarcane is abundant, so most employed farmers plant sugarcane. There are both scattered farming replacement (each person cultivating about 2 000 to 5 333 m<sup>2</sup>) and farming replacement team to contract land in the collective form.

## 2.2 Survival difficulty of employed farmers

**2.2.1 Policy discrimination.** Unfair policy treatment is the biggest difficulty faced by employed farmers. The promise of "household registration" is delayed time and time again, leading to harm of legal benefits and rights of employed farmers in housing, children education, and political rights. Even in daily matters such as connecting tap water, electricity, installing telephone, and registering license plate, they are also suffered from great obstruction. The shadow of "black household" exists everywhere. They are social weak groups and have to suffer hardships and struggle in poverty, even in constant accumulation of social wealth and gradual improvement of security network. In recent years, some employed farmers are even expelled, so they have to withdraw to second-tier and third-tier cities from first-tier cities.

**2.2.2 Villager discrimination.** In the early days of flow-in of employed farmers, they had to deliver annual task of state requisition grain, prevented cultivated land from becoming desolate, and they opened much wasteland. In this period, employed farmers get along harmoniously with local residents. However, with economic development of the Pearl River Delta, land expropriation area of government and land use area of industry and commerce, the area of cultivated land becomes less and less, accompanied with problems of compensation of land expropriation, dividend on land shares, and building construc-

tion, *etc.*, the conflict between employed farmers and local residents gradually emerges. In addition to difference of cultural background and custom, and obstacle of language exchange, the conflict becomes intensified, even violent conflict occurs<sup>[9]</sup>.

### 3 Social issues due to employed farmers in the Pearl River Delta

In the beginning, the assumption is that most employed farmers will return to their hometown when the contract expires or there is no land for cultivation. Local residents join together with government under common benefit, so the voice of expelling employed farmers is louder and louder. On the other hand, employed farmers actively safeguard their rights, there is frequent occurrence of civil dispute, appealing to the higher authority for help, and violent conflict.

**3.1 Land issue of employed farmers** Land is important resource for survival of farmers, but it makes employed farmers get into a difficult position. The largest dispute of employed farmers over land issue is the expropriation of cultivated land and residential land, land expropriation makes employed farmers have no land to cultivate and become homeless.

**3.1.1 Cultivated land.** The expropriation of cultivated land mainly involves compensation and resettlement. According to employment contract or verbal employment promise, employed farmers only have right of use or right of management over the contractual land. Accordingly, the land expropriation compensation will be partial to local village collective, or will be directly distributed to local residents. For employed farmers, there is no compensation or only little compensation. For example, in 2004, over 200 hm<sup>2</sup> land in Shanghe Village of Baoan District in Shenzhen was expropriated, which concerns livelihood of many farming replacement teams in Shanghe Village. Although related department is willing to pay migration expenditure and compensation for crops, most employed farmers are unwilling to move, the Xinyi farming replacement team even rebelled against the expropriation. Since 1982, this farming replacement team has moved twice in compliance with relocation policy. This time, they are unwilling to move and ask for reasonable migration and resettlement policy<sup>[8]</sup>.

**3.1.2 Residential land.** Housing is a problem to be considered by employed farmers when moving to inflow place. They have no registered permanent residence, so they can not apply homestead certificate, land use certificate and building property title certificate. Consequently, employed farmers build houses by themselves. However, most self-built houses are simple hut near the field or village edge. There are also tile-roofed houses, with area of 20 to 30 m<sup>2</sup>, generally housing a family of 4 to 6 persons. When the government expropriates land or township readjusts land distribution, these simple huts will be deemed as illegal building. For example, the Zijinwei pull-down event in Dabianling of Dongguan City. Zijinwei is actually a village in village where employed farmers are concentrated. In the past 20 years, Zijinwei people have been working hard in this strange land, and they bear children in this land. However, some department considers this village as illegal building. The order of

pulling houses down has been issued, but there is no compensation, with the reason that "they are illegal buildings and impairs appearance of the city"<sup>[10]</sup>. These employed farmers move to Dongguan with the whole family and abandon their field and houses in hometown, if their huts are pulled down, they will be homeless.

**3.2 Education of their children** The compulsory education of China adopts the principle of "classified school running and classified management system", and the elementary education is at the expense of the county and township finance. Children of employed farmers do not have local registered permanent residence, so they can not enjoy education funds provided by finance of local government, and have to pay temporary schooling fee for public school. The criterion of temporary schooling fee is different, in Zhuhai, it is 200 to 300 yuan, and in Shenzhen, it is up to 700 to 800 yuan. Even in the same city, it may be different, generally the provincial level schools charge higher than common schools. After from temporary schooling fee, there are fees for books and materials and other hidden charges, all of which are heavy burden for employed farmers.

In recent years, relevant departments begin to consider education of children of employed farmers. For example, Zhuhai issued *Methods for Implementing Rural Free Compulsory Education* in August of 2006, and urban finance allocated 33.96 million yuan for subsidizing rural compulsory education. The annual free standard for middle school and primary school is 740 yuan and 520 yuan respectively for each student. Besides, it will establish emergency mechanism for utilization of public fund of rural middle and primary school education, to achieve specific fund for specific purpose. The object includes children of rural and farm employees, and qualified employed farmers. Qualified farmers refer to those employed farmers who have moved to Zhuhai for over 5 years and have the temporary residence permit card. This is a breakthrough in safeguarding rights of employed farmers.

**3.3 Social security of employed farmers** In the Pearl River Delta, employed farmers make the same or more contribution to local socio-economic development. Nevertheless, they fail to share social public achievements, and nearly have no social security, especially medical insurance and endowment insurance.

**3.3.1 Medical insurance.** China is implementing nation-wide medical insurance reform, and establishing new rural medical cooperative system that incorporates migrant workers into urban security system. However, employed farmers are neglected. Although government is pushing forward the reform of rural cooperative medical service, and expanding benefit scope, there is no obvious improvement in the situation of "expensive medical bills and difficult access to quality medical services" for employed farmers. For example, the old rural cooperative medical system in many places of Zhuhai falls apart, and the government prepares to allocate 50 million yuan to establish rural health service center, and make the center function as medical health, population and family planning, recovery of disabled

people, as well as food security, to maximize coverage of rural cooperative medical service. In fact, only those employed farmers whose residence has moved to Zhuhai can join the insurance, so about 80% of employed farmers fail to enjoy such benefit.

**3.3.2 Endowment insurance.** Currently, the rural pension system is still based on family and supported with the collective, masses and state relief. On the one hand, employed farmers leave their native place and become estranged with their hometown. On the other hand, the employing places are unwilling to include them into collectives. Consequently, employed farmers fail to enjoy benefits of rural endowment insurance policy. Land endowment is also one of important endowment methods for farmers. However, most of them have handed over their land in hometown, and they only have right of use and management, and have no ownership of employed land, so the land endowment is meaningless for them.

**3.4 Household registration of employed farmers** China's household registration system plays an important role in allocating social resources and maintaining balanced development of urban and rural areas. However, this system also has the function of social closure, makes social resources take on regional feature to some extent, and screen unqualified people out. Employed farmers are just these unqualified people. They do not have local registered permanent residence, so they can not apply for homestead certificate.

**3.4.1 Reasons for difficult household registration.** Over the past 30 years, only few employed farmers successfully registered permanent residence, most employed farmers are still black households<sup>[8]</sup>.

Difficult household registration is mainly resulted from following two points. Firstly, policy change and authority transfer of household registration. Before 1984, in Tanzhou Township of Zhongshan City, employed farmers there could apply for household registration directly to township government. Then, the township government is deemed to have final adjudication of household registration. In fact, during 1984 to 1985, the actual household registration authority has been taken back, but it still encourages farmers to move in for farming replacement. Till 1992, Zhongshan Municipal Government started stipulating clearly no admittance of employed farmers any more, accordingly policy change provides government with the reason for refusing employed farmers. Secondly, local residents obstruct employed farmers from registering household and refuse sharing benefits. Most local farmers object to household registration of employed farmers. In Tanzhou Township, about half local villagers clearly show their objection, especially to registration to agricultural household. Local villages have obtained land compensation since land expropriation in 1993, and can obtain annual dividends of land fund. If employed farmers registered agricultural household, they will share such compensation and dividends.

**3.4.2 Exploration in solving household registration of employed farmers.** Survival difficulties of employed farmers are to a great extent resulted from no local registered permanent resi-

dence. Relevant departments have noticed such situation and taken actions, Tanzhou Township for instance.

The exploration in solving household registration of employed farmers in Tanzhou Township experiences four stages. At the first stage, Zhongshan Municipal Government firstly stipulated no acceptance of employed farmers any more in the *Notice on Strengthening Management of Employed Farmers*. Only those moved before 1984 successfully registered household, other employed farmers fail to apply household registration. At second stage, in the *Reply to Household Registration of Some Employed Farmers* issued by Zhongshan Municipal Government in 1996, it stipulates that farmers who moved to Zhongshan during 1984 to 1985 may apply for household registration by paying 2 000 yuan. Most employed farmers fail to pay such amount. At the third stage, Zhongshan Municipal Government issued *Several Opinions on Solving Problems of Employed Farmers* in 2003, firstly defining employed farmers and scope thereof, to better solve their problem of household registration. However, the conditions for household registration are still harsh. Only a few employed farmers are qualified for these conditions. At the fourth stage, Tanzhou Township government decided to solve historical issues of employed farmers, especially the issue of household registration. In *Propaganda Materials for Household Registration of Employed Farmers in Tanzhou Township*, it put forward five conditions for household registration. Through investigation, about 8 000 employed farmers are qualified, mainly in Tanzhou and Sanxiang townships.

**3.5 Industry switching of employed farmers** With 3 decades of reform and opening-up, coastal cities in the Pearl River Delta have tremendous development, and rural areas experience great change. Many townships start making new development plan and introducing industry, so agriculture is not the sole pillar industry any more. In addition, intensive and large-scale production greatly increases agricultural production efficiency. Consequently, employed farmers are faced with difficulty of switching industry.

Firstly, agricultural industrialization leads to industry switching of employed farmers. Employed farmers conduct cultivation in the form of family, generally, each person cultivates land not more than 6 667 m<sup>2</sup>. With cultivated land becoming less and less, the government encourages centralizing cultivated land and developing industrialized planting of agriculture. For example, Agriculture Bureau of Dongguan City put forward the idea of establishing vegetable production base, to achieve company-oriented, intensive and large-scale vegetable planting, reduce field pollution, and guarantee supply security of vegetable. Then, the small business of vegetable planting of employed farmers will be gradually replaced.

Secondly, industry entering villages leads to industry switching of employed farmers. Rural industrialization can drive rural urbanization and agricultural industrialization, so it obtains great support from government. To encourage industrial development of rural areas, government of all places has issued many preferential policies, mainly including talent introduction and land use. For example, Zhuhai put forward "Urban and industrial

westward movement" development strategy in 2003, namely, focused on supporting western areas, especially Jinwan and Doumen districts. To introduce foreign capital, government conducts large-scale land expropriation, takes agricultural field into industrial park or sci-tech garden, turns agricultural household of local farmers into urban household. However, employed farmers are faced with difficulty of no land for cultivation. What's worse, employed farmers do not have skills and are difficult in adapting to production process of factories. Therefore, industry switching is particularly difficult for old employed farmers.

In recent years, people blame employed farmers for abuse of fertilizer, use of hyper-toxic pesticides, and excessive use of ripener. Government has been advocating harmless production, but has never provided relevant guidance. In the course of industry entering villages, government guides landless farmers in reemployment, and enterprises also give preference to local farmers. However, for employed farmers, there is basically no guidance and assistance in solving difficulties of industry switching.

## 4 Solution to difficulties of employed farmers

With limit of time, and economic development and policy change, employed farmers will go decline or even disappear. However, we should not forget their contribution to socio-economic development of the Pearl River Delta. Employed farmers play the role of preventing cultivated land from becoming desolate, and they also exploited much wasteland. Many employed farmers are allocated to production teams. They help local residents completing task of state requisition grain, and provide rich agricultural products for urban development. They play a special role in stabilizing rear part and supporting economic development. Therefore, the government should not take employed farmers as vagrants and expel them to their hometown, and should not take them as people from other places and charge administrative fee, but should actively solve conflict and help them integrating into the farming replacement regions.

**4.1 Solving problem of household registration and incorporating them into social security network** Since the reform and opening-up, numerous people flow in the Pearl River Delta. Some are engaged in farming, some in working and some go into business. All regions should define employed farmers according to actual situations and related policies. For example, Tazhou of Zhongshan City defines farmers moving to Tazhou before 1989 as employed farmers. It is required to help those qualified employed farmers in applying household registration. If the village has been changed to township and villagers' households are changed to urban households, help them applying non-agricultural household registration. If local residents are still agricultural households, help employed farmers applying agricultural households, to safeguard their rights in land dividends and expropriation compensation. Besides, it is required to incorporate employed farmers into urban or rural social security system according to the nature of the registered household.

**4.2 Raising compensation for land expropriation and demolition, and implementing new residence** For those employed farmers whom it is difficult to resettle, it is required to raise compensation and forbid the forced demolition and relocation. For example, Changbaitou Village of Qingxi Township in Dongguan City built 3 000 m<sup>2</sup> new community to resettle vegetable farmers coming from other places. Instead of wasting time and money in confronting with employed farmers, the government should assist them in establishing new community, and conducting unified planning, to maximize total social benefits.

**4.3 Cancelling the admission threshold and making children of employed farmers share fair education** In the Interim Measure of School Education for School-age Children among Floating Population issued by State Education Commission, it mentions that "solving the problem of education of school-age children among floating population is an unshirkable duty of government, school and family. The government should create conditions for school entrance of school-age children, provide them opportunity of compulsory education, and establish strict management system". Those employed farmers fail to apply household registration are classified into floating population, they have to pay for temporary residence permit. Their children often are kept outside of the school for excuse of "limitation of source of students" or for "temporary schooling fee" which is more than two times higher than the general tuition fee. Therefore, it is required to cancel the temporary schooling fee, break the local protection, and provide children of employed farmers with opportunity of fair education.

**4.4 Providing reemployment guidance and assisting them in switching industry** On one hand, local government should provide applicable reemployment training for employed farmers who lose cultivated land. On the other hand, the government should encourage those employed farmers who are still engaged in farming to learn production technology, improve their production methods and raise land benefits. Besides, it is proposed to provide market information from time to time, and help employed farmers grasp supply and demand and price information of agricultural products.

**4.5 Establishing management funds for employed farmers, and adhering to the principle of specific fund for specific purpose** Living at the bottom of society, most employed farmers have difficulties in economy and spirit, and their ability to ward off risks is low. Urban residents have the minimum living security system and rural areas have anti-poverty policy, while employed farmers have nothing. Establishing management funds for employed farmers can relieve their living to some extent, and help them in land expropriation, residence demolition, and education of their children.

## 5 Conclusions

In recent years, the problem of employed farmers is gradually receiving wide concern from all walks of life. Related departments also make and implement policies. However, the employed farmers are still in inferior position in sharing social

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ence imparting and instruction, so that the new generation replaces the old generation. With the continuous progress of science and technology, the cultivation of innovation ability becomes particularly important. Today, only through systematic professional learning can people acquire the basic theory and expertise in a particular area. However, if wanting to make breakthrough in a particular area, one must pay attention to the cultivation of innovation ability, which is the need of the development of human society<sup>[9]</sup>.

In order to train qualified modern and new farmers, we must strengthen the cultivation of farmers' innovation ability. They should learn the theoretical knowledge of agricultural science, absorb the great achievements of their predecessors; constantly participate in practice; independently think problems, analyze problems and solve problems in practice. Only by doing this can the modern and new farmers with theoretical knowledge, practical ability and creative ability, be fostered; only by doing this can such kind of farmers be regarded as the modern and new farmers who can not only understand the mystery inside "black box of science and technology", but also constantly improve "black box of agricultural science and technology".

## 4 Conclusion

The modernization of agriculture poses higher requirements on modern and new farmers. In order to meet the challenges in the process of agricultural modernization, modern and

new farmers must improve their own quality. The farmers are required to be able to use modern agricultural production tools-black box of science and technology, promote their own practical ability and creative ability, make good use of the national policy for benefiting farmers and supporting agriculture, constantly solve various kinds of agricultural problems, to adapt to the needs of the development of modern agriculture.

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resources. In the whole Pearl River Delta, there are about 200 000 to 300 000 employed farmers. They are distributed separately and lack standard carrier and channel for safeguarding their rights, so it is difficult for them to obtain their legitimate benefits, and they need support and guidance from government. However, government departments often take tough measures for employed farmers, which is inconsistent with objective of harmonious society. Thus, instead of from the point of administrator, the government should change its attitude towards employed farmers, make policy of maximizing total social benefits, and promote management with better services, to really realize the objective of harmonious society.

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