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# Living Condition and Willingness of Migrant Workers – A Case Study of Panyu District in Guangzhou City

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**Abstract** Migrant worker is the product of urban and rural dual structure, and also an important force promoting social development. Paying close attention to living condition and willingness of migrant workers is favorable for improving people's livelihood and stabilizing society. Panyu District of Guangzhou City has gathered numerous migrant workers. Therefore, it randomly selected 600 migrant workers in Panyu District and took them as objects of questionnaire. Through research, it is found that current living condition of migrant workers is not optimistic, and it is expected that their housing problem can be solved.

**Key words** Migrant workers, Living condition, Willingness

## 1 Background

Migrant workers are people who have rural household registration but work in cities. Migrant work is a special identity label within the framework of China's traditional household registration system. It is objective result of the serious conflict between acceleration of China's industrialization and traditional household registration system<sup>[1]</sup>. Migrant workers promote rural labors constantly moving to non-agricultural industry and urban areas, and become the most important force driving economic growth. In addition, migrant worker is also an important motive force for improvement of people's living condition. Migrant working becomes an essential approach and inevitable requirement for narrowing urban and rural divide and promoting harmonious social development<sup>[2]</sup>. However, their flow has various limitations, including household registration system, labor employment system, and social security system, which cause them to fail to share achievements of urban civilization and drift in edges of urban and rural areas<sup>[3]</sup>. Both the Party and government attach great importance to migrant worker issue, and have issued a series of policies to solve living problem of migrant workers, such as *Opinions of the State Council on How to Resolve Problems Related to Migrant Workers*. As the third largest city of China, Guangzhou has gathered numerous migrant workers. According to preliminary estimation of appropriate authorities, Guangzhou holds more than 3 million migrant workers, ranking the first in the whole country<sup>[4]</sup>. Panyu District is an important industrial area in Guangzhou City. Every year, it attracts numerous workers from other places, most of whom are migrant workers. According to Data of the sixth population census in China, Panyu District has permanent resident population of 1 764 869, 328 786 more than the fifth population census, having an increase of 22.89% (average annual growth rate of 2.08%). It can be estimated that migrant workers take up a large part in permanent resident

population of Panyu District. Therefore, the study on living condition and willingness of migrant workers in Panyu District plays an important reference function in improving their living condition and stabilizing society.

## 2 Basic characteristics of migrant workers in Panyu District

In order to find out living condition and willingness of migrant workers in Panyu District, our research team took those people who have agricultural household status but are not engaged in agricultural work as respondent. We adopted random sampling and snowball sampling methods, distributed 600 copies of questionnaire in 5 towns where migrant workers are relatively centralized. We received 584 copies of questionnaire. Finally, after checking the received questionnaire and rejecting those careless ones and those missing key information, we obtained 572 valid copies, with the valid response rate up to 95.3%. Since the collected sample is large in quantity and coverage, the data has considerable credibility. Through data handling, we got following basic characteristics of migrant workers:

### 2.1 Most migrant workers are male, young and middle-aged

Male migrant workers account for 69.09%, while female ones account for 30.91%. Generally speaking, urban area and industrial sectors require high labor intensity, and male migrant workers just have such advantage. As to the age, new generation migrant workers younger than 25 years old account for 27.27%, those 26 – 35 years old account for 30.91%, 36 – 45 years old account for 25.45% and those older than 46 account for 16.36%. These indicate that young and middle aged migrant workers (younger than 45 years old) account for 83.64%. Such age structure reflects that young and middle aged migrant workers are major force of migrant workers.

### 2.2 Most migrant workers have just junior middle school education level, and most have never received skills training

Among the migrant worker respondents, 3.64% are illiterate,

9.09% have primary school education, 56.36% have junior middle school education, 21.82% have special secondary school or senior middle school education, and 9.09% have college education, indicating most migrant workers just received general education. We also found that 69.09% migrant workers have never received skills training provided by government, factories or technical schools, and 47.27% migrant workers have never learnt skills from a master. Therefore, most migrant workers have never participated in any skills training, and their skill level is relatively low, which seriously influences their transfer employment and stable employment.

**2.3 Migrant workers from Guangdong and Hunan provinces are in the majority** Migrant worker respondents come from many provinces, including Guangdong, Guangxi, Henan, Hunan, Hubei, Jiangxi, Shaanxi, Sichuan and Chongqing, but most migrant workers come from middle and western regions. Among them, 32.73% come from Guangdong Province, 21.82% from Hunan, 12.73% from 12.73% and 10.91% from Hubei, indicating that most migrant workers in Panyu District come from Guangdong and Hunan provinces. This is possibly because Panyu District, having developed economy and traffic in Pearl River Delta, attracts farmers from whole Guangdong Province, especially eastern and western Guangdong and northern mountain areas. Hunan Province is adjacent to Guangdong Province, so a lot of farmers from Hunan Province are willing to go to Guangdong.

### 3 Living condition of migrant workers in Panyu District

**3.1 Whole family migrant workers taking up a small portion** According to our survey, among samples we collected, 47.9% migrant workers have been married and have children. 83.3% migrant workers go to cities with their spouses, while old people stay at home to look after children; 12.5% migrant workers take their children together when going to cities, and only 4.2% migrant workers are whole family going out to work. Migrant workers in Panyu District have problem of children education: children of 72.73% migrant workers have to study in their local areas, and children of only 27.27% migrant workers can study in Panyu District. As to caring for old people, 58.18% migrant workers say that their parents or grandparents have to look after themselves, 27.27% migrant workers have brothers to look after old people in the family, and only 2% migrant workers ask their parent to live with them in Panyu District. For the question of sending money home, 72.73% migrant workers need sending money home. For the money, 32.56% is used for children's study, 34.88% for family daily expenses, and the rest is for living expenses of the family. These show that most migrant workers are not unwilling to ask their children and parents to live in cities, but rather they are unable to do so because of high living cost in cities.

**3.2 Long working hours but low wages** Most migrant worker work in long hours: 80% migrant workers have 9–12 daily working hours, and 5.45% have 12 daily working hours, far greater

than statutory working hours specified in *Labor Law of the People's Republic of China*. The survey indicates that monthly wage of migrant workers is generally low, the minimum is as low as 1 000 yuan, and 65.46% migrant workers fail to receive wage of 3 000 yuan monthly. Due to their condition limitation and existing imperfect system, there are widespread problems of long working hours and low wages among migrant workers.

**3.3 Single employment channel and low technological content of work** As to the question of employment channel, 34.55% get jobs from introduction of their fellow villagers, 49.09% find jobs by themselves, 3.64% from their spouses, 2% from introduction of their classmates, 7.27% from recruitment, and 1.82% from employment agency, indicating most migrant workers depend on their interpersonal relationship and their own effort, and employment information they obtain from labor market is little. In comparison with job types of migrant workers, it can be found that 31.25% jobs are skill types, 20.83% are management types, 25% belong to physical types with high labor intensity, and 22.92% are simple mechanical operation types. Therefore, most migrant workers have difficulty in jobs with high technological content due to their low education level and skills.

**3.4 Low level of right and interest protection and low right safeguarding awareness** In our survey, 572 migrant workers are employees, only 47.27% migrant workers have signed labor contract with enterprises, while more than half migrant workers fail to sign any labor contract or agreement with enterprises. In addition, 49.09% migrant workers say that their enterprises do not buy work-related injury insurance, endowment insurance or any other insurances, and only 38.18% migrant workers have participated in social insurance. These reflect that some enterprises violate against statutory regulations. They neither sign labor contract with migrant workers, nor buy social insurance for migrant workers. These serious infringe upon lawful rights and interests of migrant workers. Many migrant workers are faced with risks of dismissal at any time, arrear or reduction of wages, or failure to enjoy compensation for work-related injury or retirement and endowment. In the aspect of awareness for labor contract, 27.27% migrant workers say it does not matter, and 18.18% migrant workers say that signing labor contract or not signing is just the same. Besides, 74.55% migrant workers do not ask their enterprises to buy social insurance for them. These indicate that most migrant workers have low awareness for protection of labor rights and interests and social insurance, and their awareness for safeguarding interests and rights is weak.

**3.5 High living costs** As regards living, 56.36% migrant workers have their independent leased house, 25.45% migrant workers stay at their factory dormitory, 12.73% migrant workers live together with other co-tenants, 1.82% migrant workers live in their relatives' or friends' house, and 1.82% go back to their own home, indicating enterprises of more than 70% migrant workers do not provide accommodation and living subsidy and accordingly migrant workers have serious problem of housing. 47.27% migrant

workers have to monthly pay 100 – 500 yuan for housing, 20% migrant workers monthly pay 600 – 1 000 yuan for housing, and 3% migrant workers monthly pay more than 1 000 yuan for housing. For other expenses, 30.91% migrant workers are within 1 000 yuan, 32.73% are 1 001 – 2 000 yuan, 14.55% are 2 001 – 3 000 yuan, and 14.55% are more than 3 000 yuan. Furthermore, 49.09% migrant workers are unwilling to buy washing machine, refrigerator and air conditioner and only want to buy some necessities; 12.73% migrant workers are only willing to buy second – hand appliances; 20% migrant workers buy costly but durable consumer goods; 18.18% migrant workers plan to buy durable consumer goods in the future. These data indicate that migrant workers have great monthly living expenses, and their balance is little, which reduces their consumption ability in cities.

### 3.6 Seldom going home due to high travelling expenses

Our survey found that 50.91% migrant workers go home only one time annually and 25.45% migrant workers go home twice annually. For travelling expenses, 30.91% migrant workers need less than 200 yuan, 41.82% migrant workers need 200 – 500 yuan, 23.64% migrant workers need 500 – 1 000 yuan, and 1.82% migrant workers need about 1 000 yuan. For reasons of seldom going home, 38.18% migrant workers impute it to high travelling expenses, 32.73% migrant workers worry about affecting their work, and the rest think it costs much to visit relatives and friends after going home.

## 4 Future plan of migrant workers in Panyu District

**4.1 Plan to go home and buy house in hometown** In our survey, we found that 36.36% migrant workers plan to go home and engage in farming, 41.82% migrant workers do not want to go home. Even if they go home, they are unwilling to engage in farming, and 20% migrant workers have no such plan. Most migrant workers do not want to go home and engage in farming possibly because the marginal benefit of farming is relatively low and lacks attraction. In addition, 47.27% migrant workers plan to go home in future, 16.36% migrant workers want to stay at cities, and 36.36% migrant workers say that they have not thought about this question. As to buying houses, 14.55% migrant workers want to buy houses in the city where they work, 18.18% migrant workers plan to go home, 36.36% plan to buy houses in their local towns or build houses in their hometown, 23.64% migrant workers plan to buy houses in their local counties, and only 7.27% migrant workers have never thought about this problem. These reflect that high price of houses in Panyu District pushes most migrant workers outside, making them have no economic ability to buy houses in Panyu District and have to buy houses in their hometown.

**4.2 Keeping rural land and hoping to solve house problem in cities** 52.73% migrant workers are unwilling to move their household registration to cities, and only hope to keep their rural land; 30.91% migrant workers hope to move their household registration to cities and keep their rural land at the same time; only 7.27% migrant workers are willing to give up their rural land con-

tractual right and move their household registration to cities, because migrant workers are just a special group flowing between urban and rural areas, and rural land is still their fundamental safeguard<sup>[5]</sup>. As to the question of what problem they hope most the government to solve, 41.82% migrant workers say it is house; 25.45% hope to improve welfare of work, especially the social insurance; 10.91% migrant workers care about household registration and want to settle down in Panyu District; 9.09% migrant workers hope to solve job and income problems; 7.27% migrant workers hope to solve the problem of their children education; 3.64% migrant workers want to safeguard their interest and right; 1.82% migrant workers hope to have excellent urban environment and social security. These reflect diversified demands of migrant workers, but house is still the major problem troubling most migrant workers.

## 5 Recommendations for improving living conditions of migrant workers in Panyu District

Our survey has shown that living condition of migrant workers in Panyu District is not optimistic, and they stay in weak position in wage income, right and interest protection, employment channel and living consumption. If government neglects these problems for a long time, it will dampen production enthusiasm of migrant workers, potentially force them to leave Panyu District, and finally will bring heavy losses to economic development of Panyu District. Therefore, the district government should attach great importance to living condition of migrant workers and formulate effective measures to improve their living conditions, to make them live in peace and work contentedly.

**5.1 Reinforcing protection of lawful rights and interests of migrant workers** In line with low rate of signature of labor contract, low social security level, and inadequate occupational health and safety protection, government should reinforce law enforcement of protection of migrant workers' rights and interests, to create favorable environment for stable employment of migrant workers. Besides, government should strictly investigate and prosecute illegal activities of enterprises, order enterprises and factories to strictly abide by labor contract management method, labor contract must be signed when recruiting migrant workers. Also, it is required to incorporate migrant workers into social security system, and strictly enforce specified working hours and intensity, to promote rational increase of wages of migrant workers. Besides, it is recommended to strengthen propaganda of relevant laws and regulations, further raise legal awareness of migrant workers, and improve offence-reporting and complaint system for migrant workers safeguarding their rights and interests.

**5.2 Expanding employment channel and providing various trainings for migrant workers** Since employment channel of migrant workers is simple, government should take more active employment policies, improve human resource market, and improve employment service system. In addition, it is proposed to annually organize several times of recruitment fair special for mi-

grant workers, to expand employment channel of migrant workers. For migrant workers, a city is a different social environment, so living and working in a city needs various knowledge and skills. In this situation, government should reinforce training effort of migrant workers, strengthen training of migrant workers in vocational skills, legal awareness and health care, and improve their living and working ability. Training expenses can be shared by government, enterprises and migrant workers, to practically reduce burden of migrant workers.

### 5.3 Providing housing subsidy for migrant workers and safeguarding education right of migrant workers' children

According to the survey, housing is still the major problem most migrant workers hope to solve. High house rental is a problem troubling migrant workers. Therefore, government should provide moderate housing subsidy for migrant workers, reduce rentals of migrant workers, and lighten their living burden. The *Report to the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China* states that we should ensure that children of rural migrant workers in cities have equal access to education. In recent years, Panyu District government practiced the "integration admission scheme" for compulsory education of migrant workers' children. This scheme won high opinion of most migrant workers, but its threshold is too high and only a small portion of migrant workers can be

benefited. Based on this, government should continue to improve this scheme, allocate education fund for migrant workers who take their school-age children together, moderately expand public school resources and liberalize admission condition, to satisfy fair compulsory education requirement of migrant workers' children in public schools. Furthermore, it is recommended to build migrant workers self-established schools and provide adequate subsidy in tuition fees, to safeguard compulsory education right of migrant workers' children.

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