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# Survival Predicament and Recommendations for Second Generation Farmers in Northwest China

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**Abstract** The second generation farmers in northwest of China have difficulties in employment after receiving general higher education, and vocational and technical education is not perfect on the whole. Besides, it is easy for them to become marginal people in cities. However, returning home and business startup also face many obstacles. Selling land for money brings great hidden trouble for survival. It is recommended that the government should carry out reform from the aspects of quality of work, investment assistance, popularization of law education, rural policy, and people's livelihood. Through increasing the investment, policy support, and education leading measures, the government will make great efforts to improve the quality of life, to help ordinary second generation farmers get out of the survival predicament.

**Key words** Second generation farmers, Survival predicament, Countermeasures, Recommendations, Northwest region

## 1 Introduction

The rapid urbanization of China in the 20th century and the large-scale population flow since the 1980s have produced two generations of migrant workers. The second generation migrant workers were the children of the first generation of migrant workers, born in the 1980s and 1990s. In this paper, we took those migrant workers born after the 1980s with rural household registration, but working in urban areas as the second generation farmers. At present, China's economic growth is changing from high-speed development to the stable growth period. Due to the lack of support in financial resources, material, and power, most ordinary second generation farmers in northwest region face increasing employment crisis and have survival predicament. And they face certain difficulties in receiving education, migrant work, and returning home for farming. In sum, their development prospect is not optimistic. It is of great significance to study the survival predicament of ordinary second generation farmers in northwest region, and come up with feasible recommendations to solve the survival crisis, stabilize the social environment and promote social harmony.

## 2 Development path and survival predicament of the second generation farmers in northwest China

**2.1 Receiving education** A development path for the ordinary second generation farmers is to receive college education. With the enrolment expansion of China's colleges and universities from 1999, the college education has changed from elite education to universal education, and colleges and universities have become easier for ordinary families. In addition to all levels of support have been introduced for poor students, such as scholarships,

grants, student loans and other policies, ordinary farmer families can bear the burden. Compared with the first generation migrant workers, the second generation migrant workers have higher education level, pursue decent jobs, and would like to go to large and medium cities and look forward to integrating into urban society, and have similar values and personal development demands as urban peers<sup>[1]</sup>. Going to colleges and universities has become a common way for the ordinary second generation migrant workers. However, it has become an indisputable fact that numerous college students have difficulty in finding jobs. In 2015, 7.49 million college graduates were graduated, the employment pressure continued to increase, many college graduates face the problem of unemployment at the time of graduation. In addition to the lack of economic and social relations, and information support, the employment rate is relatively low for college graduates of the second generation migrant workers. "Not going to colleges, you will be poor in future, but if you go to colleges, you get poor immediately". Such problem is more obvious for the ordinary second generation migrant workers. The hidden meaning of "difficulty to find a job even if you are graduated from colleges" is "no job at all if you do not go to colleges". After all, receiving higher education is a path for the ordinary second generation migrant workers to get a higher platform. In order to improve the management level and the quality of teachers, both the civil service examinations and teacher qualification examinations have corresponding academic requirements. Various examinations such as college entrance examination, the civil service examination, the recruitment examination and so on provide an opportunity for the second generation migrant workers, poor second generation, and ordinary people to compete with "rich second generation" "official second generation". Nevertheless, if you do not have college education, you will lose the such opportunity. These examinations have provided more choices for the second generation migrant workers to solve the "survival crisis", and

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a large number of ordinary second generation migrant workers have become civil servants or teachers through these examinations. In view of the employment predicament of the new generation migrant workers, vocational and technical education can be a compromise in the face of difficulties in choosing higher education. Since China has vigorously advocated vocational and technical education, the public and private technical colleges have developed rapidly, and the scale of enrollment has been expanding. Therefore, the ordinary second generation migrant workers may take more consideration of vocational schools and secondary schools, and learn a certain application skill at the same time of obtaining college or vocational school diploma, so as to solve the employment crisis when finding jobs. For example, in 2015, Hanzhong Vocational and Technical College in Shaanxi Province enrolled 2850 students for three-year vocational college, and a large number of local ordinary second generation migrant workers have selected vocational education which is an appropriate platform for future development. New generation migrant workers can learn and master practical skills to survive, rather than like the old generation migrant workers relying on hard labor for survival. This is also the most prominent feature of new generation migrant workers. However, at present, the overall vocational education still remains at the starting stage, there are still many imperfections: secondary vocational education promoted the short-range flow to a certain extent, but failed to make the second generation migrant workers step to a higher social class, thus vocational education is not an effective channel for promoting flow of the second generation migrant workers, but just plays the role of class reproduction<sup>[2]</sup>. In this situation, government should actively reform the vocational and technical education, to meet the demands of social development, so as to provide effective help for the second generation migrant workers.

**2.2 Working in cities** Working in cities or doing migrant work is a traditional survival channel for the older generation migrant workers. China initially put forward the concept of new generation migrant workers in 2012. According to data of the National Bureau of Statistics, migrant workers with high school and above education accounted for 23.8% of the total migrant workers, 75.6% migrant workers younger than 30 years of age had junior middle school or above education, and 40% had high school education<sup>[3]</sup>. It can be seen, although more and more new generation migrant workers received education than old generation migrant workers. The overall level of education is still very low, many second generation farmers only received the basic the nine-year compulsory education. In many rural areas of the northwest region, doing migrant work seems to have become a trend. Although the wage is meager, they have to do for survival. Along with the migrant working, the expansion of urbanization and the relocation of migrants and other measures, a large number of second generation migrant workers live in urban areas or urban fringes since their childhood. However, due to combined action of economic status, social class, and living habits and customs, many second generation farmers live in

cities but can not integrate into cities and finally become marginal people. In this situation, the second generation farmers are rootless. Because of the household registration system, exclusion of them by urban residents, weak occupation they are engaged in, and lack of social identity, they are gradually reduced to urban marginal people, they can not go back to rural areas, and can not adapt to the city<sup>[4]</sup>. The majority of these second generation migrant workers lack hard-working spirit of the older generation of migrant workers. They are unwilling to overwork in site, and do not want to go outside to sell physical labor, just want to do easy, respected high payment work. However, they do not have excellent academic performance or special skills, lack family support, so they are weak in job findings, house purchasing, car purchasing, being in love, and daily life, they do not have foundation and skills for realizing objectives, and it is easy for them to take extreme road. At present, more than 100 million second generation farmers live in cities for a long time, engaged in a variety of work, and have become the main force of urbanization of China. In addition, high incidence of crime has become a factor affecting social stability<sup>[5]</sup>.

**2.3 Returning home for farming** Farming is originally the most fundamental survival method of farmers, but it is the most helpless and most difficult path for the second generation farmers. Although a large number of the second generation or the third generation farmers still live a marginal life, in either psychological point of view or the life, they will not return to the traditional living conditions of farmers, they are not adapt to traditional rural life any more, and prefer to continue living marginalized life in cities. Therefore, existing farmer are mainly old, weak, women, and young ones, and few young and middle-aged second generation farmers do farming. At the same time, the cost of agricultural products is relatively high, but the price devalues. In addition to rising price of means of agricultural production, traditional farmers rely on farming for the livelihood will suffer too much pressure. Although the state strongly advocated "modern farm" business model relying on advanced technology, and vigorously promote the new socialist countryside construction, and there have been measures of new socialist countryside construction, such as "closing forest to facilitate afforestation", "conceding the land to forestry", and "silkworm breeding and pig raising bases", the gap with ordinary farmers in mountain areas is still very large. Similarly, in the aspect of returning home for business startup, although the state strongly encourages college students to start a business, for college students of ordinary second-generation farmers, they are facing many difficulties, such as in land constraints, children education, pension care, business startup funds, and entrepreneurial quality and other aspects<sup>[6]</sup>. In addition to a small number of farmers getting rich relying on business or expertise skills, in recent years, many farmers obtain high compensation through "selling land" or "land expropriation compensation". Under the impact of real estate economy, industrial economy, and infrastructure construction and other economic industries, farmers' land is

expropriated by the government or real estate developers, and "selling land for money" even becomes a wave of rural areas. In the land acquisition process, in addition to the active land selling action, the forced land acquisition by municipal construction has become a forced choice of farmers. For example, after farmland is requisitioned for the construction of the highway, hundreds of acres of high-quality paddy fields will be changed into relevant class highway. However, land requisition brings about huge hidden trouble. On the one hand, for the whole nation, the farmland red line (121.2 million ha) is frequently challenged, and sharp drop of farmland area will lead to decline in the grain yield. On the other hand, once farmers lose the last protection of survival-land, their risk of survival will increase<sup>[7]</sup>. In the past, farmers went to cities and became migrant workers, they could return home and did farming' now, both the new generation migrant workers and the majority of the second generation farmers have the problem of "no way forward, no way back". For a three-person family, the minimum household consumption is 500 yuan / month for each person, and the annual consumption of the whole family is 18000 yuan. Except a very small number of farmers good at management, the majority of farmers sit idle at home eating away the land requisition compensation, and there is no route of retreat.

### 3 Recommendations for survival of the second generation farmers in northwest region

(i) It is recommended to improve the work quality of government officials, in particular, to improve the work quality of village-level organizations, so that they can truly do their work in their post, and fully mobilize the government departments at all levels, so that they can really serve the agriculture and farmers. (ii) It is recommended to increase government investment, adjust the industrial structure of agriculture, and introduce cash crops suitable for the local environment according to local conditions, and help farmers to get out of the plight. (iii) It is recommended to help farmers to improve their legal awareness and strengthen their self-protection ability, and help them to understand how to defend their legal rights according to laws rather than by violent means such as blocking doors or closing roads. (iv) The rural policies of government should be clear, timely, and convenient, so that farmers can keep abreast of the dynamic changes in national policies, to help farmers timely understand their rights and obligations. In sum, ordinary second generation farmers place their hope in the government, hope the government to make reforms in the quality of work, investment assistance, legal education, rural policy and other aspects, so as to help them get out of the predicament. These measures can provide livelihood security for the majority of farmers, are conducive to alleviating family burden of ordinary second generation farmers in northwest China, so that they will not be crushed by various family matters such as raising children to

support them in old age, medical care, and children education. Besides, these can help them to put more efforts in career development, gradually change their destiny of poverty under the guidance of government, and step to the objective of building a well-off society in an all-round way.

### 4 Conclusions

The second generation farmers are weak groups in society, but also the main force of urbanization. At present, the second generation farmers in northwest of China have difficulties in employment after receiving general higher education, and vocational and technical education is not perfect on the whole. Besides, it is easy for them to become to marginal people in cities. However, returning home and business startup also face many obstacles. Selling land for money brings great hidden trouble for survival. Those second generation farmers left behind in rural areas have backward living conditions and hostile living environment, while those second generation migrant workers are drifting in urban fringes, those second generation farmers who are going to colleges are busy with various examinations such as college entrance examination, the civil service examination, to increase qualification for employment and they are concerned with their future. Therefore, it is recommended that the government should carry out reform from the aspects of quality of work, investment assistance, popularization of law education, rural policy, and people's livelihood. Through increasing the investment, policy support, and education leading measures, the government will make great efforts to improve the quality of life, to help ordinary second generation farmers get out of the survival predicament.

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