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# Employment and Transfer Status of Female Labor Force in Rural China

WANG Dong-ping\*, PENG Jian-qiang, YAN Zhen

Department of Modern Science & Technology, Agricultural University of Hebei, Baoding 071001, China

**Abstract** Official statistics are used to expatiate the general status of female labor force employment and transfer in rural China. According to the "structure" problem of female labor force transfer, it is pointed out that the overall cultural quality of rural women is relatively low, a large number of rural middle-aged women stay at home, social security system is lacked and the social service system is not perfect, which are the major factors restricting the transfer of rural female labor force. Therefore, according to the problems in employment and transfer of female labor force in rural China, countermeasures are put forward, which are ① improving cultural quality, skill and competitiveness of rural female labor force, ② perfecting labor market and social security system, ③ developing labor-intensive rural enterprises and implementing agricultural industrialization management. All these are of great significance to promote the orderly transfer of labor force, as well as the process of urbanization in China.

**Key words** Rural female labor force; Employment; Transfer; China

Since the 1980s, a large-scale transfer of rural labor force has become focus of the whole society. Transfer of rural female labor force, an important part of rural labor transfer, not only involves the self-development of rural women, but also directly affects the structural balance of China's labor force and the social stability and development. Therefore, in-depth analysis on the transfer of rural female labor force and study on the problems in transfer of rural female labor are of great significance to promote the orderly transfer of labor force, as well as the process of urbanization in China.

## 1 Employment of rural female labor force

### 1.1 High participation rate of female labor force in rural China

At present, participation rate of female labor force is a little lower than that of male labor force in rural China, but higher than that of urban population. Among the 1% population sample survey in the year 2005 in China, participation rate of labor force in urban population is 64.8%, with 73.6% participation rate of male labor force and 56.2% participation rate of female labor force. Participation rate of rural labor force is 84.9% with 91.1% male labor force and 82.1% female labor force. Compared with urban population, participation rate of female in rural areas is 8.5 and 25.9 percentage points higher than those of urban male and female, respectively. But, compared with female labor force in rural areas, participation rate of female in rural areas is 9.0 percentage points lower.

### 1.2 Low cultural quality of female employees in rural areas

In recent years, labor population quality has been improved greatly in China. But the overall pattern of low cultural quality has not changed, and cultural quality of female labor

force in rural areas is in a lower level. Table 1 indicates that female employees in rural areas with education degree of middle school and above it account for 42.6% employed population above 16 years old, and those below middle school occupy 57.4% in China in the year 2005. Compared with the urban employees, rural female employees with education degree of middle school and above it are 40.3% and 33.1% lower than urban male and female. Compared with the rural male employees, proportion of rural female with education degree of middle school and above it is 16.4 percentage points lower than that of rural male. This shows that the overall education level in China is still relatively underdeveloped, especially that some rural female can not get a good education and training, and will be difficult to adapt to the economic development in knowledge-based society in the future.

### 1.3 Distinctive age characteristics of the employment of female labor force in rural areas

Similar to the age characteristics of national labor force, female labor force in rural areas also shows the characteristics of "low at both sides and high in the middle". Table 2 indicates that among the employed rural female, age group from 16 to 24 accounts for 12.7%, age group from 25 to 49 is 61.7% and that above 50 occupies 25.6%. However, compared with urban employees, number of rural female employees after the age of 50 is 6.8 and 13.3 percentage points higher than those of urban male and female.

### 1.4 Scale increase of rural female employees

In the year 1990, female employees in rural areas are 195 million. And the number increases to 210 million and 220 million in the years 1995 and 2000, respectively, accounting for 46.6% of the rural employees and 30.3% of the national employees<sup>[1]</sup>. Moreover, the scale of employment increases sharply. From the year 1990 to 2005, average annual increase reaches 2 025 thousand female employees, an annual increase of 0.9%.

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\* Corresponding author. E-mail: wdping@hebau.edu.cn

**Table 1 Structures of education level and sex of rural and urban employees in the year 2005**

%

Education degree	Structure of education degree		Structure of sex	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Urban area				
Illiteracy	5.1	1.8	68.4	31.6
Elementary school	19.2	15.3	49.0	51.0
Junior middle school	41.5	44.8	41.5	58.5
Senior middle school	19.5	22.3	40.2	59.8
Junior college	9.8	9.9	43.3	56.7
Undergraduate course and above	4.9	5.9	39.3	60.7
Total	100.0	100.0		
Number of population	1 660 607.0	2 165 585.0		
Rural area				
Illiteracy	16.1	6.3	69.3	30.7
Elementary school	41.3	34.7	51.2	48.8
Junior middle school	38.4	50.1	40.3	59.7
Senior middle school	3.6	7.9	28.4	71.6
Junior college	0.5	0.9	33.7	66.3
Undergraduate course and above	0.1	0.1	31.3	68.7
Total	100.0	100.0		
Number of population	2 557 444.0	2 903 774.0		

Note: Data are from the 1% national population sampling survey data in 2005.

**Table 2 Age and sex structures of rural and urban employees in the year 2005**

%

Age	Rural area		Urban area	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
16 – 19	4.8	4.5	4.9	3.3
20 – 24	7.9	7.4	10.8	8.4
25 – 29	8.9	8.5	13.2	11.8
30 – 34	12.5	11.6	16.5	15.5
35 – 39	15.9	14.2	17.5	16.6
40 – 44	14.0	12.6	15.2	14.8
45 – 49	10.4	10.1	9.6	10.8
50 – 54	11.1	11.7	6.7	9.5
55 – 59	7.1	8.4	3.1	5.2
60 – 64	4.0	5.4	1.4	2.2
65 – 69	2.1	3.4	0.7	1.2
70 +	1.3	2.2	0.4	0.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Data are from the 1% national population sampling survey data in 2005.

## 2 Transfer situation of rural female labor force

### 2.1 Transfer scale and proportion of rural female labor force are increasing, but the transfer number still lags behind male labor force in rural areas

In recent years, transfer scale of rural female labor force is increasing in China. Female migrant workers have reached 22 360 thousand in the year 2000, 28 060 thousand in the year 2002, 35 500 thousand in 2004 and 36 910 thousand in 2005. Compared with rural male, proportion of migrant workers of female labor force in rural areas rises to 29.9% in the year 2002, 34.3% in the year 2003 which increases by 4.2 percentage points, and 34.6% in the year 2004 which increases by 0.3 percentage point<sup>[2]</sup>.

Though the scale and proportion of rural female labor force continue to increase, its transfer number lags far behind male

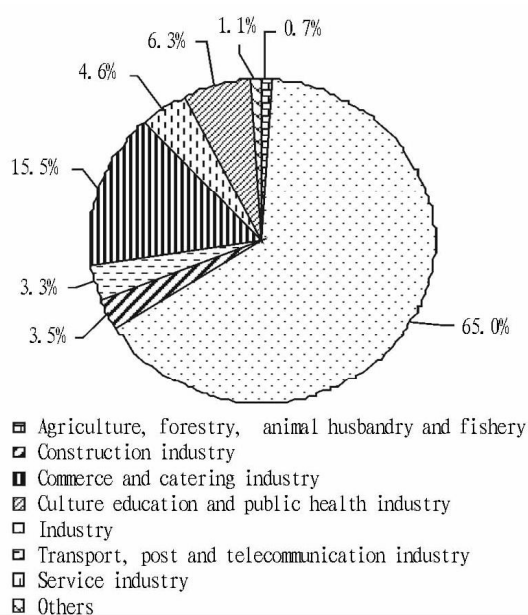
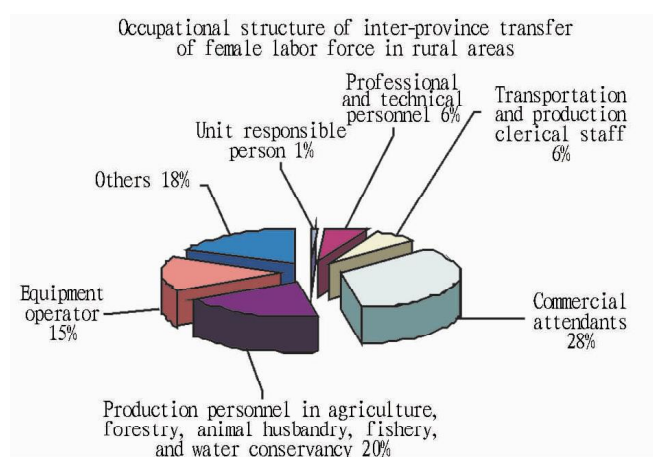
labor force in rural areas. Female migrant workers reach 28 060 thousand in the year 2002, which is 37 880 thousand population less than the male migrant workers. In the years 2004 and 2005, the number of female migrant workers are 31 600 thousand and 34 420 thousand less than rural male migrant workers, respectively. Proportion of female labor force engaged in agricultural production in rural areas is increasing from 48.5% in the year 2000 to 53.1% in the year 2004. Compared with the migrant workers, people engaged in agricultural production obtain undoubtedly low efficiency and small development. Migrant workers have not narrowed the gender division between men and women in rural areas, but have gradually changed the pattern of gender division from "men presiding over external affairs and women taking charge of internal affairs" to "men working outside and women doing farming".

**2.2 Rural female transfer is mainly concentrated in industry, commerce, catering and service** Fig. 1 illustrates that rural female labor force mainly transfers to the fields of industry, and the commerce and catering, accounting for 65.0% and 15.5% of the total female transfer, respectively. But in the construction industry, and the transport, post and telecommunication industry, rural female labor force account for a very small percentage, which are only 3.5% and 3.3%, respectively. According to the gender composition of transfer industry, transfer population of men is more than women almost in every industry apart from culture education and public health industry. Especially in the industries of construction, transport, post and telecommunication requiring strong physical strength and skills, rural male labor force takes a dominant position (Table 3). It is not difficult to find out that the reason for rural female labor force concentrated in the industry, commerce and catering, and service is that these three industries are labor-intensive industries requiring low physical strength, expertise and quality.

**Table 3 Sex distribution situation of transferred industry of rural labor force**

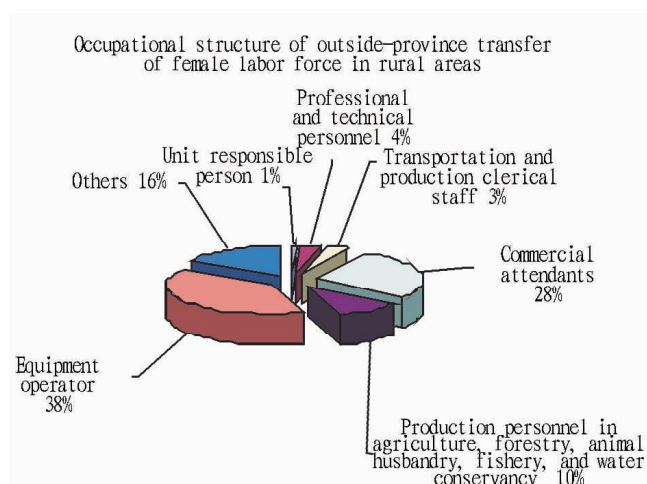
Transferred industry	Structure of industry		Structure of sex	
	Rural female	Rural male	Rural female	Rural male
Labor force in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery	0.7	0.6	43.3	56.7
Labor force in industry	65.0	52.3	46.5	53.5
Labor force in construction	3.5	14.8	14.4	85.6
Labor force in transport, post and telecommunication	3.3	7.9	22.7	77.3
Labor force in commerce and catering	15.5	12.9	45.7	54.3
Labor force in service	4.6	6.6	32.5	67.5
Labor force in culture education and public health	6.3	2.8	61.4	38.6
Others	1.1	2.1	26.7	73.3

Note: Data are from the 2005 *China Labor Statistical Yearbook*.

**Fig.1 Industries distribution of female labor force transfer in rural areas****Fig.2 Occupational structure of inter-province transfer of female labor force in rural areas in 2005**

**2.3 Occupations for rural female labor transfer are mostly business services and equipment operation requiring low skill** Table 4 indicates that among the inter-provincial transferred female labor force, equipment operator accounts for 15.4%; and commercial attendant occupies 34.9%. Among the female labor force transferring to outside provinces, these two occupations are 39.2% and 28.2%, respectively.

Compared with the male migrant workers in rural areas,

**Fig.3 Occupational structure of outside-province transfer of female labor force in 2005**

proportion of female migrant workers undertaking unit responsible person and professional and technical personnel is very small. In the inter-province transfer of rural female labor force, unit responsible person and professional and technical personnel account for 0.8% and 5.9%, respectively, which are 1.9 and 3.0 percentage points lower than the female labor force. In the outside-province transfer of rural female labor force, proportions of the two occupations mentioned above are 1.2 and 3.6 percentage points lower than the male labor force. Thus, occupational gender segregation is very obvious among the rural migrant workers. Especially in the labor-intensive industries, migrant rural female can find better job than male, but the works at management layer with high income mostly employ rural male. Migrant female worker is easy to find jobs with low income and long working hours, which do not require technique.

**2.4 Transfer of female labor force is mainly young women with the coexistence of shortage and surplus of female labor** In the two age groups of 15 – 19 and 20 – 24, female migrant workers in rural areas have the largest number, which account for 9.5% and 12.5% of the total rural labor force and are 3.71 and 0.2 percentage points higher than the migrant male workers at the same age, respectively. After the age of 25, number of rural women going outside is decreasing. After the age of 45, the proportion is less than 1% of the total migrants<sup>[4]</sup>. Table 5 indicates that compared with rural male migrants, the number of female migrants is relatively more before the age of 25, and both of them shows an upward trend. After the age of 25, the number of women going out declines rapidly

while men continue to rise and begin to decline after the age of 30. Gap between the number of male and female migrant workers is widening after 30 (Fig. 4). Thus, it can be seen that the transferred rural labor force is mostly young adults, and rural women are particularly young. Taking the age of 25 as a turning point, difficulty in transfer is increasing with the growth of age. Research result shows the migrant workers under the age of 25, especially female migrant workers, are in great demand with the gaps of 6 870 thousand men and 10 020 thousand women<sup>[3]</sup>. It can be said that "Labor Shortage" takes place

under the situation of general difficult transfer of rural labor force, mainly lacking the female migrant workers under the age of 25. And the older rural labor force is difficult to be transferred, especially the older female labor force in rural areas. Among the rural labor force in the year 2000, female labor force under the age of 25 is less than one-tenth, that above the age of 25 accounts for 38.72%, that above the age of 40, a difficult employment age, is about a half. This indicates that the structural problems of the transfer of rural labor have already emerged.

**Table 4 Occupational structure of rural labor force transfer with sexual difference in 2005**

%

Occupational structure	Inter-province		Outside-province	
	Rural female	Rural male	Rural female	Rural male
Unit responsible person	0.8	2.7	0.5	1.7
Professional and technical personnel	5.9	8.9	3.5	7.1
Transportation and production clerical staff	5.6	6.4	3.1	3.6
Commercial attendants	34.9	24.9	28.2	20.7
Production personnel in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, fishery, and water conservancy	19.5	13.7	9.6	5.2
Equipment operator	15.4	22.9	39.2	44.9
Others	17.9	20.5	15.9	16.8

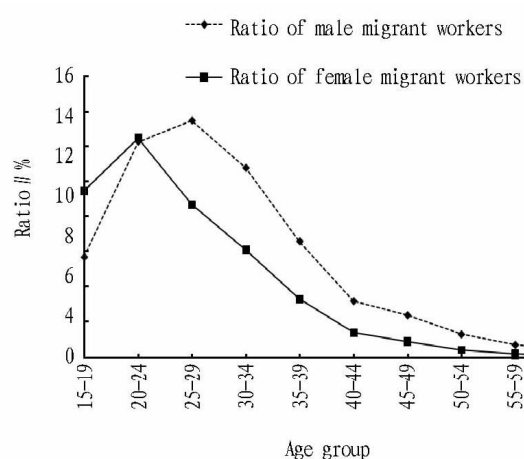
Note: Data are from the 2005 *China Labor Statistical Yearbook*.

**Table 5 Structure of age and sex of people working out and doing business in the year 2005**

%

Age group	Structure of age		Structure of sex	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
15–19	9.5	5.7	62.2	37.8
20–24	12.5	12.3	50.4	49.6
25–29	8.7	13.4	39.4	60.6
30–34	6.1	10.8	35.9	64.1
35–39	3.3	6.6	33.3	66.7
40–44	1.4	3.2	29.6	70.4
45–49	0.9	2.4	28.3	71.7
50–54	0.4	1.3	25.4	74.6
55–59	0.2	0.7	23.7	76.3
60–64	0.1	0.4	19.7	71.3
Total	43.1	56.9		

Note: Data are from the 2000 *Population Census of China*.



**Fig. 4 Age structures of female and male migrant workers**

### 3 Problems existing in rural female labor force

**3.1 The overall cultural quality of the female labor force in rural areas can not meet the needs of transfer** Number of female employment in rural areas with the education level of primary school and below it accounts for 57.4%, those with the education levels of junior middle school and senior middle school are 38.4% and 4.2%, respectively. Rural female labor force with low cultural quality usually only engages in traditional work, and can not competent to the task of high-tech industry, which greatly limits the horizontal movement of the rural female labor force. At the same time, rural female labor force has low cultural quality, causing their narrow-minded thinking and understanding, which is neither conducive to accept new things, nor to master the advanced skills.

**3.2 A large number of elderly women remain in rural areas and is not conducive to the long-term development of rural economy** Women account for about one-third of the rural migrant workers<sup>[4]</sup>, and men even account for more. In the groups of migrant workers, young male and young unmarried female are the main forces with 33.3 percent of farmers below the age of 30, and 65 percent of farmers below the age of 40. Among the migrant workers below the age of 30, the proportion of female migrant workers is as high as 65%<sup>[5]</sup>. That is to say, rural female engaged in agricultural production is more than male migrant workers; and most of them are married women over the age of 30. Cultural quality of rural female is relatively low with poor ability to accept the knowledge about poverty alleviation, and they lack innovative spirit and skills. Therefore, they cultivate the land by simple experience, and can only be engaged in traditional transport, wholesale and retail trade, low-level services and simple craft, and are difficult to access a higher level of new industry. This will hinder the popularization

of agricultural scientific knowledge, the promotion of improved varieties, soil improvement, adoption of new technologies, and the adjustment of agricultural industrial structure.

### **3.3 Lack of social security system and imperfect social service system are not conducive to the transfer of rural female labor force**

Due to the long-term planned economic system, an obvious dual structure is shown in the social security system of China. At present, China has basically established a social security system with social security as the core, and the minimum standard of living as the basis. But in the vast rural areas, social security system has long been ignored and is basically not established, such as pension, health care, children's schooling and housing, and other actual problems that can not be resolved. Land has become the only unemployment insurance and pension insurance for rural labor force. Once rural surplus labor forces leave the land, they would have no security. If losing the jobs, they would be difficult to guarantee their basic living. Therefore, starting from the maximum overall interests, the majority of men in rural areas select working outside and women stay at home, so that migrant workers can have a place of refuge when losing their jobs. Besides, due to the affects of traditional attitudes and the restriction of women's own physiological characteristics, rural women assume the responsibility of taking care of the elder and rearing children after marriage. But in China, rural social service system is not perfect, having no supporting measures to solve the problems of rural left-behind children and elder, which greatly reduces the opportunities for rural female migrant workers to work outside. Besides, rural network information service is imperfect with the characteristics of poor information flow and no route. Thus, rural female who works, or wants to work, outside is in a very awkward position.

## **4 Countermeasures for the female labor force transfer in rural areas in China at present**

Transfer of rural labor force is a complex social system project. Transfer of rural female labor force in China should start from the actual situation of China, adhering to the principle of "moderate transfer, institutional optimization, rational distribution, and efficiency complement". A multi-level, multi-channel, multi-form, and all-round economic space of rural female labor force transfer in China should be expanded.

### **4.1 Advancing the cultural quality and skill of rural female labor force; enhancing their competitiveness**

First of all, governments at all levels should focus on the long-term development, reduce learning costs as much as possible, improve the education level of rural female, and continue to promote the in-depth and sustained development of nine-year compulsory education in rural areas. At the same time, governments should enhance publicity and education, and completely solve the uneducated problems of rural children, especially girls. Secondly, strengthen the vocational and technical education in rural areas, so that teenagers leaving school after junior middle school can accept formal vocational and technical education in rural areas. And vigorously cultivate the vocational

skills of educatee in secondary and tertiary industries. Education of rural women should have pertinency with practical professional skill training as the core. Training intensity of rural adult female should be strengthened, especially the vocational training suitable for their own characteristics. Vigorously improve the overall quality and skill level, in order to change these women from simple labor force to skilled personnel and to strengthen their competitiveness in finding a job. Thirdly, strengthen the concept and improve the subjective consciousness of rural female, so as to make them become new and enterprising women with self-esteem, self-reliance and independence. At the same time, increase the knowledge dissemination of migrant workers to let female labor force in rural areas grasp the knowledge of working outside, such as knowing relevant laws and regulations and matters needing attention, and knowing how to protect their own interests and their own safety, which provide skills and knowledge reserve for female labor force in rural areas. Thus, it not only reduces the pressure on younger age female labor force, but also helps to develop their skills, and enhances their competitiveness, in order to meet the developmental needs of secondary and tertiary industries in rural areas and to promote the rapid development of rural economy.

### **4.2 Improving the labor market; perfecting social security system**

Create social environment suitable for the transfer of rural female labor force; offer service and guide for the transfer of rural female labor force; and ensure the orderly transfer of rural female labor force. Firstly, eliminate the various institutional barriers for the free flow of labor force under the dual social structure; establish a unified urban and rural labor market with gender equality; further improve the laws and regulations protecting the work rights of women; strengthen the supervision and management of the labor market; protect women's rights according to the law; and eliminate the gender discrimination in employment of labor force. Secondly, governments at all levels, as well as various labor intermediaries, should support the rural female labor force with a clear objective. In particular, governments at all levels should establish specialized agencies responsible for information services, organization and guidance and legal rights protection, in order to offer information platform for the transfer of female labor force, to realize the effective connection of market and rural female labor force, to promote the rational and orderly flow of labor force, to change the blind and disorder state of the transfer in the past, and to reduce their risks and costs of going outside. Thirdly, relevant departments in follow-in areas must offer security services for the migrant female workers, solve the actual problems in their children's schooling, health examination and rights safeguard, and guarantee the smooth flow and transfer of rural female labor force.

### **4.3 Developing labor-intensive rural enterprises; implementing agricultural industrialization**

Native soil consciousness is very strong among peasants in China due to profound socio-economic reasons. Moreover, rural women have to bear heavy housework. Therefore, township enterprises with characteristics of "leaving the farmland but not one's hometown; shifting from farming to other trades within the rural area" are more easily accepted by rural women. Based on

this situation, according to the characteristics of abundant surplus labor force and low quality and low labor costs of rural women, we should make full use of rural resources, focus on food processing industry, feed processing industry, means of production, energy industry and traditional handicraft production, promote the degree of association between rural industry and agriculture, and provide more opportunities for in situ transfer of rural female. In addition, after implementing agricultural industrialization, integration of agricultural production, processing and marketing can be realized; a large number of population under disguised unemployment in rural areas can be absorbed by the new job vacancies. Meanwhile, agricultural industrialization stimulates the development of social service of agriculture, which is an important form suitable for the women in rural areas. Therefore, we should rational distribute the rural labor force, gradually guide the female labor force engaged in industries suited to their qualities and skills, fully mobilize the enthusiasm of labor force, and separate them from single farming, which not only promote the in situ transfer of

rural female labor force, but also accelerate the pace of agricultural modernization.

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中国农村女性劳动力就业及转移状况研究

王东平,彭建强,闫震 (河北农业大学现代科技学院,河北保定 071001)

**摘要** 利用官方的统计数据,分析了农村女性劳动力就业和转移的总体状况。其中,农村女性劳动力就业状况主要表现为农村女性人口劳动力参与率较高、农村女性就业人员文化素质普遍较低、农村女性劳动力就业的年龄段特征明显以及农村女性劳动力就业规模递增;农村女性劳动力转移状况主要表现为农村女性劳动力转移规模和比例不断加大、农村女性劳动力转移行业主要集中于工业、商业、饮食和服务业等行业、农村女性劳动力转移职业多为低技能的商业服务和设备操作以及农村女性劳动力转移以年轻女性为主,女性劳动力短缺与过剩并存。根据农村女性劳动力就业及转移过程中的"结构性"问题,分析指出,农村女性整体文化素质偏低、农村中老年妇女大量滞留农业、社会保障制度缺失和社会化服务体系不健全等因素是制约农村女性劳动力就业和转移的主要原因。因此,针对农村女性劳动力就业及转移过程中存在的问题,提出了相应的对策建议:①提高农村女性劳动力文化素质和技能,增强就业竞争力;②完善劳动力市场,健全社会保障制度;③发展劳动密集型乡镇企业,实施农业产业化经营,对促进我国劳动力有序转移和推进城市化进程具有重要意义。

**关键词** 农村女性劳动力;就业;转移

(From page 3)

中国农村居民家庭人均纯收入的聚类分析

官琳琳,门可佩 (南京信息工程大学数理学院,江苏南京 210044)

**摘要** 简述了中国农村的现状。农村大部分地区在耕作方式上仍采用传统的方法,机械化使用率和劳动生产率较低;作物品种少有创新,作物质量不佳,出口受到严重限制,农民收入偏低。介绍了聚类分析的原理:根据一批样品的多个观测指标,具体找出一些能够度量样品(或指标)之间相似程度的统计量,并以此作为划分类型的依据,将一些相似程度较大的样品(或指标)聚合为一类,直到把所有的样品(或指标)聚合完毕。根据相关统计资料,采用聚类分析方法,对中国各地区农村居民家庭人均纯收入进行了聚类分析。结果表明,中国31个省(市、自治区)可划分为4类。第1类为北京、上海。此类地区综合经济实力处于全国前列,因而农村居民家庭人均纯收入也位于前列。第2类为天津、江苏、浙江。其中,天津市坚持沿海都市型农业发展方向,积极推进农业产业结构战略性调整,从而大大提高了农民收入;江苏是中国著名的经济大省,具有优越的农业生产条件;浙江是综合性的农业高产区域,以多种经营和精耕细作见长,因此,农村居民人均纯收入位居全国前列。第3类为辽宁、山东、福建、广东。4省均位于中国东部沿海地区,具有丰富的海洋资源,适宜于农作物生长,农业发展较快,农村居民生活水平相对较高。其他各省(区)归于第4类,由于受地理位置和气候条件的影响,农业产值和农村居民家庭人均纯收入均较低。

**关键词** 农村居民家庭;人均纯收入;聚类分析