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The New Generation of Migrant Workers in Urban China

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Abstract:

After three decades of contributing to the Chinese economy and society, the first generation of rural-to-urban migrant workers is being replaced by a new generation in the urban labor market. This study aims to provide a more accurate description of the nature of the cohort, and thus promote a better understanding of this group. Compared to the image of migrant workers depicted in previous research, this study presents them in a different light. Getting urban jobs for today's generation migrant workers means embracing urban life rather than simply earning a living, which is the major purpose of migration. This new breed of migrant workers consist of younger, better-educated individuals who are also less connected to the countryside and eager to pursue an urban dream.

This study draws on original data, based on interviews with migrant workers, employers, managers, and government officials. It compares the living and working conditions, as well as aspirations, of the previous and present generations of migrant labor in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong province. The difficult working conditions of rural migrant workers are caused by a long-standing rural-urban divide, institutional barriers, and market forces. Investments in rural human capital development, in addition to institutional reforms, are needed to address their concerns.

Keywords: China, urban labour market, rural-to-urban migrant workers, first generation and new generation

The New Generation of Migrant Workers in Urban China

Introduction

China's rapid city-industry growth since the country's opening up to reforms in late 1970s has been matched by an increase in urban population, that is, from 172 million in 1978 to 577 million in 2006 (Lu et al. 2010), and an expansion of the urban industrial mix (Eng 1997; Wu et al. 2007). Among other factors, rural-to-urban migrant workers (*nongmin gong*, hereafter referred to as 'migrant workers') have contributed enormously to economic development, urbanization, rural poverty reduction, and an increase in the standard of living (Meng et al. 2010; Murphy 2002; Yao 2000).

During the period 1978-97, migrant workers contributed two out of the country's 9.4 percent annual GDP growth (Cai and Wang 1999). In 2009 "Chinese workers" emerged runner-up for *Time* magazine's "Person of the Year" because these "tens of millions of workers who have left their homes, and often their families, to find work in the factories" secured China the title of the world's fastest-growing major economy, and helped stabilize international economic order during the global financial crisis (Ramzy 2009). In 2009 this sector comprised approximately 145.3 million outgoing migrant workers (*waichu nongmingong*),¹ nearly 20 percent of whom migrated with their entire families; 62.5 percent of them worked in economically advanced coastal provinces (NBSC 2010a). Internal migration continues to grow steadily and is projected to reach 350 million by 2025 (MGI 2009).

China has benefited from the demographic dividend brought about by a large working-age population, combined with a declining youth dependency rate. But the country now faces a rapidly ageing population due to the low fertility rate resulting from the One Child Policy of the government. First-generation migrant workers are stepping down from the urban labor market due to their decreasing working capacity. Simultaneously, a new and younger generation of migrant workers are taking their place, embarking on "urban adventures," exhibiting new attitudes and approaches to urban life, and posing new challenges to rural-urban governance. The new generation of migrant workers is officially defined as those who were born from 1980 onwards and are currently primarily engaged in or looking for non-agricultural urban employment. Accounting for approximately 62 percent of the outgoing

¹ "Outgoing migrant workers" is defined as those who work and live outside their home villages. Local migrant workers (*bendi nongmingong*), estimated at 85 million in 2009, work in nearby towns but live in their home villages.

migrant workers in 2009, translating to 89 million,² the new generation of migrant workers has been growing rapidly (see Table 1), increasing by approximately nine million per year (NBSC 2011).

Table 1: Migrant Workers by Age, 2009

Age	Percentage
16—25	41.6
26—30	20.0
31—40	22.3
41—50	11.9
51 and above	4.2

Source: NBSC (2010a)

This phenomenon prompts the present study's concerns about both the current and future situations of migrant workers, in particular the similarities and differences between the past and present generations, the new-generation migrant workers' viewpoints on—and their survival experience and strategy in—urban society, and the manner in which this new generation is shaped by Chinese-style urban development and capitalism. The categorization of migrant workers into first and new generation has three major implications: first, an intergenerational demographic relationship formed by consanguinity and age difference (i.e., parents and children); second, an intergenerational replacement in the evolving urban labor market for migrant workers; and third, an intergenerational gap in the comprehension of, and ability to cope with, continued and radical change (Mead 1970).³ The last implies that social events and changes can construct a generation different from the previous one, and classical studies on subjects such as the children of the Great Depression and the Chinese youth in the Cultural Revolution exemplify this point (Elder, 1974; Zhou and Hou 1999).

To shed light on the growing discourse about new-generation migrant workers, we carried out research in the cities of Guangzhou, Foshan, and Zhaoqing in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong province, one of the primary destinations of migrants in the past three decades. These locations are not only currently important but also have future significance in the development of south China as an economic heartland. Guangzhou, the provincial capital, plays a central role in the provincial development of the high-tech and service sectors. Foshan is the third largest city in the province. Currently manufacturing-dominant, its plans are to diversify its economy. Zhaoqing is a medium-size city that relies on manufacturing and agricultural sectors.

² If the group constituting local migrant workers is also included, the population of the new generation reached nearly 100 million in 2009.

³ This paper does not intend to over-generalize the two generations but to provide some comparisons in a research context. Therefore, it does not imply that a migrant must have all the same characteristics as the others in the same generation.

Recently, the Guangdong government announced the unification of these three cities (PGGZF 2010). These cities are now in the process of being incorporated into a unified economic and social system, replacing the autonomous, city-based administration by 2020. This will certainly have some important implications on migrant employment, mobility, and welfare because the new-generation migrants are one of the influencing factors in this even more intensive process of urban sprawl and urbanization. An examination of this group will provide much insight into how they interact with regional socio-economic changes.

First-hand qualitative data were collected between August 2011 and May 2012 from three categories: first, semi-structured interviews with 98 migrant workers (18 and 80 from the first and new generations, respectively); second, open-ended interviews with employers (10), managers (10), and government officials (10); and third, observations in small businesses, factories, and enterprises of different types and different sizes (a total of 15) that employed migrant workers. We asked workers a series of questions related to their origins, families, and life and/or work experiences in both countryside and city. Employers, managers, and government personnel were asked about how they perceived, compared, and managed the two generations in their areas. The first and second categories adopted a combination of purposeful, random, and snowball approaches. Initially, the interviewees were contacted through the authors' (indirect) personal connections. A first-round interviewee, if evaluated to be a good source, was then asked to refer one or two additional interviewees (such as friends, relatives, workmates, or colleagues). In some cases, interviewees suggested a diversified group of further interview candidates. When selecting observation sites, we tried to cover a range of types of employers, including those from small to large as well as private, state-, and foreign-owned enterprises. These methods of data collection were used to provide, given the available resources, a wider coverage and a more in-depth inquiry than would have been possible with the initial contact base.

This paper aims to contribute to a timely understanding of migrant labor by probing into some aspects of the research problems. These include the fading predeterminist social attitudes among the new-generation migrant workers and their living and working conditions in cities. The next two sections introduce the research background and present the study's research framework, methods, and data. The fourth section analyses the present generation of migrant workers in a comparative framework to determine how they differ from the first generation of migrant workers and what mainly accounts for the generational differences. The section also critically analyses various secondary sources to complement analysis of original data. The next two sections focus more specifically on comparing the two generations' perceptions and understanding of urban life and society, and the challenges

confronting them in view of the fatalistic attitude of other migrant workers. The final section discusses the recent changes and development of migration policy and provides some concluding remarks.

Literature Review and Analytical Framework

The most fruitful research outcomes on the first-generation migrant workers are concentrated in two areas: first, migrant workers' social, economic, and political status (Guo and Cheng 2010; Myerson et al., 2010; Pun 1999); second, the mechanism and consequences of the *hukou* (household registration) system, which has institutionally discriminated against rural residents since 1958 (Bao 2010; Chan 2009 2010b; Solinger 1999; Yang et al. 2010; Zhang, 2010a; Zhao and Howden-Chapman 2010). Every Chinese citizen is assigned either a rural or urban *hukou* status. Rural *hukou* holders were not allowed to migrate to cities before the advent of reforms in China. After the reforms, they were allowed to migrate but still had difficulty accessing the same benefits and welfare enjoyed by urban *hukou* holders.

A series of news and events concerning these new-generation migrant workers recently drew worldwide attention. In January 2010 the Chinese government issued its first national policy for the year, which emphasized the importance of “solving the problems for the new generation of migrant workers,” who were expected to become the predominant source of industrial workers in this decade (CCG 2010). The motivation behind this policy is clear: because China's structural upgrade of its economy—from the world's factory to a powerhouse of innovation—is slow and strenuous, maintaining its competitiveness in labour-intensive production is more important than ever, especially given the challenges from other emerging economies such as India and Vietnam.

Later in 2010 Premier Wen Jiabao enjoined “[everyone in] government and society shall treat young migrant workers as their relatives’ (Li, 2010a). This warm-hearted appeal came on the heels of a string of suicides among young migrant workers in 2010. On 5 May, Chinese Youth Day, three migrant workers under 20 years committed suicide together by poisoning themselves, because their jobs were too demanding and their wages insufficient (Sun 2010). In early 2010 a total of 13 migrant workers aged 19 to 25 years and working at Foxconn—the world's largest contract electronics manufacturer for companies such as Apple, Samsung, and Nokia—attempted suicide by jumping off buildings and cutting their wrists. These incidents took place at the company's two campuses, where more than 300,000 employees were accommodated in Shenzhen of south China (Barboza 2010). The incidents resulted in 10 deaths and three severe injuries, as well as a massive public crisis and debate (Chan and

Pun 2010).⁴ Some news reports attributed these tragedies to underpaid, high-pressure, and repetitive assembly line work, which involved standing for approximately 12 hours a day, six days a week. They also point to workers having to endure phlegmatic and indifferent interpersonal relationships in a workplace that actively expunges individuality through a semi-military management style (Li 2010d; Liu 2010b). The first of the suicidal workers, for example, did not know the name of any of his nine flatmates after living together for seven months. Three days before he took his life, he was seen downing a large quantity of pills, but not one of his workmates asked him why (Xie 2010).⁵

Workplace suicides have also prompted an examination of China's suicide rate. It has been suggested that the number of deaths at the worksite was not unusually high compared with China's estimated overall suicide rate of 15 per 100,000 people per year (Hille 2010). However, this problem warrants deeper and wider investigation because of the impact of socio-economic changes, including migration, urbanization, and industrialization, on suicidal behaviour (Lester 2001), particularly during China's rapid social changes (Zhang et al. 2010). On one hand, high prevalence of depressive and other symptoms of psychological disorders has been found among migrant workers, and some young migrants have manifested a propensity for self-destructive behavior to give vent to their grievance, despair, and dismay at work (Mou et al. 2011). Such behavior is in stark contrast to the generally mild-mannered social attitude and introverted personality manifested by many older migrant workers we interviewed. On the other hand, it is not clear whether suicide was less prevalent among first-generation migrant workers, although recent studies suggest that suicide rates in both rural and urban areas have decreased (Yip et al. 2005). Findings also show that young migrants may have a lower level of suicide morbidity than non-migrants in the countryside (Dai et al. 2011). If these suicides are at least in part attributable to work places, we may wonder why similar cluster suicides did not occur in the previous two decades, during which a similar operational and organizational form of production was in place, and work and pay conditions were similar or worse than they are today.⁶

Although direct investigation of these suicides has been hampered by the unavailability of further information, an examination of the broader socio-economic reasons beyond an individual's psychological problem should provide further clues (Stack 2000a 2000b). In other words, worker suicide should not simply be regarded as an individual or management issue (Li and Tian 2011). Indeed, the suicides seemed to emerge as symptoms of a broader malaise among new-generation migrant

⁴ See "What do China's workers want?" (<http://roomfordebate.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/13/what-do-chinas-workers-want/>)

⁵ But this may be only the tip of the iceberg due to the news blackout by Foxconn and media censorship.

⁶ Foxconn's harsh labor conditions have been reported much earlier than 2010.

workers, who are generally less tolerant of low pay and poor conditions, and more willing and able to fight for their rights than their parents, as demonstrated by a number of collective labor actions since 2010 (Béja 2011; CLB 2011). Some scholars argue that this labor struggle is a form of incipient class action in a specific context (Pun and Yi 2011).

We looked further into relevant literature on the generational changes among migrants in China as well as in other countries to build an analytical framework. The earliest published study in Chinese reveals that many new-generation migrants were confused about their self-identity, and unsure whether they were still part of the peasant class (Wang 2001). This emerging psychological phenomenon was not apparent among first-generation migrants, who made up the majority of migrant workers in the early 2000s. More recent studies have shed further light on the new-generation migrants' employment patterns and their desire for equity (Du and Zhang 2008; Gao 2008; Ge et al. 2009; Liu 2007; Wu and Xie 2006).

Studies have shown that the two generations of migrant workers have different life experiences, cultures, and social and political attitudes (Liu and Xu 2007; Wang 2010). For instance, in contrast to the first generation, who tended to return to their home villages to marry someone with whom they shared the same rural background (Zhang, 2009), a significant proportion of the new-generation migrants are willing to marry urban residents (Xu 2006). However, overall Chinese literature on the new generation of migrants is inadequate because many studies usually examine the new generation at the macro or aggregate level. Some studies, using the traditional analytical framework of internal migration, treat the group as a simple, static continuation of the previous generation. Other studies see the new-generation migrants as an almost totally new group without many connections to the first generation. But our observations demonstrate that either extreme is too narrow to accurately present the whole picture about migrant workers.

In view of these gaps, including the lack of research findings in English on the new-generation migrant workers and their perceptions, this study seeks to examine the new generation in light of the changes in China's internal migration and urban labor market. Our study takes a different stance from past research and starts from the premise that while the two migrant worker generations represent a continuum, they are also markedly different. Therefore, we seek to elucidate these similarities and differences, and analyze the reasons behind them by building upon a dynamic analytical framework that has been used to study the assimilation of international immigrants such as from Europe to the United States (Thomas and Znaniecki 1996).

Assimilation, sometimes known as incorporation or integration, is defined as the process by which the characteristics of members of (im)migrant groups and host societies come to resemble one another (Brown and Bean 2006). There are four steps in the assimilation process, namely, contact, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation (Alba and Nee 1997). The four core aspects of immigrant assimilation, as summarised in Waters and Jiménez (2005) are socio-economic status (e.g., educational and occupational attainments), spatial concentration (e.g., residential patterns), language ability (i.e., to speak local language/dialect), and intermarriage (e.g. between races and social groups). The study mainly focuses on the generational changes in migrant workers' socio-economic status.

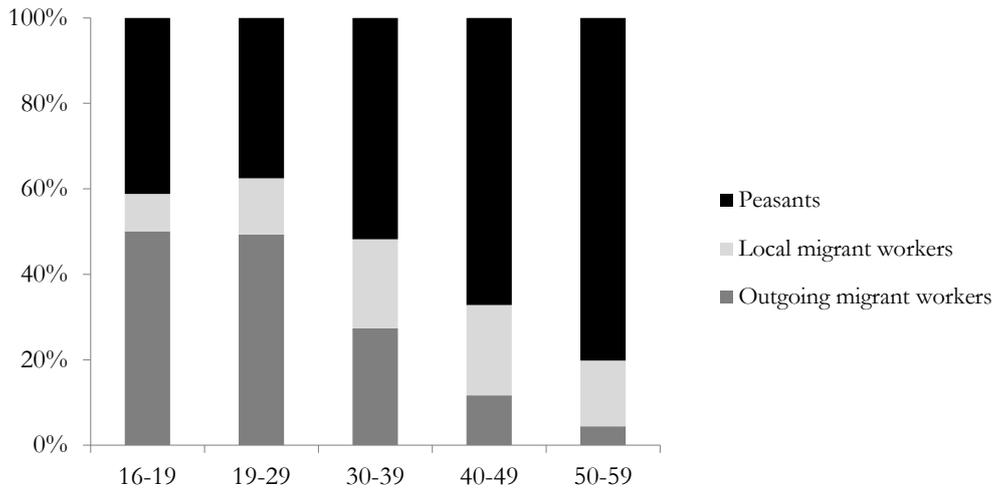
Although the scenarios are different between international and domestic migrations, this analytical framework is suitable for examining migrant workers' experiences in urban China, considering the stark economic, social, and cultural contrasts between rural and urban areas that migrant workers encounter as "outsiders" (Fan 2002). For example, the declining economic returns to education among migrants signal blocked economic assimilation for the first-generation migrant workers (Zhang and Meng 2007). In sum, a massive rural-urban integration process had not taken place in the 1990s.

Therefore, one emerging question is whether the new-generation migrant workers can assimilate into receiving cities. Some studies argue that immigrant assimilation is a spontaneous and often unintended process in the course of interaction between majority and minority groups (Clark 2003). In addition, certain factors block or slow down assimilation. Our findings in the next section, however, demonstrate that the new generation's assimilation into urban China is a relatively well-defined, proactive, and deliberate process.

China's Changing Pattern of Labor Migration

On one end of the spectrum, interviews with migrants revealed that the stagnant increase in agricultural income and the consistently widening rural-urban gap are still the driving forces of migration. This is consistent with official statistics showing that working in non-agricultural sectors is still an important occupational choice for rural labor force (see Figure 1). Yet, economic incentives today are not always the most important reason why new-generation migrants move to the cities.

Figure 1: Primary Occupation of Rural *hukou* Labour Force at Ages 16—59, 2010



Source: NBSC (2011)

The first-generation migrant workers rarely considered settling down permanently due to urban discrimination, personal incapacity, maladjustment to urban life, and inherent cultural ties to their hometown and farmlands. But many new-generation migrants were either born or grew up in towns and cities, have better education and occupational training than their parents, know little about life in the countryside, and more importantly, no longer burdened by the pressure to lift their families out of poverty. Rural cultures and traditions, such as early marriage and dying in one's birthplace, no longer constrain the behaviour and movements of new-generation migrant workers. Instead, in their aspiration for a better life, they expect to assimilate themselves into urban China.

Although the first generation's assimilation into urban China was minimal and largely blocked, they paved the way for their children's assimilation by investing in social capital. The new generation seeks to break away from old forms and rules imposed on migrant workers through a socio-economic restructuring that shaped the new generation's different pattern of labor migration.

First, the changes in values and behavioral patterns induced by the market economy have spelled the difference. In the post-reform era, where upward social mobility is desirable, rural parents hope their children will "walk out" of the rural area (Kipnis 2001; Kong, 2010). We found that members of the first generation have generally accepted the importance of education because of their experiences in the city, which showed, among others, the wage differentials between better-educated urban residents and themselves. This propelled many of them to invest in their children's education. Child-centeredness has long been a traditional family value, and parents' hopes were further intensified in the context of the national birth control policy (Fong 2004). Growing up in this atmosphere, the desire to shake off "boorishness" and to become a part of the urban class—which is not regarded as a betrayal

of rural connection but an honorable achievement—is strong and widely spread among the new-generation.

Second, the changes have cultivated the new generation's intense desire for better educational attainments, stronger desires for social mobility, and emerging quests for gender equality. Based on official data, 26 percent of the new-generation migrant workers have completed senior high school or higher; nearly one-third of those aged 21 to 25 did so (NBSC 2010a).⁷ These proportions are significantly higher than those of migrant workers as a whole (13 percent) and of the total rural *hukou* labor force (10 percent) (NBSC 2008). In addition, 36 percent of new-generation migrant workers attended occupational training, which is 14 percent higher compared to the first generation (Wu 2009).

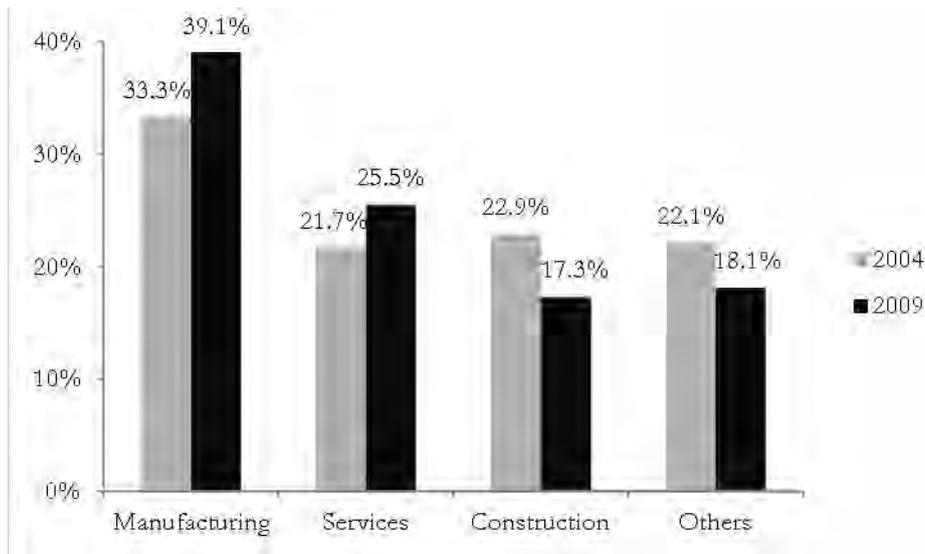
Higher female participation rate in labor migration is fostered. Unlike the first-generation workers, who were dominated by male migrant workers (73 percent), female migrant workers made up a significantly higher proportion of the new generation (41 percent). In addition, 30 percent of new-generation workers were married (NBSC 2011) in contrast to 68 to 80 percent of migrant workers who were married in 2003 and 2004 (Gao 2006; ROCCG 2006). These figures highlight another difference between the two generations—that is, the first generation migrant workers usually had to juggle work and family commitments (Pun 2005), which was not quite case with the new-generation workers.

Lastly, the new generation usually became urban workers immediately after graduation from school. The vast majority of migrants interviewed for this study do not have substantial farming skills as did the first-generation migrants. Some of those who migrated with their parents in their childhood are actually much more familiar with cities than the countryside. They have no past memories of the peasant life and undaunted by expectations of returning to their villages or remaining in cities (Hong 2011).

The increasing proportions of migrant workers in certain industries (such as manufacturing and various urban services) reflects a changing attitude to employment whereby the new-generation migrants strive to obtain better labor conditions than their predecessors. These industries provide comparatively better work and pay conditions than some of the sectors where migrant workers have traditionally been concentrated, such as construction (see Figure 2 and Table 2). The new generation has also shown greater eagerness to work in the eastern region, which provides more diverse occupational choices and lifestyles than the inland region (NBSC 2011).

⁷ Another survey, mostly on skilled workers in formal enterprise employment, suggests that 67.2 percent of new-generation migrant workers finished senior high school and above, 18 percent higher than the first generation. See ACFTU (2011).

Figure 2: Employment of Migrant Workers, 2004 and 2009



Sources: ROCCG (2006); NBSC (2010a)

Table 2: Employment of Two Generations of Migrant Workers by Industry, 2009

Employment industry	All	First generation	New generation
Manufacturing	39.1	31.5	44.4
Construction	17.3	27.8	9.8
Transportation, logistics and post	5.9	7.1	5.0
Wholesale and retail	7.8	6.9	8.4
Guest house and catering	7.8	5.9	9.2
Service to residents and other services	11.8	11.0	12.4
Others	10.3	9.8	10.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: NBSC (2011)

With a stronger desire to stay in cities, a better skill set and/or less family burdens, new-generation migrant workers behave more aggressively in the urban labor market. They actively seek better living and working environments, more secure employment, and higher remuneration. Years ago, whether a factory was located in a remote suburb or a city centre did not matter to a migrant worker. But now, as young migrants indicated in our interviews, they are less likely to choose remote locations where services are limited. An employer is less attractive if after-work life is perceived as boring, or if it is located far away from entertainment and shopping centers and similar establishments. To attract and retain young workers, many enterprises provide, in addition to better pay, free meals, accommodation, clinics, cybercafés, theaters, and sports facilities, return tickets during the Chinese New Year, annual recreational trips, and even kindergarten services. All of these, according to several managers

interviewed, were unimaginable only a few years ago.⁸ Despite these findings, in some factories as many as 70 percent of new-generation migrant workers resigned within a year, resulting in many vacancies and factories' production capacity remaining unfilled.

The First Generation's Urban Experience

Floating between the countryside and the city has been described as “an endless road” (Bao 2010). First-generation migrant workers had more or less accepted this fate as their inevitable destiny. In practice, this meant that cities were never their final destinations. First-generation migrant workers mostly just put up with discrimination, violations, and disrespect in cities, and expressed a low view of equality (Li and Tian 2010). Our interviews supported this assertion. Mr. A, a 40-year-old migrant who started working in Guangdong province in 1994 and who still worked in the city at the time of interview, specifically in a car repair workshop, recalled his earlier city experience:

For me, being a migrant worker was my fate. Our family was impoverished, so I had no choice but to leave home in Sichuan province after working on the farm for some years... At that time, I did not have the money to register for a temporary resident permit;⁹ and so I was detained by police officials several times and had to bribe them to escape... I worked many jobs and experienced everything you can imagine—I worked extra shifts for years without overtime pay, had my wages delayed and unpaid, endured violence, robberies, and break-ins in the urban villages where I lived, was restrained by my employer, who suspected that I would expose his illegal business, and suffered many work-related injuries and harms. I complained to authorities several times, but this mostly did not work. I then realized that no one cared about me in the city, or maybe they were too busy to care about every migrant at all.

His workmate, Mr. B, was a 38-year-old from Shaanxi province and a migrant worker whose village's farmland was illegally confiscated by the local government during the urban expansion in the late 1990s. He experienced, as he described, as much unfairness as Mr. A did. In his home village, he protested the illegal acquisition of their farmland, and as a representative of the village, submitted petitions to the State Bureau of Letters and Calls (*guojia xingfangju*) in Beijing, a government agency that dealt with people's complaints and grievances. However, while in the city, he said that he had

⁸ Nonetheless, according to one of the experts on the aforementioned *New York Times* blog, employees do not necessarily have the time to use the facilities. This is also exactly what we found.

⁹ A temporary resident permit, or *zhanzhu zheng*, was required of all non-local *hukou* migrants so they could live and work in cities legally. The system was fiercely criticized, and its associated repatriation (*shourong qiansong*) policy for unregistered migrants was eventually abolished after Sun Zhigang, a college graduate who was unable to present his permit to police, was arrested by authorities and beaten to death in Guangzhou in 2003.

“kept silent” and showed “remarkable endurance,” because “in the village, all the villagers backed me up all the way; but in the city, I was an outcomer on my own.”

But migrant workers were not always silent. They fought injustice when they felt badly treated beyond their endurance. In the last three decades, migrant workers have organised numerous demonstrations, petitions, and protest activities on labor rights, industrial injury and death, and back pay (Cai 2010; Perry 2001; Pun et al. 2009). These migrant protestors of the first generation made explicit demands and raised public awareness about their plight. Some used extreme methods (such as attempted suicide and self-harm, and violent acts against employers) to urge employers to pay a default wage. Their radical, dangerous, and sometimes illegal approaches were hailed as proactive challenges to power and injustice.¹⁰

But these actions need more careful examination. On one hand, many of them, such as the act of *tiaolou* (climbing a building and threatening to jump) are calculated, strategic actions designed to pressure authorities to resolve disputes in workers’ favor (Broudehoux 2007; Griggers-Smith 2003). On the other hand, not frequently mentioned is that these actions are also desperate (and final) outbursts against longstanding perceived powerlessness and oppression in the urban setting, where institutional supports are ineffective. To a certain degree, they were mainly conceived as an immediate call to action meant to benefit individuals or small groups, rather than long-term pleas for improvements to the plight of migrants as a whole.

Among these radical migrant workers was Mr. C, a 40-year-old construction worker who migrated from Henan, the largest province of origin for migrant workers, to Guangdong, the largest receiving province. One week before the 2009 Chinese New Year, he stood on the top-floor balustrade of a high-rise building he had been involved in constructing, and announced to journalists, police, and labor officials that he would jump off the building unless the back pay for his nine-month subcontract (amounting to 20,000 yuan) was paid in full. The police quickly summoned the contractor, whom workers had not seen for months. He was forced to pay the back pay on the spot and supply a train ticket for Mr. C to return to his home village. Mr. C recalled during an interview:

¹⁰ The authorities believed that media coverage of these suicide attempts and violence has encouraged migrant workers to adopt similar radical approaches to fighting for their back wages. As a result, this type of media report has been mostly forbidden in recent years.

I did not think of challenging injustice or anything like that. I just wanted to have my money back because I was the only one working in my family... I realized how dangerous it was after I stepped off the balustrade, on which I had stood for two hours in a gale. I will never do that again... Nonetheless, at that time, I had not thought about any other methods to get my pay back; I was only a migrant worker. Workmates who had similar experiences with unpaid back pays said the authority was unhelpful... So I thought that making my problem big news might help.

In 2010 he again needed help receiving his back wages. His was, in fact, one of the 450,000 documented cases of wage arrears amounting to 620 million yuan in Guangdong province that year. But this time he chose to seek help directly from the labor authority. In just two days, the officials managed to help him obtain his back pay, fearful that he would make another attempt at suicide.

However, many other migrant workers also seeking help from the labor authority were not so lucky, apparently because there were many more cases of back pay and labor disputes than the officials could possibly handle before the Chinese New Year. Many had to return to their home villages without any or with only a portion of their back pays, but were nonetheless hopeful that these issues would be resolved after the holiday. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these migrant workers, as one official revealed, did not sign employment contracts, making it difficult to pursue unpaid wages through legal means. As the labor authority put it, they could only “admonish” employers to disburse back pays, but they could not force them to do so. According to our interviewees, due to the slim chance of obtaining back pays, many never went back to the same city, or simply bore the loss.

In sum, first-generation migrant workers commonly held a notion that they were inescapably temporary workers and lifelong peasants. These labor migrants had long endured a marginalized life and had to bear extremely low pays under ineffective labor laws (Chan 2003; Fu et al. 2007; Solinger 2006; Wu 2004). Often called “country cousins”, they widely perceived themselves as outsiders in cities. In spite of some resistance, most believed that their disadvantaged socio-economic status could not be challenged and changed. Chan (2010c) describes the quandary of such migrant workers: “There is no future as a laborer; returning to the village has no meaning.” Or, as Ms. Zheng Xiaoqiong, a new-generation migrant worker and multi-award winning poet, expresses it, the situation is one of an unreturnable hometown versus an unliveable city (Zhang 2010b; Zheng 2008).

But many of them have high hopes for their children and have tried to carve the path to a better future for them. For instance, Mr. A was saving money to take his two primary school-age children to study and live in the city. Although he considered himself to be a “lifelong peasant,” he expressed hope that his children will experience positive life changes, because “the life of a migrant worker or a peasant is too difficult.”

The New Generation: Living, Working, and Slugging it Out in Cities

Effects of Socio-Economic Changes

The fatalistic, predeterminist attitude is fading slowly among new-generation migrant workers due to the combined effects of changes in personal belief systems, market forces, and the state's advocacy.

The new-generation migrant laborers are increasingly concerned for their career and urban future, whereas their parents had focused on remitting hard-earned money to support families in their home villages. Their evolving expectations and demands include a decent and safe work environment that is a far cry from filthy and dangerous work conditions that commonly affected the first-generation migrant workers (Hannan 2008). This explains why, even after a spate of worker suicides, thousands of people still seek employment at Foxconn every day (Li 2010b; Zhang 2011). The company has increased its nominal wage on top of providing better work and living conditions and a seemingly more equitable career promotion system than other small factories (Liu and Yang 2010). On-time wage payments by such large employers are also of particular importance to young migrants, because they do not want to be caught up in wage arrears and disputes as the first-generation migrant workers did.¹¹

The market and the local state also play a crucial role. Currently, coastal labor-intensive businesses are trying to expand into inland provinces to lower operational costs and be close to major sources of labor supply. Local governments are supporting these inter-regional industrial transfers. For instance, the Henan provincial government provides tax and land rental discounts to Foxconn, acts as a recruitment agency,¹² and even uses government money to pay an allowance of 600 yuan to each worker who works there for more than six months (Liu 2010a). These measures have funnelled urgently needed young workers to these factories and satisfied the enterprises' labor requirements. In return, local governments have seen growth in tax revenue and GDP, the absorption of surplus labor, and more importantly, opportunities for officials to be promoted within a political hierarchy that puts a premium on quantifiable economic outcomes. However, the environmental and social problems that may be brought to localities by massive industrial transfers, and issues affecting the wellbeing of migrant workers, go almost unmentioned by local governments and the media. Instead, a strong propaganda

¹¹ Wage in arrears is the biggest source of conflict between labor and management in the private sector (CLB 2007).

¹² In Henan cities, urban neighborhood committees were asked by the governments to recruit workers for the Zhengzhou campus of Foxconn that is seen to accommodate 140,000 workers (Foxconn 2011). In addition, some occupational school and college diploma students were forced to travel to and from work as trainees in the Shenzhen campus of Foxconn for at least three months to fulfil their degree requirements. In some of the 12 Foxconn campuses, more than half of the workers were student trainees without contracts and employer contributions to their social insurance programmes (JRG 2010).

attempts to persuade young migrants that working in these newly built, close-to-family factories is a realistic path to their dream of an urban lifestyle.

While some of them are persuaded that these provincial factories are as good an option as going to the coastal cities, others still believe that the latter offer better opportunities. Our interviewees reported various personal reasons why new migrant workers decided to move to cities. Following are some of them:

Life is so boring in my village... City life is much more charming.

Almost all young people in my village migrated to cities and some of them got rich—by the rural standard, of course—after a few years. If they can [get rich], why can't I? I don't want to fall behind them.

I don't want to be a farmer whose future income mostly depends on the weather, plant diseases, pests, and the market price of farm products. My parents work so hard on the farm, but we are still poor. They have invested almost all they have in my education, so I want a change for them and myself.

I studied for four years as a mechanical engineer at a technical school. I don't know farming. So the city is the only place where I can utilize my skills.

I cannot change my humble origin, but I can change [my future] through personal effort. Since the introduction of economic reforms [in China], many former farmers and common people have become rich and successful—based on accounts of their lives. I may not be as successful as they have been, but at least I can earn a place in the city.

However, the reality facing migrant workers is that they cannot be too optimistic about their urban future because of the effects of segmented assimilation, which may lead to negative outcomes in an intricate process of adaptation (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997). Nonetheless, new-generation migrant workers have a stronger belief in their skills and in the opportunities in cities, and they do not usually display the pessimistic or predeterministic attitudes of some first-generation migrants.

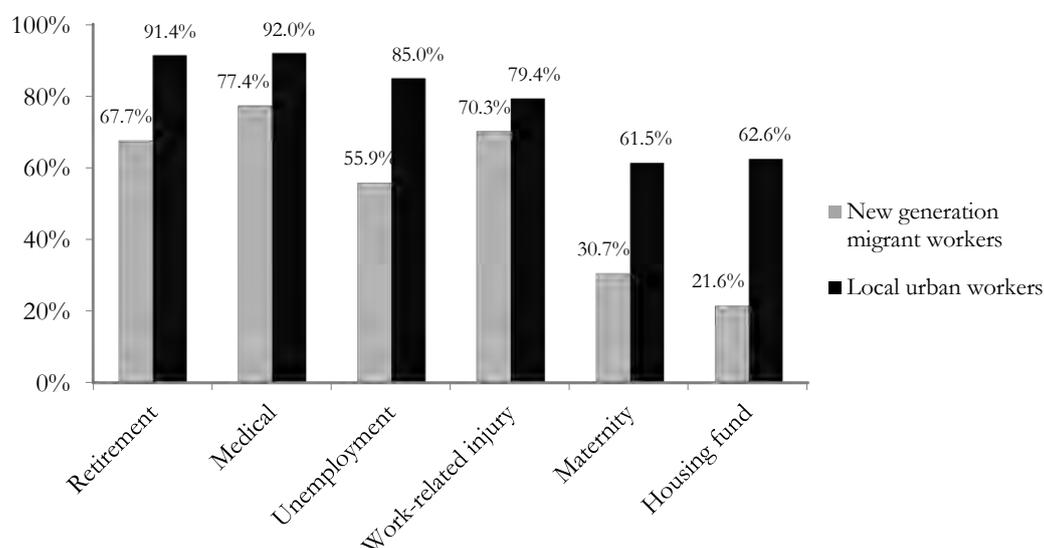
The following subsections further illustrate and analyze how new-generation migrant workers approach their urban life in a new way through four methods: accessing the urban welfare system, reaching out of traditional social networks and breaking the migrant identity, working hard to become true urban citizens, and breaking the silence on—and acting collectively for—group benefits.

Access to Social Insurances and Public Services

Despite an established (though flawed) social insurance system for migrants, the vast majority of first-generation migrant workers interviewed for this study said they did not take out urban social insurance (i.e., retirement, medical, unemployment, work-related injury, and maternity as the five principal social insurance programmes) due to lack of awareness and poor enterprise compliance. Other studies have

yielded similar findings (Li, 2008; Nielsen et al. 2005; Nyland et al. 2006). In some of the largest migrant worker-receiving cities (such as Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Tianjing), insurance participation rates were as low as 3.5 to 10.9 percent in 2006 (Guan 2008). At the end of 2008, only 17 and 10 percent of migrant workers participated in pension and medical insurances, respectively (Yang 2010). In contrast, based on official data as of 2009, new-generation migrant workers had significantly higher participation rates in the five principal social insurance programmes as well as the housing fund compared to previous surveys of migrants in general, thus closing the gap between migrant and urban workers (see Figure 3).¹³

Figure 3: Participation Rates in Social Insurance Programmes, 2009



Source: ACFTU (2011)

A majority of the respondents among new-generation migrants (80 percent) considered purchasing insurance schemes costly. Yet two-thirds of them regard social insurance as an essential part of a more secure urban life they are trying to pursue. Sixty percent of the respondents have purchased one or more insurance schemes. With stronger expectations of social security and equity in the cities and as preparation for the desired *hukou* policy loosening in the future, they participated in urban social insurance policies in the hope of integrating themselves into the urban social structure. This can be interpreted as a rational self-choice to lower their future risks in cities because they may never return to the countryside or have no secure farming income.

¹³ It should be pointed out that this figure represents only formally employed workers (i.e., with labor contract).

Local governments have provided some free services to migrant workers such as training courses, job search assistance, and arbitration of labor disputes. But the provision of such services appears motivated by the authorities' need to utilize migrant labor in the economic system rather than from a genuine interest to help the workers assimilate smoothly into cities. Such motivation may be attributed to the fact that local governments lack the incentives to provide such services because migrant workers are not a major consideration in financial budgeting and urban governance.

Despite token support from local governments, many of the migrants' current or emerging needs are unaddressed while some of the most important areas of public service (such as the Minimum Living Standard Scheme and public housing) are available exclusively to urban *hukou* holders. For instance, despite constant criticism, the majority of school-age children who migrate with their parents still cannot be admitted to quality public kindergartens and schools, since these are reserved for city inhabitants. They are denied access to colleges in the cities as well. To receive compulsory education in the migrants' host cities, they need to pay low-ranked public schools an administrative fee of approximately 500 yuan per month, in addition to other expenses. Alternatively, they may send their children to private schools, where tuition fees are more expensive but good teaching quality is not guaranteed. Or migrant families may choose unauthorized/charity schools for migrant workers' children only.¹⁴ Many school-age children either do not attend or quit schools due to poverty, resulting in many teenage problems and, possibly, generational poverty.

Social Network and Identity

Migrant workers use varied information communication technologies to seek information related to job mobility and career progression.¹⁵ In addition, while the urban social networks of first-generation migrant workers were usually limited by kinship and origin, the new generation has extended their social links to include more people from different places and backgrounds through social gatherings, communication technologies, such as mobile phones, and social networking sites, including instant messaging and dating websites. These social activities have been an important and integral part of the new generation's daily urban life.

Influenced by prevailing consumerism, the present-day migrant workers crave the urban lifestyle and spend a large proportion of their incomes on recreation, entertainment and leisure, and consumer goods. Many of them have little or no savings unlike first-generation migrant workers, who had significant

¹⁴ In August 2011, 30 schools of this type for migrants' children in Beijing were closed or demolished. As a result, 30,000 pupils and students lost their classrooms (Jacobs 2011).

¹⁵ See, for example, studies by Ngan and Ma (2008), and Peng (2008).

savings or remittance rates. Some young migrant workers work in the same city as their parents, but they tend to live separately from them, because, as one interviewee said, they “practice economy in housing, food, transportation, and everything else” and “believe that savings equal earnings.” Young migrant workers mostly live in factory dorms, rental units, and urban villages, but they are eager to move out and rent better places like their urban counterparts.

Nowadays it is more difficult to tell the difference by appearance alone between urban and migrant youth, because the latter try hard to conceal signs or vestiges of their rural origins. To establish an urban self-identity, migrant youth also resist the label *nongmingong* (meaning ‘peasant worker,’ the original term for migrant worker), which captures the dual roles of a peasant and a worker, and undermines their distinction from first-generation migrant workers. Instead, new migrant workers insist that they have no double identities and responsibilities at different times of the year or stages of life. As such, they prefer to be called urban industrial workers or employees (*zhigong*), which is considered more respectful in the urban context. This kind of attitude contrasts with the past, when similar externally imposed tags (e.g., *dagongmei* and *dagongzai*, or factory girl/boy) was accepted by migrant workers and gave them some sense of self (Pun 2004).

Notwithstanding their rejection of the label ‘peasant-worker’, migrant youth oscillate between the social identities attached to rural and urban (i.e., *nongcun ren* and *chengli ren*) settings due to the difficulty of integrating themselves into the city and with the local people. But evidence is mixed. On one hand, the estrangement and social boundaries long observed between migrant workers and urban *hukou* residents are gradually attenuating through social ties, including marriage (Jin 2010; Nielsen et al. 2006). Most new migrants in our study consider themselves members of urban working and residential communities—but not necessarily urban citizens of their host cities. On the other hand, despite working frequently together and dealing daily with urban locals, many young migrants have no or only a few local urban friends. This is seen to be mainly because of—beyond the common notion of discrimination—their differences in background, education, interest, life experience, and nature of jobs derived from one’s socio-economic status. In some cases, they tried to extend their social network but retracted their attempts after several failures. A young migrant worker said:

I have many urban local colleagues, and they are generally nice. But when I tried to make friends with them, I found that they were mostly interested in video games, electronic products, fashion, luxury goods, apartments, cars, and so on, none of which I could afford... I once joined them at a night club and dined with them, which cost me one week’s income... After that, I made excuses and refused their invitations, and they have not invited me since. Now I only meet other migrant workers after work, for street foods, card games, some affordable shopping, or at best, karaoke.

Living in the city, participating in urban social insurances, and embarking on similarly oriented efforts do not make a migrant worker an urban citizen—either by official classification or urban assimilation. Some new migrant workers compromise by migrating to smaller towns and cities that are less competitive and more socially inclusive. However, the infamous *hukou* system remains the fundamental institutional barrier for migrant workers to benefit more from the urban-based economic boom, to shake off the officially imposed identity of agricultural populations, and to be accepted by the city's mainstream culture as truly urban citizens.

In Pursuit of the Urban Dream

Besides social identity and equity, many other difficulties hinder young migrants' further acceptance and inclusion by cities. In the early 1980s a migrant worker could earn a higher wage than many urban workers in the state sector, where low wage (but high welfare) was the norm. But since then, the success of the Chinese economy has largely relied on low labor costs and high profit margins, thanks to migrant workers' contributions. Since 1992, urban workers have been outpacing migrant workers in terms of wage increases in a segmented labor market that explicitly favors urban locals (Yang and Liu 2010). Between 1992 and 2004 the nominal average wage for migrant workers in the Pearl River Delta increased by only 68 yuan (Li 2011). Indeed, as this study has shown, many migrants' real wages have failed to keep up with inflation, especially in the past few years.

Official figures based on two surveys show that in 2010, despite working nine hours a day and 26 days a month on average, the new-generation migrant workers' monthly wage income per capita amounted to only 1,748 yuan, which was approximately half the income of local urban workers, and 167 yuan less than that of first-generation migrant workers (ACFTU 2011; NBSC 2011).¹⁶ Between 1992 and 2008, China's gross export of goods increased by an average of 19.6 percent annually. Recently, China emerged as the world's top exporter (NBSC 2010b). However, it is difficult to say that there has been significant wage improvements for migrant workers in export-oriented industries in the last decade (Lin 2011). Our study shows that many employers pay migrant workers no more, if not lower, than the official minimum wage, which has increased slowly and disproportionately to inflation and the rising cost of living. Therefore, all first- and new-generation interviewees for this study considered wages to be a major concern. As a response to stagnant wage rates, about half of new-generation migrant workers hoped to, or were preparing, to become entrepreneurs, which is seen as a path to financial independence (and therefore a means to weaning away from relying only on wages). This

¹⁶ These two surveys might have underestimated the working hours in general. Two other studies find that migrant workers worked 11 hours a day, 26 days a month (CLB 2008). Ninety percent of them worked more than the maximum working hours (44 hours/week) prescribed by law, ranging from 58.2 to more than 60 hours per week (NBSC 2010a).

echoes similar findings showing self-employment as a vehicle for economic advancement among migrants in China and other countries (Giulietti et al. 2011; Portes et al. 2002). In addition, being an entrepreneur more or less signals real success as a migrant worker.

Their ambitions and desires have turned them into very industrious workers even as they languish in exploitation. The base wage for a normal 44-hour workweek is intentionally set low by employers to stimulate overtime work, which is the only option for many workers to increase their meager incomes.¹⁷ Therefore, employers who offer more overtime shifts are more favored by migrant workers. All migrant respondents to this study had worked overtime, ranging from 50 to more than 120 hours per month, but only one-quarter of them received full overtime payments based on the legally prescribed overtime rate. Although monthly overtime work of more than 36 hours is illegal in China, this is simply ignored or justified by employers, saying workers signed a waiver surrendering their right to limited overtime, which is illegal. Labor officials usually turn a blind eye to this practice because prosecution of such infringements has “no benefits to employers, migrant workers or the local authorities.”

Since the emergence of modern labor-intensive factories, a dormitory labor system has been adopted (Smith and Pun 2006). Given the first-generation migrant workers’ relatively weak intentions to change jobs, human resources were managed and controlled through employer-controlled accommodations.¹⁸ Meanwhile, workers were able to develop collective action against managerial prerogatives (Pun 2007). This repressive environment has been further challenged by new-generation migrant workers who change jobs much more frequently on account of their deep-seated dissatisfaction with work conditions and their increased versatility due to better education, occupational training, and other elements of human capital working in their favor.¹⁹

The emergence of this pattern of behavior among the new breed of migrant workers has rankled some first-generation migrant laborers. A manager in a toy factory, who belonged to that generation in the late 1990s and rose from the ranks (starting out as a frontline worker) through “hard work and her endearing attitudes,” expressed disappointment over the new generation’s “lack of job responsibility,” “strong sensitivities and resistance to criticism,” and eagerness “for quick success and instant benefits.” The present study shows that many skilled workers left their jobs even after their employers raised their wages. A young migrant worker, tendering her resignation immediately after our interview with

¹⁷ The legal overtime wage rate is 1.5 to three times the normal rate. However, not every employer obeys these legal requirements, or they only offer a normal wage rate for overtime work.

¹⁸ One reason is that there is not much difference between factories, according to interviewees who have changed jobs.

¹⁹ A quantitative study by Smyth et al. (2009) also yielded similar findings.

the manager, said: “If I don’t see any hope in this position and this factory, or if another factory gives me a better chance, why should I stay? Life is too short!”

‘Foot Voting’

Many first-generation migrant workers found jobs through existing social links, and in many cases they confirmed their employment before migration (Wu and Zhou 1996; Zhao 2003). This means that they tended to migrate—sometimes in groups—to cities where their friends and relatives worked. In comparison, and besides searching for urban jobs on their own, increasing numbers of new migrant workers are voting with their feet, that is, moving between factories, cities, and regions for the most suitable jobs and workplaces for them.

Some studies reveal that young migrants are attracted to metropolises such as Shanghai (Guiheux and Zalio 2010). But the overall situation is more complicated, because these immensely competitive large urban sites have high living costs. Consequently, young migrants give greater weight to affordable—and long-term—living than the previous generation. Among our interviewees was a married couple, both 25, who had worked in five large cities in a span of four years before migrating to Foshan, which they felt offered better job opportunities. They said that they were satisfied with their current wages as a technician and an office clerk, but they decided to move anyway because soaring house prices were beyond their financial means. Keen to have their first child within two years, they planned to move to Zhaoqing, where housing costs and living expenses were relatively affordable. There they hoped that their child could become a true urban citizen and enjoy good education.

Unlike many first-generation migrant workers who had to leave behind family members and children in their home villages, young migrant workers—some of whom lived apart from by their migrating parents when they were little—are increasingly concerned about the well-being and development of their children in cities. A 25-year-old new migrant, whose father was also a migrant worker but eventually returned to their village, summarized his outlook:

My father and his generation had neither intention nor ability to stay in the city. But I have a strong intention [to stay], so I have been working hard. It seems unrealistic for me to have equal status with urban locals because of my poor education and background. My hope rests with my child. He will not grow up as a country boy, but will have the same start as other urban kids. I hope that one day he can bring honor to our ancestors (*guangzong yaozu*) and visit our home village enjoying fortune and glory (*yijin huanxiang*).

Responding quickly and proactively to dissatisfaction with labor and living conditions, the new-generation migrant workers have a greater tendency toward continuous mobility. Nearly 90 percent of

the respondents among the new-generation migrant workers said they intended to move to another city, or were unsure whether or not they should stay in their host city for a long period; while most older first-generation migrant workers said they did not want to move but, in the words of one interviewee, “would work for a few more years in the current city before returning to my village permanently.”

Still another new phenomenon is that some college graduates now compete with migrant workers in a labor market where no such competition used to exist. Feeling these pressures, some migrant workers in more technical positions (such as engineers and technicians) have squeezed training courses into their busy work schedules, hoping to improve their skills and successfully survive the emerging competition with college graduates.²⁰ Under pressure not only to survive but also to self-improve amid conditions of limited human and social capital and other resources, new-generation migrant workers continually assess themselves and adjust accordingly to their work environment in terms of their socio-economic behavior and strategy, hoping to increase their—and their children’s—prospects for success in life. This behavior reaffirms a distinct trait of the new generation, that is, to challenge the existing norms.

Collective Labor Action

Almost simultaneously with the suicides at Foxconn, the new-generation migrants demonstrated a strong determination not to resign themselves to adversity by holding strikes and undertaking collective bargaining, which achieved impressive outcomes. In a Honda component-manufacturing factory in Foshan, well-organized young workers successfully won a sizeable wage increase in 2010 and 2011. They also re-elected officers for their union branch, among other successful initiatives, thus demonstrating solidarity and a firm resolve to win their labor battles against their employer and the local government (Chan 2010a 2011).

These actions demonstrate a potential to change the landscape of the urban labor market and a capacity to topple the symbolic structures of the Chinese economy and society as configured by the state and market. These also show that, in addition to self-modification based on individual adaptability, collective action and resistance still play a crucial role in recent labor-management conflicts and labor disputes.

The information technology and strategies used in the Honda strike, the likes of which were unavailable to or had not been tried by first-generation migrant workers, inspired other strikes and

²⁰ But migrant workers have difficulty obtaining official accreditation of their occupational skills and techniques (Li 2010c).

labor movements by young migrant workers across Guangdong province and elsewhere, and increased migrant awareness of labor rights. All 15 enterprises interviewed for this study raised their workers' wages from 10 to 40 percent in 2011. Some did so after experiencing small-scale strikes, while others were afraid of the possible loss incurred by strikes, and did so on their own initiative.

Collective action continued in 2011. Consequently, many local governments raised minimum wage rates substantially. Beyond that, the new-generation's collective actions may open a new chapter in the labor movement. Their voices will be more clearly heard, and businesses and government will need to more effectively address their concerns and uplift workers' conditions since the possibility of a strike looms large over them.

Discussion and Conclusion

Amid high hopes and some encouraging progress, Chinese migrant workers still face many obstacles to achieving fairness, justice, and success. At the central level, the aforementioned national policy released recently shows that helping new-generation migrant workers blend into urban society is one of the most important policy and governance challenges nowadays. The state has shown concern for social instability—which is the responsibility of local government to address—that the migrant cohort could trigger if their demands are ignored. However, the state's persistent lack of commitment to achieving genuine urban citizenship for migrant workers has continued to feed the “one country, two societies” phenomenon, or a de facto apartheid (Chan and Buckingham 2008; Li et al. 2010; Whyte 2010). That creates a dilemma for the local government, which must maintain labor stability, while the central government does not have a clear agenda on how to forge ahead with *hukou* reforms.

Strong grievances and doubts are fermenting among the more socially and politically active young migrants. They have perceived—and also responded to—strong horizontal inequality in relation to urban *hukou* citizens. Some have aggressively demanded the same treatment as the locals of their host cities. For example, they demand career and social mobility from the secondary or informal sector to primary or formal sector with better job tenure and more regulated employee benefits. Although central policymakers have recognized the economic value of migrant workers and increased the urban minimum wage beginning in 2009, few have shown genuine interest in enabling migrants workers to become urban citizens.

At the local level, the worsening labor shortage has increased competition for labor between cities, provinces, and regions. Recent policy loosening in some cities has allowed migrant workers to obtain urban *hukou* if they purchase a property in the city and/or they pass a points test to qualify for

transferring *hukou* from rural to urban areas. Even though the quota for *hukou* transfers in Guangdong province was 100,000 in 2010 (PGGP 2010), this method will take nearly two centuries to enable all migrant workers to obtain urban *hukou*.

Some provincial/municipal governments (for example, Chongqing, Guangdong, and Shaanxi) have asked rural *hukou* holders to hand over their farmlands before being granted urban *hukou*. Potential migrants are hesitant to give up rural benefits (such as land rental incomes and year-end bonuses from collective farms) and are concerned about the government's sincerity and ability to fulfil its promises, and receiving fair and equal treatment vis-à-vis the urban locals. As such these policies have failed to attract as many migrant workers as expected. In addition, the many notoriously capricious public policies give little confidence to migrants. After several years of debate, the state recently dashed hopes for migration freedom. Instead, it chose a conservative, and even stagnant, approach to *hukou* reforms.

This study presents a different portrait of migrant workers from previous research in the sense that for the new-generation migrant workers, getting jobs and earning are means to maintaining livelihood and embracing the urban life, not just a ticket to migration. The new-generation migrant workers are younger, better educated and trained, and less connected to the countryside than their predecessors. They were initially a product of China's economic prosperity and rural-urban inequality, and the consequent generational replacement driven by labor demand in the urban economies. New-generation migrant workers have a broad urban dream not shared by many first-generation migrant workers. They are not resigned to the fate of "peasant-worker" that first-generation migrant workers deemed inevitable. They work together by expressing their grievances to challenge the external economic burdens imposed on migrant workers. They do all this while working as industriously as the first-generation workers. Despite all these efforts, the new-generation migrant workers, while endeavoring to drive off the feeling of being outsiders in cities, are now stuck to the rural-urban divide that was spawned by longstanding institutional barriers and market forces.

China's ruling party needs the new migrant workers to contribute to the economy consistently and to maintain the political regime. Yet it refuses to make an unqualified commitment to promote the migrant workers' welfare. At present, the future of new-generation migrant workers seems bleak. This, while the national policy appears to be just a state machination to stabilize the group.

But one thing is certain: *hukou* is not the only factor underlying these issues. Migrant workers' wellbeing and status in cities are principally determined by their stock of human and social capital in the market economy. Even if the *hukou* restrictions on migrant workers are abandoned now, migrant

workers will, in the long haul, remain at the lower tier of the social structure due to their inherent disadvantages compared with urban citizens.

Improving education for this growing group is a basic but crucial task, and goes beyond simply providing migration freedom and essential public services. Sound policy is also needed to eliminate the socio-economic division between rural and urban youth, and accord the former the opportunity to climb up the socio-economic ladder faster. New-generation migrant workers are becoming a formidable force in the economic reshaping not only of the Pearl River Delta but also of the entire China in the coming decades. Therefore, the Chinese government must recognize the signs and address the new generation's multifaceted needs.

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