

# Viewing the Development of Chinese Migrant Women in the Context of Education and Work from the Perspective of Gender and Development

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## Abstract

With the development and progress of society, the status of women is promoted with the development of culture and economy, and equality between men and women is a basic national policy in China. However, according to the literature, there are still significant gender differences in poverty, and women tend to be poorer than men. With the rapid development of urbanization, it is very important for immigrant women to develop better in cities. Based on the influence of migration and poverty alleviation on women's development, this paper divides the changes of women's poverty after migration and poverty alleviation, and puts forward some thinking methods in order to consolidate the work of migration and poverty alleviation and promote the development of women in poor areas.

## Keywords

Women's Development; Migration; Poverty Alleviation; Rural Poor Areas; Poverty, Gender Differences; Social Development.

## 1. Introduction

Due to rapid economic development, China remains the world's second-largest economy and keeps ranking second in the whole world. Today, people's living standards have been continuously improved, but a number of groups still live on the fringe of the city, among whom migrant women are one group (Yang, 2014). Many research results showed that rural women were faced with a number of challenges from urban life in spite of making some development after moving to cities, including the low overall rate of employment, the low level of economic income, and more prominent employment problems such as the lack of security, poor housing and education conditions and domestic violence (Yang, 2014). Therefore, it is important to study how to help migrant women to develop better in cities.

In this context, a number of social organisations participate in the development of migrant women. When just getting involved in the practice of migrant women, social organisations focus on solving the practical problems of migrant women. Therefore, a large number of services are only aimed at the shortcomings and deficiencies of individual migrant women, solving existing problems, meeting existing needs and mostly focusing on personal tutoring (Zhang et al., 2011). However, it was soon discovered that it was difficult for this traditional model of adapting to social changes by counselling individuals, groups or communities to cope with a series of problems such as insufficient employment, livelihood needs and more comprehensive development of migrant women. Thus, China is in urgent need of a new model that macroscopically grasps the current social situation. In this case, developmental social work is introduced into China's social work academia. In addition, theoretical research shifted from the simple 'development of women' to 'Gender and Development'. Taking China's migrant women as an example, the essay will explore the development and changes of gender, education and occupation.

## 2. Research background and purpose

'Development' in 'the development of migrant women' has long been only defined in the dimension of 'economic development'. Meanwhile, the policies and measures adopted by the government and social organisations for migrant women emphasise the participation of migrant women in urban construction and economic development, the attainment of higher economic income and the creation of better economic living condition (Zhang et.al,2016). However, the author believed that migrant women failed to develop better in cities and live a dignified life by combining with some research in social reality and the academic world. They still live on the fringe of the city, work in poor environments with low wages, find it difficult to integrate into urban life and suffer from the double oppression of patriarchy and the capital market. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, the number of migrants in China reached 236 million in 2012, accounting for about 17% of the total population in China and nearly half of them are migrant women, namely, the number of migrant women accounts for about 8.5% of the Chinese. With the development of the economy, migrant women continuously increase, reaching 100 million. In the academic world, as a great number of women are engaged in social production, researchers propose the theory of "gender and development", aiming to understand the formation of gender relations. Many studies have been conducted to examine the shaping of gender roles, i.e., the formulation of responsibilities and expectations for women, with the focus on both the formation of unequal gender relations and the influence of their interactions with class, race, ethnicity and other unequal social relations on women. According to existing studies, there are generally two views regarding the group of migrant women. Firstly, the process of migration brings women new opportunities, which enable them to develop capabilities, alleviate family poverty, and escape the traditional patriarchal control; secondly, women are still oppressed in the process of mobility, thereby entering the dilemma of choosing whether to stay in work at the bottom or return to their homes to live a simple life. Therefore, the author held that the 'development' of migrant women should not be limited to the dimension of 'economic development' from the theoretical perspectives of gender and development. The society should empower migrant women and promote them to expand their social interpersonal relationships, gain more educational opportunities, increase economic income and participate in the formulation and decision-making of social policies so that they can achieve all-round development (He,2000).

## 3. Current status of migrant women in China

Since the 1980s, international research has become more mature with the continuous advancement of the reform and opening-up process, especially the holding of the World Women's Congress in Beijing in 1995 and the emergence of various assistance projects aiming to raise the status of women. Studies on development and female gender have gradually emerged in China and received growing attention from society in addition to academia. These two areas focus on the same issues, namely the development of women and gender equality. On the one hand, a variety of international organisations have taken root in China and funded a lot of projects on women and gender at the micro-level, and government departments and grassroots organisations in China have provided women with services from the aspects of employment, poverty alleviation, education and training. On the other hand, gender equality index, gender empowerment scales and Millennium Development Goals are commonly used in international development areas as global standards for monitoring and evaluating the development and gender equality of national and regional women at the macro level. To be precise, this process is a process of advancing the development of women and gender equality. Formally based on the advancement of these two aspects, research on gender and development is making rapid and steady progress in China(Chen,2009). Different views were expressed by

Chinese scholars on the migration of rural women. When a large amount of rural surplus labour force just transferred to cities, the academic circles held that the rural population greatly boosted the economic development of cities after their entrance. Moreover, the mobility of rural women to cities has many advantages and generally plays a positive role in increasing their economic income and improving their livelihoods. At a higher level, this mobility provides rural women with the opportunities of economic independence, which saves them from traditional patriarchal control. Besides, it transforms the world views and values of rural women, which thus equips them with advanced urban ideas owned by modern women. Some studies pointed out that young unmarried women had more power to decide their spouses and ways of courtship after breaking away from the control of traditional patriarchy. Additionally, married women moving to cities showed a lower fertility rate than those in villages, whose expectations for the education of children were higher (Zheng and Xie, 2004). However, scholars now hold a contrary view that the mobility of rural women to cities has neither contributed to their better development nor changed their fate, but exerted a huge negative impact. Pan Yi (2005) pointed out that they suffered from the triple oppression of the national system, transnational capital and family patriarchy which jointly created a special form of labour exploitation based on class, gender and urban-rural differences. Under the circumstances, rural women are brought into a tangled environment of returning to the countryside and living a simple life without many sources of livelihood or continuing to live an oppressed life with certain economic income in cities, which results in their marginalisation step by step. Therefore, current academic research on migrant women mostly focused on problems. The most important part is the research on the living conditions and development of migrant women. The survey report on the situation of migrant women in Gansu Province revealed several problems in the development of migrant women: First, the low level of employment has narrow channels. Second, they bear high labour intensity and heavy psychological burden. Third, they have low development ability and weak cultural quality. Fourth, they have low labour income and poor living conditions. Fifth, their children receive little family education and find it difficult to enter school. Sixth, they are lacking in the self-awareness of social security and right protection. Seventh, the degree of urban integration is low and social interaction is relatively isolated (Wang, 2012). Lu Fuxing and Liu Ning (2007) suggested that being marginalised by cities was the biggest problem of migrant women. Many migrant women come to cities through the introduction of relatives and friends because of informal employment channels and forms. Therefore professional roles are marginalised, and migrant women are engaged in catering, entertainment and other long-term and low-paying jobs in cities. Their social status is marginalised. They lack the channels of urban formal participation and form the marginalisation of political participation (Lu and Liu, 2007). However, domestic studies on gender and development excessively focused on summarising the international development in the development context of the gender and development theory but lacked discussions on how the concepts of gender and development should be conducted under different cultural backgrounds and political and economic conditions in China. Additionally, these studies lacked the practice in the theory of gender and development (Most practical research was carried out in the form of a project) reflection on the feedback of the theory from deep practice. Then, such practical theoretical studies will not be far from the end of their life if divorced from reality and failing to make a summary from practice and form a scientific circle of theoretical research. Therefore, people should take gender and development as theoretical perspectives and treat migrant women as independent and active participants rather than passive service acceptors in order to better solve the development problem of migrant women. In addition, efforts should be made to actively integrate a variety of government and social resources, organise migrant women, empower them, enhance their ability to gain access to educational resources and occupational opportunities, improve their livelihoods, and promote their mutual solidarity. Furthermore, the

community participation and decision-making of migrant women should be promoted to propel them to become the subjects of self-development and ultimately facilitate the harmonious and common development of migrant women, the community and society.

## 4. The Operational Process of Gender and Development in China

Zhao (2004) used various examples of development practices at home and abroad to illustrate that if it lacks gender sensitivity to development, "promoting women's development" can easily make women some kind of money-making machine. Therefore, when talking about the gender and development of women, researchers are supposed to express different opinions and positions and demonstrate them using different models, policy routes and intervention methods to achieve their objectives.

### 4.1. Gender and work technology promotion

According to Zhao (2005), when a technology is used in a certain society and population, the existing structure of gender will inevitably play a role, and consequently, the seemingly neutral technology cannot be separated from the gender structure. To be specific, men who are more likely to access and use technological service systems and technical information can often master the key links of technology whereas women who are less likely to receive professional technology training can only master simple techniques; when women begin to access the key links of technology, men leave the specific industry and engage in another higher-tech activity in the industry; therefore, the structural relationship between women and men has not changed, and even further enhanced due to the dominant position of men and the marginalisation of women. According to Zhao (2005), there are several actions to change this situation. Firstly, it is necessary to increase the gender sensitivity of project implementers and technical personnel through training; secondly, gender participation in the implementation, management, and inspection evaluation should be emphasised in a complete project cycle including needs assessment, feasibility study, project design, and implementation, especially that channels, places, and opportunities should be provided for women to express their views and appropriate mechanisms that influence project decision-making should be established; thirdly, women's special needs can be satisfied in the project, for example, the implementation location and time that are convenient for migrant women can be decided.

### 4.2. Gender training

When it comes to mainstreaming a gender perspective into people's development, the experience of various firms has proved that gender training is a good way (Gao, 2000). Gender training is an approach, channel, and process through which the sexual gap can be gradually eliminated, gender dialogue and communication can be conducted, and gender relations can be recognised and studied by female scholars (Zhao, 2004). Gender awareness can be improved through the elimination of gender inequality. Li (2000) suggested that women will recognise their traditional roles differently after receiving gender training, which is likely to break the original balance of their families. After she returns to the original system, there must be a conflict of ideas. More painfully, gender training should include a strategic method that teaches women this concept. They must not only recognise their own value, but also understand how to return to the family, and how to communicate, speak, and influence their husbands or men in the community to reduce burdens suffered by women. However, participation requires respect for traditional culture, which lurks a danger, namely, the conflict with the existing gender system, which plays an important role in traditional communities. It is difficult to challenge the exiting patriarchal social relationships to promote participatory style. Although participatory style enables women to express their own needs, the inherent gender system manipulates and constrains them; therefore, the needs that they speak out are often practical

rather than strategic. The current pattern of equality makes it difficult to change the gender system.

## 5. Conclusion

Current research on migrant women has the following shortcomings. First, research conducted from the perspective of researchers lacks their own voices and views, which thus fails to deeply reflect their true ideas. Second, most research on migrant women is faulty and lacks the understanding and observation of the entire life course of rural women. Therefore, they find it difficult to understand the different cultural backgrounds of migrant women and impossible to really enter the life situation of migrant women. Therefore, they can only dissect migrant women into fragments instead of understanding the whole picture of migrant women. It is supposed to shift from empowering migrant women to self-empowering them, guide them to express their thoughts and wishes, and participate in the services of migrant women as 'supporters' and 'companions'. China's female researchers have paid attention to the real problems of female development and participate in a variety of intervention programs, which makes female research shape its unique features, namely, it is closely linked with the real problems of women. However, we must also be soberly aware that there is also the question of "spokesperson" in the process of development.

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