

*Job-Search Channels of Migrant Workers in Large Chinese Cities: A Case Study of Shanghai**

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Abstract

In the process of urbanization in China, a large number of migrant workers from underdeveloped regions, especially rural areas, flow to economically developed regions and cities to search for employment opportunities. Their job search is facilitated by a large number of labor

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market intermediaries that exist in cities, as well as abundant recruitment information from the Internet or other media and various types of job fairs. This study, based on a survey of migrant workers in Shanghai, examines the patterns and determinants of migrant workers' job-search approaches after their arrival. It focuses on the influence of migrants' personal characteristics and prior experiences of migration and employment on their choice among labor market intermediaries and personal social networks as compared to those who found jobs without any assistance. The results show that nearly half of migrant workers find jobs through personal social networks and a further 29.0 percent find jobs through labor market intermediaries. The results also show that those who are male, lowly educated, and recently arrived tend to use labor market intermediaries to find jobs, and those who are female and have been in the city for a long time or whose origin is near Shanghai tend to use social networks to find jobs. Our results suggest that migrant workers are heterogeneous in terms of labor market experiences and that lowly skilled and newly arrived migrants occupy an inferior position in the urban labor market.

1. Introduction

Constrained and controlled by the *hukou* (户口) system,¹ labor mobility between rural and urban areas and across different regions in China was extremely limited prior to the economic reforms initiated in 1978. After the 1980s, driven by gradual economic reforms and transformation from a planned economy to a market-oriented economy, the constraints on labor mobility were gradually relaxed. A large number of surplus rural laborers have since moved to economically developed regions or cities in search of new employment opportunities. Largely because of the *hukou* system in China, and unlike migrants in advanced economies, most of the Chinese migrant workers are really floaters who migrate among various cities and move from one job to another in a segregated migrant labor market.²

A significant challenge to this large number of migrants is to find a job before or shortly after they arrive in the cities, especially since most rural migrants have no access to a social safety net in urban China. Previous studies have shown the important role of social capital,³ kinship, and native-place ties in migration processes but have devoted little attention to their role in migrants' job search processes.⁴ Another strand of literature has found that some migrants, especially those who have poor social networks, either do not have or do not use social ties but, instead, rely on various forms of labor market intermediaries in the host city to find jobs.⁵