

Guanxi and Job Mobility in the Socialist Transformation*

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Abstract

Using tobacco industry workers' applications for Wuhu General Labor Union (蕪湖總工會 *wuhu zong gonghui*), this article examines the role of *guanxi* (關係) in job searches before and after the socialist transformation in the early 1950s. We reject the conventional view that *guanxi* was extensively used in the early socialist system. Rather, *guanxi*, particularly kin ties, was vital for obtaining good jobs before the socialist transformation, but its role was sharply restricted after the job assignment system was established in the early 1950s. This system was particularly advantageous for workers who were young and female and lacked appropriate *guanxi* to access good jobs. These findings suggest that a more accurate understanding of the early socialist period would enrich the debate about the role of *guanxi* in market reform.

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