

Conference Paper

New Characteristics of Rural Women's Economic Participation in Shaanxi, China

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Abstract

China's large scale migration, urbanization, accompanying its rural land circulation for modern agriculture, rural women's economic situation was enormously affected but little noticed. To explore this, the study examines rural women's challenges and potential in economic participation in Shaanxi province through a survey of 356 rural women in three areas of Shaanxi with different developing characteristics. The primary data allows a more in depth and systematic analysis of the current situation of rural women. Results indicate that the economic participation of rural women in China presents some common and different challenges. Their own low educational attainment and their care-provider role are two common challenges. Meanwhile, their economic participation illustrates a geographical characteristic, which is largely restricted by the land policy, regional economic development.

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1. Introduction

Over the last three decades, China's industrialization and urbanization have been on an unprecedented scale [3]. To fight against its decaying and backward agricultural situation and stimulate people's enthusiasm in farming, Chinese government for decades has put forward a series of measures including encouraging land circulation and loosening even abandoning Hukou system. The overall goals of this paper are to compare rural women in three different areas with different land circulation situations in Shaanxi, contribute knowledge about the common and different attributes, and the challenges they facing, their understanding and attitude towards the State's ongoing land circulation policy, their preference among farming, working and off-farm work and their plan about future.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2, literature review; Section 3 presents the methodology and data. The findings and results are discussed in Section 4, and Section 5 is the conclusion.

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2. Literature Review

2.1. Women in rural China

The study of Tanner (2004) and Zhao (2002) claimed the existing division of labor by gender, informal rules and gender norms in intra-household decision-making suggest that the propensity for migration in China differ by gender. There was a rapid increase in the migration of men of all ages to jobs in urban areas. Some women followed suit, but their overall participation in migrant labor markets has lagged behind comparing to that of men's. In the last decade or so, more women have joined in the rural to urban migration, particularly young, single women (Du, et al. 2005, [6]). For most rural women, marriage was synonymous with the termination of migrant work and return to the village (Fan 2004). With most of the rural young girl engage in off-farm activities, rural women's off-farm employment presents a characteristic that the ratio below 40 years old is about twice higher than those above 40 years of age [9].

Song and Vernooy (2011), based on field research carried out in 2007 and 2008 in Guangxi, Guizhou and Yunnan, China, found women and old people have become the main agricultural labour force in most households and communities, playing key roles in local farming and livelihood systems yet they continue to have limited control over necessary resources and poor access to supporting services.

Thus, older, married women continued to stay behind in rural areas due to women's occupational options as migrants being inferior to that of men's (Fan 2003, Liang and Chen 2004), a consequence of heavier family responsibilities, such as the presence of preschool children or children in the primary or junior middle schools reduced their likelihood of migration [15], and more rigid social norms faced by married rural women.

Seeing things from macro-micro perspectives, and based on the household economics, Hu (2014) holds the idea that household job division resulted from differences of educational level. The traditional position for women during the process of rural labor migration led to women lagging behind men in the process of shifting from agriculture to non-agricultural industries. She claims that after decades of hard development, with the comparatively low status of agricultural income in rural household income and heavier labor burden and low return, farming is no longer the main source of family income, but rather a security net for rural households. After rural households had made their 'rational choices', it was usually rural women who remained trapped in an agrarian crisis, which led to the blockage of market information informing their

knowledge. The state, coupled with the market economy, penetrated in rural people's daily lives, simultaneously intensifying economic stratification between men and women as well as inequalities. Female-led farms have lacked access to production factors such as land and capital.

Based on a survey of 100 female peasants, key informant interviews, six biography recordings and participatory observation in Yang Village in northern Jiangsu, Meng (2014) discussed the intra-household gender relations and women's well-being in rural China. She argued that the female peasants themselves did not recognize the significance of agricultural production adequately, thus leading to the denial of their contribution to agricultural production and to the household.

Meanwhile, lots of specific research on current rural women is given to the left-behind women, including (1) the causes for such group of people, represented by F. Wang (2007) and Kang (2008). From institutional and traditional aspects and using gender division, the former explained the formation of left-behind women phenomenon; the latter argued more physical capabilities of women; (2) the challenges and difficulties left-behind women facing and solutions to helping them through case studies [23]; (3) the contributions that left-behind women made towards the development of rural areas (Ye 2009); (4) on specific questions, such as children's education, social support network, personal development and rights-safeguarding [34]. Liang, Tang, & Huo (2014) focused their study on left-behind women's happiness and factors influencing it, finding that the financial situation, personality, government efficiency, conjugal relationship and relationship with in-laws are significant factors influencing the happiness of left-behind women.

2.2. Rural women, land and land circulation policy

Gender bias was explicit in the implementation of both policies in the village between 1980 and the mid-1990s. Since that time, explicit gender bias has been reduced and policies have stressed market incentives more, reflecting China's modernization goals and accession to the WTO. Yet the policies are not gender neutral in their implementation, effects, and interactions. Women remain the target of the eased population policy, and they are more likely to become "landless" at marriage, divorce and widowhood [17]. The policies work together to reinforce traditional and emerging forms of gender bias, though at times they offset each other. They impact women's bargaining power within the home, status in the community, and social security. Together they provide a richer view of the gendered experience of living in the village [1].

Judd (2007), using field evidence from three upland agricultural communities in Chongqing and Sichuan (studied in 2003, 2004 and 2005), examined local conceptions, responses, and practices regarding land-use rights under “No Change for thirty years”, where land allocations were fixed in 1995, 1999 and 2001 respectively. The ethnographic findings are further explored in relation to contemporary research on gender and land rights. The new regime, which has gradually come into effect as previous (usually fifteen-year) terms expired, authorizes an adjustment in land allocation which is then normally frozen for thirty years. Nowadays the land tenure policy not only exclude young people from direct access to land for long and ever from birth, but the separation of the majority of women who marry or remarry to their husbands’ villages from their own allocated land, thus for a while a growing number of women experience loss of contract land coincident with marrying, and this trend may be expected to increase [13].

Meanwhile, to deal with the out-of-date small-scale farming, land circulation was advocated and encouraged by the Chinese central government. Wang (2010) defined rural land circulation as a market behavior to transfer or transact the use right of agricultural land without changes in usage within an effective contracting period. Land transfer/circulation can enable capable farming households in the countryside to gain access to additional land thus increasing their operational farm size and their income. The land lease market is regarded as an efficient way to bring about efficient resource allocation (Binswanger and Deininger 1995; Carter, Fletcher, and Olinto 1996). But in reality, it is still at its initial stage in China, as only 3.4 hundred million mu of family contracted land are transferred, and the transfer ratio is only 26% (MOA, 2014-04-03).

Wang Le & Xianli (2012) put together the three prevalent models of land transfer in China together and made a comparison of the main features of (See Table 1), and also the comparison of the practical operation of them, concluded that of the three, land bank with its fixed income and minimized risk, meet the characteristics of the western regions of China.

2.3. Summary: The uniqueness of the current study

From the perspectives of labour supply, productivity and income, Brauw et al. (2008), claimed Chinese agriculture is not feminized, but more and more women are taking farming performance in the vast countryside in PRC, and an extensive body of literature on feminization in Chinese agriculture is available [4, 5, 25], and most of them is simply a factual description of the rural economic situation. As China transitions out

TABLE 1: The Comparison of Main features of the Three Modes of Land Transfer.

Mode	Business Content	Function as	Interest distribution	Risk Management
Land Bank	Farmers voluntary their deposit land, lending together to business entities	A platform to provide land transfer services about land deposit and lending	To deposit, get interested, and loaning land needs to pay rent	Arbitration institutions, agricultural insurance
land circulation trusts	Agricultural land is entrusted to the trustees, and the trustees operate and manage them unified and legally	The land circulation intermediary platform for providing trust services	after deducting operating expenses, the rest earnings belongs to the Principal	Credit guarantees, legal protection
joint-stock cooperatives	Agricultural land as production shares, stock cooperative conduct enterprise management	joint-stock agricultural production enterprises	share dividend	Share interest and risks

Source: Wang Le & Xianli (2012)

of a traditional agricultural nation, a key question is whether some groups are being held back in farm work, which could limit their social and economic mobility [21].

Accompanying China’s economic reforms, land reform, unprecedented migration, fast urbanization, and gradual Hukou reform, great changes have taken place over the past three decades, few researchers have done study on rural women, the mainstay and main force of China’s agricultural sector nowadays. To date, there have been a handful of English-language studies examining the situation of rural Chinese women [5, 18, 20, 21], but no one has tried his/her study on rural women’s situation in areas at different development stages, especially under the most recent impact of State land reform, and the difference of rural women’s situation with a leading industry or without.

In addition, previous study has a tendency of either only focusing on left-behind farm women or on simply those migrant women [11, 18, 18, 28, 36], thus lack a complete picture of them as a whole. This study studies the challenges facing rural women either engaging in farming or off-farm activities, rural women’s understanding and attitude towards the State’s ongoing land circulation policy, and investigates their current situation with the impact of the on-going land transfer so as to find ways to assist them to be involved in income generating activities and getting the maximum from development.

3. Methodology and Data collection

3.1. Research methods

We undertook a survey of 356 rural women, including 255 rural women engaging in farming (86 in Ningqiang, 96 in Yangling and 76 in Mei County respectively) and the remaining 101 rural women in off-farm employment. The data about rural women engaging in farming are drawn from Ningqiang County, Mei County, and Yangling Agricultural Hi-tech Demonstration Zone in Shaanxi, during the calendar year 2015. Villages in these three sub-provincial prefectures reflect the diverse patterns of rural development in Shaanxi. The questionnaire collected including detailed demographic information about each household member, gender, age, education attainment, and marital status. And their original distributed land, current actual cultivating land, how comes it, any family members work in the official working unit. We also looked at their challenges in farming, and whether they have access to agricultural technical extension.

3.2. Reasons for choosing Shaanxi and the three specific survey areas

Shaanxi is called "Qin" or "Shaan" for short, is the natural hub connecting the northwest and southwest of China. With China's economic development strategic focus has gradually shifted from east to west, Shaanxi plays an important position as it connects the east and the west of China. Shaanxi has arable land of 59,820,000 mu with per capita 2.5 mu. In 2012, of the 45,723,000 mu provincial rural household contracted arable land, 4,561,000 mu achieved transfer, accounting for 10% of total household contract area. In recent years, the speed and scale of land transfer in Shaanxi province are accelerated and enlarged. In 2012, the province's land transfer rate for the proportion of household contract management area, comparing to that in 2009, increased 4.3 percentage points. More than 94 percent of the counties in the province have established a land Arbitration Commission to stabilize the rural land contract relations (Shaanxi, 2013/10/18).

However, comparing to the developed regions in the east of China, land transfer rate in Shaanxi province is still low. Till 2014, the rural land transfer rate in Shaanxi Province was 11.8%, not only lower than the 40% transfer rate in the eastern coastal regions, but also lower than the national average of 21.7%. (X. Wang, 2014). An insight from Gao et al. (2012) notes that Zhejiang province, the province with the richest rural economy

and one of the most active off-farm labor employment markets, early in 2008, has more than 40% of the cultivated land being rented in. Hubei increased rentals from 5% to 20% between 2000 and 2008, Sichuan from 2% to 14%, and Hebei from 7% to 12%. Shaanxi provinces have been relatively stagnant in the growth of cultivated land rental markets (Khantachavana, Yurvey, Kong, & Xia, 2013).

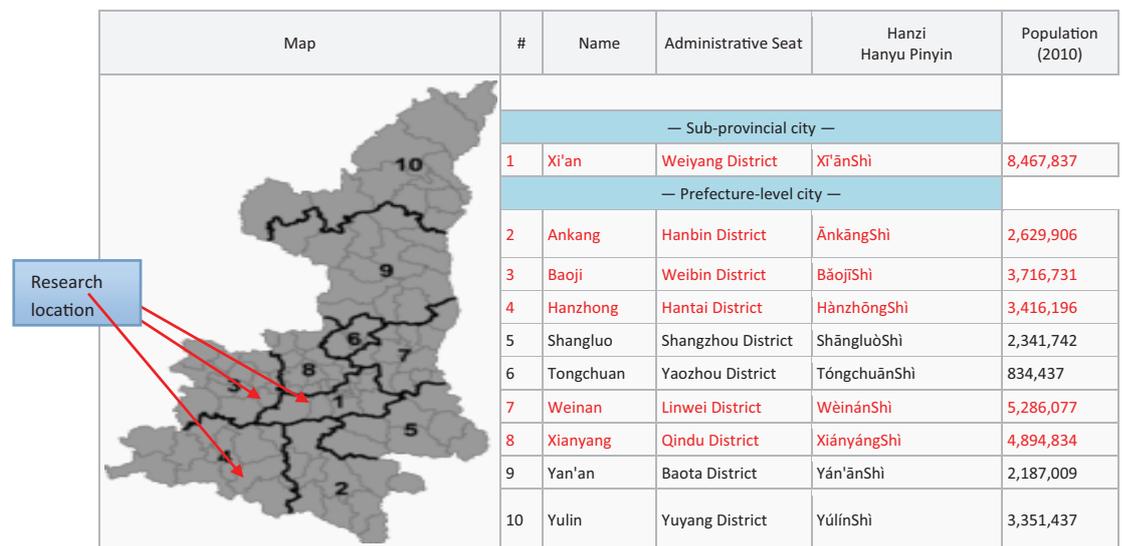


Figure 1: Shaanxi Consists of Nine Prefecture-Level Cities and One Sub-Provincial.

In 2015, Shaanxi ranks as the No. 15th in terms of GDP among the 31 provinces in China. From a total of 107 counties Ninaqiang rank at No. 80th, Mei County at 49th, and Yangling at 53rd in Shaanxi province. As a major agricultural province, the total number of its poverty-stricken counties in Shaanxi ranked the second in the whole country with 50 counties classified as national poverty counties with their per capita annual income was less than 1,300 yuan (Poverty Alleviation Office, 2012). The reason to choose these three regions is because they can relatively reflect rural woman’s situation in Shaanxi, and the northwest of China more broadly.

Although Yangling ranks a little bit backward in GDP to Mei County, as the birth-place of Chinese agricultural civilization and a national-level hi-tech development zone approved by State Council in 1997, it is directly administered by the Shaanxi Province and 23 Central ministries. It enjoys various kinds of preferential policies for high-tech industrial development zone and the western development. 82 km away to Xi’an (capital city of Shaanxi Province) in the east and 86 km distant to Baoji (the second largest city in Shaanxi) in the west, Yangling located on the plains of Wei River. In the past, the majority of crops there are corn and wheat double-cropped each year, the emergence

of kiwi in recent years has been due to the extension services sponsored by government programs and special credit programs leading to a dynamic and observable change to the rural landscape (Khantachavana et al., 2013).

In addition, since 2009, the Ministry of Construction Management is piloting the non-profit Yangling Land Bank to serve as a mechanism for the smooth transition of land transfers. The Bank negotiates with individual farm households to create an inventory of land, and then matches this inventory to other farmers seeking to expand; agricultural enterprises looking to modernize or other commercial interests (Khantachavana et al., 2013; [32]). As a saying goes 'For the development of modern agriculture in China, go and have a look at it in Yangling'. In recent years, mainly launched by the local government, land bank is carried out widely, plus the fast pace of urbanization, lots of land in local villages are expropriated. Thus most of the rural women in Yangling either have no land or have only a small piece left, and they need to figure out ways to adapt to the new situation, we have every reason to choose it as a research site and see the impact on local rural women.

The survey covering all the five townships in Yangling, specifically was carried out through 12 local rural women representative cadres from 12 villages in Yangling, with five of the villages having land bank operation and three where land was either all or partially expropriated by the government. Land in the remaining villages all have different degrees of leasing or transfer. Two sets of questionnaires have been developed for primary data collection. The first set targets at village heads to draw basic information relevant to the topic of rural women; another set is designed for rural women in farming and off-farming activities respectively.

Mei County is under the jurisdiction of Baoji prefecture. As a national kiwi standardized production demonstration area, the county has 270,000 mu planted kiwi, and acquired kiwi National Geographic logo certification issued by the Ministry of Agriculture. Mei County has won the "China top ten counties of standardization of fruit and vegetables", and also the honorary title of "Chinese Kiwi Technology Demonstration County", and "the provincial advanced fruit industry county." On August 9, 2014, Shaanxi Provincial People's Government approved setting up a provincial Economic Development Zone at Mei County entitling it to relevant preferential treatment.

With mature leading fruit industry, Mei County already has some characteristic of modern agriculture, and the rural woman there are busy with farming. However at the specific research site, Huaixi village, although it has an individual-invested, individual-owned agricultural company, Baoji Huaixiang Fruit Industry Company, registered in

August 2013, only 28 households joined the company, land transfer was fairly developed. Land ownership confirmation has been completed, but land certificate has not been issued to individual farmers, which is expected to put in place in 2016. The average household has 2-3 mu of strawberries, together with a few of them reach 7-8 mu.

The specific survey site in this research is at Huaixi village in Huaiya town. Huaiya town located in the east of Mei County, with state road 310 (south-west line) and the Haiya to Tangyu high-speed road directly pass it through connecting north and south, so it has good transportation, the land there is in flat terrain form. Like the county, villagers at Huaixi have strawberry and kiwi fruit as its leading industry. The transportation for the villagers is very convenient, and market is set right at the roadside, and thus it is convenient for villagers and businessmen to make transactions. Due to the low agricultural income, most men work outside of the village, and the whole process of strawberries from seed planting to strawberry collection is mainly operated by female villagers. It took two trips for the researchers to get the data there, and altogether 76 questionnaires collected are valid.

In contrast, lying in the west south mountainous area of Hanzhong prefecture, Ningqiang County has lower average income for its local residents, and is one of the national level poverty counties. It has neither land transfer nor a mature leading industry, and represents China's traditional backward farming pattern. However, the land size for local rural households also experienced great change, due to the State policy of Returning Farmland to Forest launched in 1999 and still working. Unlike the land bank in Yangling, farmers get subsidy by reducing farming size in the west aiming at improving the ecological conditions, stopping soil erosion and desertification. One of the largest impacts of *Returning Farmland to Forest policy* is that it stimulates local surplus rural labour to do non-farming transition, in other words, engaging in migrant work in other provinces. So rural women in Ningqiang, as long as conditions permit, will go outside of their hometown as migrant workers to make a living. About 57% of the populace in the villages goes out to do migrant work.

The survey was done from 13th to 17th January, 2016, about 20 days before its spring festival. As people lived scattered in a mountainous area, and the majority of local people are migrate to other provinces to engage in off-farm economic activities, so it took eight of us two days only to get 86 respondents with one invalid. Among them, 25 were answered by migrant workers who just came back either because of no work at the moment due to the cold weather, or due to their health issue, or the spring festival. In addition, there are 8 respondents whose age passed 66, and the oldest respondent

reaches the age of 78. But because of the hard life, most of them still manage to do some farming to make a living.

4. Results and Findings

This section results from the survey taken in the three areas regarding the comparison and contrast of rural women’s age, marital status, education obtainment, social connection, left behind women ratio, the impact of land situation on them, challenges in farming and their attendance in technical training.

4.1. Results from the survey

4.1.1. Rural women’s marital status and age in the three research sites

The marital status for rural women is consistent in the three regions. The majority of the respondents are all married rural women with the percentage of 88.2% in Ningqiang County, 93.4% in Mei County and 95.8% in Yangling respectively. Around 5% respondents are widow, and very low percentage, might be around two percentage of single in rural area. The data further accords to the fact that the current rural area is mainly occupied by married women. Of all the 256 respondents engaging in farming, there is only one divorced woman, who is in the respondents in Ningqiang.

TABLE 2: Respondents’ Marital status.

Marital status	In Ningqiang		In Mei County		In Yangling	
	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
single	2	2.4	0	0	1	1.1
married	75	88.2	71	93.4	91	95.8
divorced	1	1.2	0	0	0	0
widow	7	8.2	5	6.6	3	3.2
Total	85	100.0	76	100	95	100
Missing	1		0		1	

The age distribution of respondents has similar characteristics in three regions: with most of them are at forty-one to fifty years old. Both in Ningqiang and Yangling, the age group took up 46.9% of the respondents, in Mei County, 56.6%. The second largest age group in rural women is from 51 to 60 years old, taking up around one fifth of them. Respondents in Ningqiang and Yangling above the age of sixty-one although got the

same percentage 18.5%. For one thing, it reflects, besides rural women, another left-behind issue in rural China, the aging issue in farming. With a closer look at the data, we can find that the ageing issue in Ningqiang is much serious.

TABLE 3: Respondent's age.

Respondent's age range		In Ningqiang		In Mei County		In Yangling	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	=<30	3	3.7	3	3.9	3	3.7
	31-40	9	11.1	6	7.9	9	11.1
	41-50	38	46.9	43	56.6	38	46.9
	51-60	16	19.8	16	21.1	16	19.8
	=>61	15	18.5	8	10.5	15	18.5
	Total	81	100.0	76	100.0	81	100.0
Missing	System	5		29		5	
Total		86		105		86	

As maintained before, while the research team doing the survey in Ningqiang, the rural women we encountered are mostly the elder at their seventies, or disabled, not suitable to be included in the survey. Later on with some efforts to avoid it, we got eighty six respondents. However 25 of the respondents turned out as migrant workers who came back home at the time either because of no work at the time, health issue or for the spring festival. Among them, 21 went out in the form of couple, leaving their land to their parents or relatives; two of them not only the couple, but also their elder daughters all went out. But the couple normally work on construction sites in the northwest province, their daughters to the south China and work in a factory or shop, leaving their younger teenager child studying in the middle school in the county capital, and the 76 years old grandfather or the in laws at home taking care of the household and the land. The last two were the women in the household went out, leaving their old and sick husbands farming at home.

In addition, of the 25 migrant worker rural women respondents in Ningqiang, two of them are under thirty, three of them are between thirty to forty years old, and the rest twenty are all between 41 to 50 years old group. So the actual age range for the respondents engaging in farming in Ningqiang turned out to be the following table: In this adjusted new table, rural women age above 51 took up 55.4% of the whole and become the major group engaging in farming. As to the age group 41 to 50 years old taken up 32.1%, drop to the second large group, and those under forty only took up 12.5%.

TABLE 4: Adjusted age range for the respondents' solely engaging in farming in Ningqiang.

Age range for the respondents' engaging in farming		In Ningqiang	
		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	=<30	1	1.8
	31-40	6	10.7
	41-50	18	32.1
	51-60	16	28.6
	=>61	15	26.8
	Total	56	100.0
Missing	System	5	
Total		61	

The oldest respondent in Mei County and in Yangling is sixty-nine years old and sixty-five years old respectively, while the respondents in Ningqiang are comparatively much older. Eight of the respondents in Niangqiang are older than sixty six years old, and the oldest one among them is 78 years old, and her husband is 83 years old, who still have to do some farming to make a living. So rural women in the three regions present some same characteristic: mainly above forty years old, however, the poorer the region, the aging farming situation is more serious: with less opportunity of making money locally, and the low return of farming, rural women at their 40s and 50s in Ningqiang still go out of their hometown to find some off-farm employment to support their family.

4.1.2. Rural women's educational obtainment and social connection, understanding of land reform in the three areas

Of the three research area, rural women in Ningqiang have the lowest educational obtainment, those in Mei County ranks the middle, and Yangling, the best of the three. The illiteracy rate among rural women in Ningqiang reaches as high as 20.5%. 7.2 % only have one to three years of primary education and 42.2% has roughly primary education. In sum, about 67.9% rural women in Ningqiang are either illiterate or have less than primary schooling, and 26.5% has obtained middle school education. In Mei County, it turns better, but the illiteracy rate is still 7.9%. Around one fifth (17.1%) of the respondents in Mei County only possess one to three years of primary schooling, 10% higher than that in Ningqiang County. Altogether 35.5% respondents in Mei County are illiterate or have less than primary schooling, 44.7% possess middle school education. However, In Yangling, only one respondent is illiterate. In contrast to Ningqiang and Mei

County, no respondent in Yangling has less than one to three years of education. The majority respondents in Ningqiang, 42.2%, have four to six years of primary school education, meanwhile only 26.5% have middle school education and only 3.5% have high school education. Furthermore, there is no one obtains higher education among the rural women in Ningqiang. While in Mei County, the majority rural women, 44.7% got middle school education, with 18.4% received high school education and one person has higher education.

In contrast to the other two areas, rural women in Yangling have received much better education. Respondents either possessing middle school education or high school education takes up the same valid percentage 39.1% respectively. In other words, rural women only possessing primary schooling accounts to less than one fifth in Yangling. Furthermore, there are even 3.3% rural women in Yangling received higher education. The reason for rural women's higher educational obtainment in Yangling is most likely due to Yangling's specific location: With a small area of 94 square kilometers, the birthplace of Chinese agriculture, there are seven teaching and scientific research institutions in Yangling (The seven teaching and scientific research institutions in Yangling are Northwest Agricultural University, Northwest Forestry College, Institute of Soil and Water Conservation, Northwest Institute of Water Resources Science, Shaanxi Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Shaanxi Provincial Academy of Forestry, and Northwest Institute of Botany. In 1997, the seven merged and became today's Northwest A & F University), which, for decades, has a strong impact on local people's notion about education.

TABLE 5: Respondent's education obtainment.

Years of education	In Ningqiang		In Mei County		In Yangling	
	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
0	17	20.5	6	7.9	1	1.1
1-3 years	6	7.2	13	17.1	0	0
4-6 years	35	42.2	8	10.5	16	17.4
7-9 years	22	26.5	34	44.7	36	39.1
10-12 years	3	3.6	14	18.4	36	39.1
=>13 years	0	0	1	1.3	3	3.3
Total	83	100	76	100.0	92	100.0
Missing	3		0		4	
Total	86		76		96	

The results of left-behind women ratio in the three regions is a little bit surprise (See Table 6). The rate is very close in Ningqiang and Yangling, to be exact, 36.1%

and 37.9% respectively. The two research sites are in sharp contrast regarding their natural condition and rural economy, but due to the State different land policy and purpose, which reached the same effect on local people's migration decision: Local male farmers in the two research sites all chose to go out of their rural hometown by off-farm employment usually in the same field construction sites. The left behind rural women ratio in Huaixi village, Mei County is about sixteen percent lower than the other two regions. This is probably because it has its leading industry, strawberry. Local farmers can make some money through that cash crop and do not necessarily need to leave their soil to find something else to make money.

TABLE 6: Ratio of rural women as left behind in three areas.

Are you a left behind woman?		In Ningqiang		In Mei County		In Yangling	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	yes	22	36.1	13	20.3	36	37.9
	no	39	63.9	51	79.7	59	62.1
	Total	61	100.0	64	100.0	95	100.0
Missing	System	11		21		1	
Total		86		86		96	

Social connection reflects the human capital of social resources of a rural household. In China, a society put a great weight on *Guanxi*, have household members working in official branches has many implications, such as they may have special channel to get some key information, and thus take advantage of it. As to the household social connection, 85.5% households in Ningqiang has no one work in the official working unit, 14.5% households has one member working in official work branch. In Mei County, although still the majority households 76.6% has no one work in the official branch, but the figure drops and situation tends to be better. 17.2% has one person working in the official branch. In contrast to no households has two or even above two members working in the official branch in Ningqiang, 6.3% households in Mei County have.

Unlike that in Ningqiang and Mei County, the majority households in Yangling, 51.6%, has at least one member working in the official branch, and 18.8% households in Yangling have two or more than two household members working in the official branch, and in contrast, no one in the household work in the official branch becomes minority, only took up 29.5%.

TABLE 7: The social connection of rural households in the three areas.

Any person in the household work in the government unit?	In Ningqiang		In Mei County		In Yangling	
	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
No one	65	85.5	49	76.6	28	29.5
One person	11	14.5	11	17.2	49	51.6
Two persons	0	0	1	1.6	16	16.8
More than two	0	0	3	4.7	2	2.1
Total	76		85		95	
Missing	10				1	

4.1.3. Rural women’s understanding of national land policy, challenge in farming and agricultural technical training attendance

Chinese government has been advocating its land reform for years. Rural women, at the front layer of agriculture, winning their understanding and support is critical to whether it can achieve satisfactory result or not. However, the survey shows that 57.3% rural women in Ningqiang chose don’t understand or know much about the State’s land policy, and 24% even disapprove it. Although it might be partly because of aging and low literacy issue exposed in our study, government at all levels still needs to pay attention to the phenomenon. Strengthen its policy spreading in remote area with approach that local people can easily accept.

Meanwhile, the majority of rural women both in Mei County and Yangling express that they support the State’s land reform policy, and even speak out the reasons are that it does well for moderate-scale farming and release surplus labour from land. This proves that rural women in the two regions have a good understanding of the national land policy.

Currently women are the main labour force in rural area, whether they have challenges in farming and received the technology they need is a question worth to explore. While 74.7% rural women expressed they had challenges in farming in Ningqiang, only 10.3% of them said they attended some agricultural technical training. The same thing happened in Mei County: few rural women, 15.9%, claimed that they attended agricultural technical training, yet highly to 82.9% said they encountered difficulties in farming.

What is more interesting is that the survey results of rural women’s agricultural technical training attendance in Mei County went against the village cadres words. Based on the descriptions of the village leaders in Huaixi, plenty of technical training

TABLE 8: Rural women’s attitude toward State’s land policy in three areas.

Rural women’s attitude toward State’s land policy		In Ningqiang		In Mei County		In Yangling	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	don’t understand	43	57.3	12	15.8	10	11.2
	don’t care	3	4.0	10	13.2	13	14.6
	support	11	14.7	43	56.6	50	56.2
	disapprove	18	24.0	11	14.5	16	18.0
	Total	75	100.0	76	100.0	89	100.0
Missing	System	11		29		7	
Total		86		105		96	

was held in the year. In spring, training was on the introduction of new varieties, usage of fertilizer, and ways of irrigation. In winter it was on soil treatment, handling with virus damage, organic fertilizer and manure. Villagers at the village know very well the benefits of scientific farming and showed great interest in participating training. Each time, when there was training, villagers would sit crowdedly in the training venue and it always turned out not enough seats for attendants.

TABLE 9: Rural women’s farming challenge in three areas.

Any challenge in farming?		In Ningqiang		In Mei County		In Yangling	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	yes	59	74.7	58	82.9	39	41.9
	no	20	25.3	12	17.1	54	58.1
	Total	79	100.0	70	100.0	93	100.0
Missing	System	7		35		3	
Total		86		105		96	

As to why rural women did not participate technical training, 63.1% rural women in Mei County select either no one organized or they did not know where the training was. When asked how they solve their farming problems, 42% of rural women respondents in Mei County select stuck in it and had no way out; 33.3% respondents said they would solve the problem through working longer hours, seek advice from experienced ones, find answers on TV, or simply transfer land to others. Two of the respondents answered they would just take care of the house chore and the kids, and let it be. Only one of the respondents has the awareness to ask government for help. The answer shows rural women and farming marginalized status: the trainings carried out did not really reach

to the ordinary in need rural women, and they are still used to rely on themselves to solve problems.

TABLE 10: Rural women’s agricultural technical training attendance in three research sites.

Have you ever attended technique training		In Ningqiang		In Mei County		In Yangling	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	yes	8	10.3	11	15.9	37	44.0
	no	70	89.7	58	84.1	47	56.0
Total		78	100.0	69	100.0	84	
Missing	System	8		7		12	
Total		86		76		96	

4.1.4. Rural women’s plan for future in the three areas

The question about rural women’s plan in the near future is mainly to seek the difference of their sustainable development. 41.9 % rural women in Ningqiang said they did not have plan for future. It is most likely because of their remote mountainous natural condition, their old age and health issue, etc. and human being becomes kind of passive in front of such factors, besides 32.3% rural women there chose farming, which equals to keep on doing what they are doing now. Although 24.2% rural women in Ningqiang showed their interest to run a business and make money, most of them added that they were lack of fund for business and thus hard to fulfil. In short, rural women in Ningqiang cannot much have possibility of sustainable development, without the outside intervention.

TABLE 11: Rural women’s plan for future in three research sites.

Plan for future		In Ningqiang		In Mei County		In Yangling	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	no specific plan	26	41.9	17	23.9	15	15.5
	farming	20	32.3	38	53.5	20	36.8
	off-farm work	1	1.6	4	5.6	34	72.6
	start and run a business	15	24.2	12	11.4	26	100.0
Total		62	100.0	73	100	95	
Missing	System	24		3		1	
Total		86					

The answer from rural women in Mei County to the question consistently (53.5%) shows their enthusiasm in farming. It is not surprised, because the strawberry in the village has already has scale with good profit. Rural women are willing to rely on it. 23.9% rural women said they have no plan: one third of them are satisfied with their current situation, no plan means they keep moving on their current life; One third expressed that they are afraid of failure if they try something new, to be more specific, they are conservative. The last third is because of age issue and low literacy.

The same question answered by rural women in Yangling illustrates that as high as 72.6% chose to engaging in off-farm employment, due to their specific strategic location, they have not much land left due to national policy and the fast process of urbanization, what they hear and see daily is not restricted to farming anymore, and they even do not like farming because its' low return and labour demanding. But the challenge they are facing is that how to upgrade their current situation concentrated in repeated and lack of skill-content service industry. Another finding worth to notice is that 15.5% respondents in Yangling selected nothing. Among them, some of them live a care free life: neither that young nor that old, their daily life only consists of doing some light necessary house chore and then eating and idling around. In the local transition from farming to non-farming process, it seems that relying on the thin rent, they are not much bothered by their unemployed situation, and even satisfied with it. But when asked the deep reason, with no skills to meet the outside challenge, it is better for them to accept reality and rely on their husbands and family members, and enjoying life.

In short, of the three areas, rural women in Mei County have a very clear plan in life. They want to keep on engaging farming, make money and make life better. Yangling women have little interest in farming, and want to make money from off-farm work. What Yangling rural women really need are good trainings assisting them to learn skills and blend them in modern society. Rural women in Ningqiang have many constraints. From personal perspective, their low educational obtainment is their biggest limitation. Plus the remote location and aging farming, government at various levels or social forces need to give them special attention and fund to help them.

5. Conclusion and Policy Implications

Currently, even with the same identity, rural women are in quite different situations and have diversified needs, which are mainly impacted by their geographic location, government land policy, their age and educational obtainment. General speaking,

although currently as the main body and main force in farming, rural women did not get deserved attention. They still have to solve problems by themselves, which is not only time-consuming but also inefficient. It also does harm for the national modern agricultural development.

Besides, rural women's economic participation presents regional characteristics and is greatly impacted by the national land policy. For instance, although rural women in Yangling and Ningqiang all prefer to do off-farm employment, for women in Yangling, it is due to the national fast pace of urbanization and local government push of land transfer policy. In the surface, they have no land, thus get rid of its constraint and can actively engage in off-farm employment. However, their mind-set is still lingering on extensive farming, and don't have the up to date knowledge and skill for them to be involved in the market economy, that is why only those have enterprises nearby the village can find off-farm jobs, for most of them that don't have the privilege, they can only accept the reality, and do nothing, thus staying idle. As for Ningqiang, due to the bad remote geographical situation and low return in farming, rural women have no option but go out of Ningqiang and the province, to find off-farm employment opportunities. What's worse, their low literacy rate made them have not many choices, and results them in working physically on the construction sites. After around years of tedious demanding physical work, they just could not settle down and have to come back with various kinds of physical problems.

So for rural women in Yangling, the government needs to intervene at this critical moment to make their transition from agricultural to nonagricultural more smoothly. Such as creating employment opportunities, make some in time well-designed training that really meets rural women's needs. It is true rural women's needs are diversified, not easy to unify, but given the benefit of the training, it still worth to give it every try. In fact, rural women in farming center around the age group from 40s to 60s years old, most of their kids have grown up, they do not have many restrictions from family, if the State can make use it and turn the disadvantage into advantage, they can turn out to be very good human capital for the national development. For rural women in Ningqiang, the government also needs to issue specific policy and fund to support them.

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