

EMPLOYMENT IMPLICATIONS OF OFF-FARM ACTIVITIES IN WEIZHOU

As with everywhere else in China, Weizhou farmers also have a problem of underemployment. The average arable land per capita is low. In a family of five persons, with three persons in the economically-active age group, only half of the labour time is reported to be sufficient for cultivating farmland. In other words, in such families, about half of the total labour force is available for off-farm activities.

Presently, a large proportion of the farmers in Weizhou are already engaged in various off-farm activities. Taking only full-time labour into account, around 13 per cent of the total labour force are engaged in Type I activities, 8.4 per cent in Type II businesses, and 75-85 per cent part-time in Type III activities.

It is estimated that off-farm activities absorb about 40 per cent of the total rural labour force in Weizhou. About 35 per cent of the labour time is devoted to agricultural cropping activities and about 25 per cent of the labour force are estimated to be on the look out for additional off-farm jobs. The pressure for the creation of gainful employment is to a large extent relieved by existing off-farm activities.

The actual records for annual distribution of labour days in Type I and Type III activities for two families, the Wang and the Zhou, are elaborated in Table 7. This presents a clear picture of the situation of underemployment and the role of off-farm activities in relieving the problem.

Wang works in a firm for about 105 working days. He is also a farmer and spends about 60 days (17 per cent of his time) in farm-related activities. He has some land devoted to apple and S-pepper production. This involves about 10 per cent of his time. In spite of looking after three activities, 158 out of 360 days in a year remain free for Wang. Zhou's major activity is farming. This however involves 122 days. About 70 days are devoted to fruit-farming and to S-pepper activities. A total of 169 days remain free for Zhou. The case of Wang and Zhou is representative of typical cases of employment in different activities in Weizhou township.

Backgrounds of Persons Engaged in Off-farm Activities

What is the background of persons engaged in off-farm activities? An attempt was made to find an answer to this question in the Binli sample survey which covered 20 households with 69 economically-active persons.

Table 8 presents the educational background of persons engaged in off-farm work. Out of the 69 persons, 55 were engaged in Type III activities and nine and five persons respectively had Type II and I jobs. The one with the highest education ran a family business while, out of the 55 persons engaged in Type III (agriculture-related, off-farm work) activities, 40 persons had six or less years of schooling. Almost 50 per cent of these were illiterate. In contrast all those in Type II businesses had six or more years of schooling. A better educational background contributes to the ability for creating off-farm work.

In terms of training, five of the nine persons in Type II activities had one or the other types of training, while only six of the 55 persons engaged in Type III activities had such training. Training enhances one's prospects of establishing an off-farm activity.

Table 7. Distribution of Annual Labour Days for Two Farmers in Binli Village

Month	Wang [Days]				Zhou [Days]		
	Farm	Type I	Type III	Free	Farm	Type III	Free
1	11	5	4	10	10	10	10
2	3	0	0	27	5	6	19
3	5	5	10	10	14	2	14
4	4	15	0	11	10	10	10
5	3	17	0	10	14	2	14
6	5	12	5	8	15	5	10
7	4	10	8	8	11	5	14
8	0	12	5	13	5	15	10
9	7	15	0	8	18	2	10
10	6	9	0	15	12	3	15
11	5	5	5	15	8	7	15
12	7	0	0	23	0	2	28
Total	60	105	37	158	122	69	169

Table 8 : Educational Background of Off-Farm Workers

Types of Job	No. of Persons	Illiterate	Years in School		
			Elementary School	Junior School	Senior School
I	5	0	3	2	0
II	9	0	3	5	1
III	55	19	21	15	0
Total	69	19	27	22	1

Prior employment experience is also an important variable. Four of the five persons in Type I and all nine in Type II activities had previous employment experience in development-related or party-related activities. Only nine of the 55 persons in Type III activities had such experiences. Employment experiences made people more sensitive to market opportunities. Such people could also take advantage of their social contacts.

The case of Ma Yunzhong is typical. The current village head of Binli, Ma Yunzhong, used to be an electricity and agronomy technician in the village-run lime-mining activity. In 1987, while starting to produce apples and S-peppers, he purchased a milling machine and began to provide services to villagers for corn and wheat milling, charging 0.80 Rmb per *ji*. In 1990 he bought another flour milling machine to expand his milling business. The income from milling accounted for 34 per cent of his total income. Meanwhile, he still continued his job as village head and as an electricity technician. The income from these jobs accounted for 12 per cent of his total income.

There are also cases where former experience or training had not encouraged people to take up Type I or II activities. A farmer in Binli, with only one son, gave up his driving job in middle age. In order to avoid any risks, he even forbade his son to drive.

Women and Off-farm Activities

Rural economic reforms have provided rural women with a broad basis for playing a more important role in the economy. Although the employment rate and the incomes of women are relatively high in the coastal and developed areas, in most rural areas women remain mainly involved in farming activities. In Binli village almost all the women took part in farming work. Their participation in off-farm activities was in Type III activities, i.e., fruit and S-pepper production.

Women's Share in Off-farm Activities

Because heavy physical labour is required in the construction materials' industry, the proportion of female labour in Type I industries is only 15 per cent of the total. Most of the women in Type I activities worked in Shuanhe Hotel, the only Hotel in Weizhou township, where 70 per cent of the employees are female. There are no female employees in the mining business. In the basin areas, many women work part-time as vendors selling fruit and vegetables or running make-shift snack bars in the central town by taking advantage of location and traffic. Women seldom conduct similar businesses in the hilly areas. In Type III businesses, the female labour input is more than 50 per cent.

Division of Labour by Gender

Table 9 shows the division of labour by gender in Type III activities, in this case apples and S-peppers. As indicated above, a large proportion of the women is engaged in these activities. Four hundred labour days are required to take care of a 10 *mu* apple orchard and 10 *mu* of S-peppers. In the case of apples, 30 labour days are required per *mu*. Ten labour days per *mu* are needed for S-peppers.

Women were mainly involved in time-consuming activities, such as harvesting, transport, and marketing, that required few skills. While men also helped in transportation and marketing, they specialised in technical activities like pruning. Land management was also mainly carried out by men. In some families where men took full-time or part-time jobs in Type I and II activities, women had to take care of the orchards and even the marketing of apples and S-peppers. During the simultaneous harvesting of apples, S-peppers, and grain, men undertake farm activities.

Women's Income from Off-Farm Activities

If calculated on the basis of standard labour prices, the income earned by females would be higher than that earned by males, because Type III activities are the leading activities in Weizhou. Also, about two-thirds of the time devoted to animal husbandry is devoted by women. In families with only Type III activities, the contribution of female labour is much higher than the contribution of males. It may be noted that income from farming accounts for 10-30 per cent of the total income in households without Type I and Type II activities. Li's family in Binli, a couple with two children, elucidates this. They earned 2,750 Rmb in 1990, including 550 Rmb from grain sales, 20 per cent; 400 Rmb from S-pepper sales, 14.5 per cent; 1,000 Rmb from apple sales, 36.3 per cent; and 800 Rmb from livestock, 29.1 per cent. Estimated in accordance with the above-mentioned ratio, more than 51 per cent of the total income should be attributed to women's work.

Table 9. Division of Labour by Gender

(Unit: Days)

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
Ploughing	16	8	24
Irrigation	8	7	15
Ditching	20	11	31
Fertilizing	8	2	10
Pruning	30	0	30
Picking S-peppers	10	70	80
Picking Apples	30	40	70
Carrying Apples	45	55	100
Marketing	20	20	40
Total	187	213	400
Per Cent	46.8	53.2	100