

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Finding a job in urban China: A comparative analysis of migrants and natives

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Abstract: Although migration scholars have demonstrated that migrant workers behave differently from locals when looking for jobs, past research in China's urban labor market has presented puzzling results by showing that individuals (both rural migrants and urban natives alike) predominantly rely on social networks when job searching. Using data collected by a 2008 survey in Shanghai, this study nonetheless reveals significant differences between the two groups' job searching methods insofar as migrants are less likely to use hierarchy method to find jobs. I also show that while both migrants and urban natives often relied on network method when looking for employment, the pattern of such reliance decreases over time. I suggest job search methods, particular network behavior, can be viewed as strategies that individuals employ to solve problems in their specific institutional environment, and such strategies are likely to evolve in response to the changing opportunities and incentives in the corresponding institutional segments for Chinese migrants and natives.

Keywords: job search, rural-to-urban migrants, urban natives, market transition, China

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1. Introduction

“How do people find jobs?” is a classic social science research question. This question yields particularly interesting answers in the context of urban China, not only because of China's rapidly developing labor market in its fast-paced market transition, but also because of the sharp contrast between rural-to-urban migrants and urban natives who have been segregated from each other spatially, socially, and occupationally (Guo & Iredale, 2004). Before the late 1970s in China, job markets were virtually non-existent. The mandatory household registration system (*hukou*) divided people into two categories based on place of birth and parental *hukou* status, namely rural or agricultural and urban or non-agricultural residents (Wu and Treiman, 2004). The Chinese government exerted tight limits over labor and residential movement (Wang, Zuo and Ruan, 2002). Urban residents rarely sought employment on their own, and most had their jobs assigned by the state. People with rural *hukou*, on the other hand, were prohibited from living in urban areas (Chan and Buckingham, 2008). Job searching has only become a practical issue since the early 1980s, when rural and economic reforms accompanied a large-scale rural-to-urban migration that

has brought millions of job-seeking rural migrants to cities. For many urban residents, searching for jobs has also become increasingly important when the state employment system began to shrink and the state-owned enterprises underwent reconstruction and spawned massive lay-offs during the 1990s (Solinger, 1999).

Migrants, both international and internal, tend to utilize different methods to find jobs from non-migrants (Wilson and Portes, 1980; Bailey and Waldinger, 1991). Because migrants usually have less access to formal resources helpful for job-hunting, they tend to rely on personal networks as relatively inexpensive and reliable sources for job information (Aguilera and Massey, 2003). An intriguing feature for the Chinese case, however, seems to be a predominant reliance on social networks for *both* rural-to-urban migrants and urban natives when they seek jobs (Bian, 1997; Bian and Huang, 2009). This convergence in the reliance on social networks for job searches between the two groups, however, has yet to be adequately examined by current research. Evidence supporting the important role of social networks on job searches comes from either research focusing on rural migrants solely or from studies based on urban natives exclusively (Bian, 1997; Roberts, 2001). Those few exceptions (Fan, 2002; Zhang, 2010; Bian and Huang, 2009) that did compare rural migrants and urban natives also used older data from the 1990s, and the findings were inconsistent.

This paper seeks to fill the gap in the existing literature by comparing the job search patterns of rural migrants with those of urban natives using survey data collected in 2008 in Shanghai, China. This analysis is particularly important considering the rapid pace of China's economic and social transformation. While most researchers agree that social networks generate valuable resources that have helped people overcome institutional constraints and find employment (Lin, 2003; Chang, Wen and Wang, 2011), we still know little about how the dramatic market growth and institutional changes in the past fifteen years have influenced the ways people find jobs in China. Thus, this paper asks based upon data from 2008, do Chinese rural migrants and urban natives continue to rely on social networks when many institutional constraints have been lessened?

2. Rural-to-urban Migration and Job Markets in Urban China

China's market reforms in the past three decades have led to a booming economy accompanied by a large-scale rural-to-urban migration. Compared to internal migration in other time periods of Chinese history or in other countries, rural-to-urban migration in China is unique given the long-standing *hukou* system implemented in the late 1950s that has divided the country into rural versus urban areas as two distinct dichotomous sectors. The urban sector is more advantageous by almost all criteria. Before the economic reforms of the 1980s, rural residents were prohibited from living in cities as a resident and were denied access to well-paid, more permanent jobs as well as other state-subsidized social benefits available to urban residents, such as free housing, childcare, medical insurance, pensions, education, and food subsidies (Chan and Buckingham, 2008; Zhang, 2001). Although its regulations have become more relaxed, the *hukou* system is still in effect today and has had a long-lasting impact on job markets in China (Chang, Wen, and Wang, 2011; Chan, 2008). Most rural migrants encounter a variety of occupational restrictions and discrimination in urban areas (Fan, 2002), and typically fill jobs in cities that many urban natives find inferior and undesirable (Roberts, 2001; Li, Stanton, Fang *et al.*, 2006). Urban natives, by contrast, are more likely to hold white-collar jobs (Meng and Zhang, 2001).

Newer evidence, however, has shown an improved economic, social, and political situation for migrant workers, as well as a shrinking urban-rural divide in the 2000s (Tang and Yang, 2008). China's recent economic boom has led to a shortage of urban labor, especially in areas such as construction and manufacturing, which not only means more job

opportunities for migrants, but also more bargaining power for migrants to seek work protection, higher wages, and better working conditions. The labor shortage has also helped change the perspectives of employers, local and central governments, and urban natives toward migrant workers (Cai, Park, and Zhao, 2008). Recent reforms have helped provide some social benefits to rural migrants and reduce their constraints on making a living in the urban areas (Chan and Buckingham, 2008). By contrast, many urban natives have lost their job security during the market transition. The state job assignment system was dismantled in the late 1990s; many inefficient state-owned enterprises that employed mainly urban natives have undergone economic restructuring and massive lay-offs since the 1990s (Solinger, 2002). As a result, a new generation of urban residents now has to pay for their own education, insurance, pension, and housing and has to look for jobs in an increasingly mature labor market, just like rural migrants (Tang and Yang, 2008). These dramatic changes due to market transition, economic development, and social transformation are likely to have affected how both migrants and urban natives find jobs in today's urban China.

3. Networks, Institutional Constraints and Job Search in Urban China

Sociologists have demonstrated the important role of social networks in job searching (Granovetter, 1995). Voluminous research has focused on the advantages of networks, particularly weak ties or acquaintances, in accessing valuable and non-redundant job information (for a review, see Lin, 1999). This “weak-ties for new information” argument, however, is challenged by evidence from China's urban job market because, firstly what seem to be most helpful in finding jobs are strong ties for both urban natives (Bian, 2008) and rural migrants (Zhang, 2001), and, secondly urban natives seem to use networks to influence job search outcomes (Bian, 1997) while rural migrants use networks to overcome information constraints when other alternative channels are limited (Wang, Zhuo, and Ruan, 2002). In the section below, I summarize how social networks benefit migrants and natives in different ways in their job searches.

3.1 Rural-to-urban Migrants: Networks, Resource Availability and Information Exchange

Research on migrants has demonstrated the important role of migrants' social networks in overcoming obstacles in migration process and in their job search and settlement when they arrive at their destinations (Portes, 1994; Korinek, Entwisle and Jampaklay, 2005). Many face language barriers, have limited resources and know little about the local labor market (Drever and Hoffmeister, 2008). When other channels are not available and the costs of obtaining information are a concern, migrants tend to rely on personal ties, especially kinship and ties to other migrants, to acquire job-related information as these channels are relatively inexpensive and readily accessible (Wang, Zhuo, and Ruan, 2002). Those who migrated earlier usually offer newcomers helpful tips on job searching (Aguilera and Massey, 2003). Many also settle in self-enclosed urban migrant enclaves where networks from the communities provide important resources from housing, finances, job information, to emotional support (Wilson and Portes, 1980).

Not surprisingly, similar to their counterparts in other regions of the world, China's rural-to-urban migrants have been found to rely on their networks when they look for jobs; they receive job tips or help from family and friends, acquire personal referrals, or work for family (Zhang, 2001). Facing a great deal of socioeconomic disadvantages, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, rural migrants were excluded from many valuable resources, including jobs that were only available to urban natives through “formal” channels or “hierarchical” methods (Wang, Zhuo, and Ruan, 2002). Without many alternatives, mi-

grants turned to their network ties.

Some recent evidence, however, has suggested important changes that may affect migrants' reliance on network methods for job searching. Firstly, the significance of the *hukou* system has gradually decreased. New laws have been established in some coastal areas, waiving fees for temporary urban residence permits and allowing migrants' children to attend in urban schools (Chan and Buckingham, 2008). The new laws, according to Cai and colleagues (2008), were implemented by the local government to eliminate obstacles for rural migrants living in cities in order to attract and retain migrant labor sufficient to support the demands in the manufacturing and construction sectors during a period of rapid economic growth. Secondly, non-personal channels such as internet cafés and digital devices have become popular among migrants to obtain job information (Cartier, Castells and Qiu, 2005). Thirdly, China's market reforms have created an increasingly powerful private sector and rising service industries, both of which generate high demands for low-skilled labor supplied by rural migrants. However, some research suggests that information about standardized, low-skilled, lower-level, non-professional, and non-managerial jobs is more likely to be advertised via market channels and less likely to be circulated via personal contacts or network channels (Marsden, 2001). While service industries often hire many rural migrants, they also rely heavily on newspapers and other media advertisements to attract a large pool of job candidates (Osberg, 1993). This contributes to a growing significance of market channels for job searches among China's rural migrants today.

In addition, limitations of migrant networks may have motivated rural migrants further to rely on market channels, rather than networks, for job searches. As Chang and colleagues (2011) have found, obtaining jobs through relatives and friends has a dampening effect on Chinese rural migrants' income and satisfaction with work conditions because only information about inferior jobs circulates in the close-knit migrant communities. Thus we should expect that **rural migrants are more likely to use market channels than networks in their job searches (Hypothesis 1.1).**

Given all the changes, however, I also want to consider a counter-argument for the resilient usage of networks over other job search methods. The reasons for such sustained reliance on personal help among Chinese individuals may be cultural, institutional, and social (Gold, Guthrie, and Wank, 2002). Some scholars suggest that instrumental use of social connections or *guanxi* is a part of behavioral patterns reflecting Chinese social norms and cultural elements that emphasize family and social groups (Hwang, 1987; Yang, 1994). In addition, the reliance on networks may be a path-dependent behavior. Chinese migrant workers may have relied on their networks to find urban employment because other alternatives were not available, yet over time, this network usage could have reinforced the social structure (e.g., stronger migrant networks), shaping their future choices and resulting in their continuous reliance on networks for job searches (Giddens, 1979). Thus I would like to test a counter-hypothesis that **rural migrants are less likely to use market channels than networks in their job searches (Hypothesis 1.2).**

3.2 Urban Natives: Networks, Uncertainty and Influence

Chinese urban natives, on the other hand, have been confronting a different set of institutional constraints in seeking employment. Although many urban natives, like rural migrants, also rely on help from their friends and family, this network behavior is motivated by different reasons. In a state socialist economy such as the pre-reform China, information and resources were scarce, non-standardized, asymmetric, and not readily available (Boisot and Child, 1996; Oberschall, 1996). Urban jobs and related information were under the control of the state, and job mobility was kept minimal to satisfy the planned economy (Walder, 1986). Although jobs were assigned by the state, many urban natives

reached out to their network contacts to gather more reliable information (Chang, 2011), and more importantly, to secure valuable resources (desired employment) by influencing the authority's decision on job allocation (Bian, 1994; 1997).

As with what has happened for rural migrants, employment circumstances for urban natives have changed as China's state socialism moves deeply into a market transition. Since the early 1990s, the state has gradually abandoned the job assignment system and stopped guaranteeing jobs for urban high school and college graduates (Tsui, 2002). As many state-owned enterprises (SOEs) laid off workers due to restructuring, many urban natives left the state and collective sectors, finding jobs in private sectors (Cai, Park, and Zhao, 2008). As with employers in the private sector, SOEs have been experiencing higher market competition, shouldering greater economic responsibilities, and having more discretion in hiring employees, resulting in a more merit-based hiring (Guthrie, 1997, 1998; Hanser, 2002). At the same time, instead of looking for jobs in specific work units, many urban young adults now search for jobs that match their specific skills and qualifications, and many have found their friends and family to be less helpful because these ties do not always connect them to those desired jobs (Hanser, 2002).

Yet some other researchers disagree, arguing that social networks should still be influential in today's urban job market in China, especially since the advancement in market transition has yet to remove all institutional constraints (Bian, 2002). Obukhova (2012) found that China's college students often used their social networks, in addition to other alternatives, since their close network contacts have strong motivation to help and thus often lead to more job offers, albeit not necessarily the best offers, for job seekers. Huang (2008) also found that urban individuals tended to use social connections to secure state-sector positions and highly-desired jobs (e.g., better paid, more secured, and reputable) and "soft-skilled" jobs in which relevant skills and responsibilities are ambiguous and hard-to-define, such as in areas of managerial, marketing, and public relations. Thus, I would like to test the following hypothesis and counter-hypothesis: **urban natives are more likely to use market channels than networks in their job searches (Hypothesis 2.1); urban natives are less likely to use market channels than networks in their job searches (Hypothesis 2.2).**

3.3 A Comparison of Migrants with Urban Natives

Many aspects of China's market reforms and urbanization affect both rural migrants and urban natives in the same direction, suggesting it is likely that job search methods for both groups, particularly the reliance on networks, are increasingly parallel to each other. Both groups have experienced the waning control of the state and the growing opportunities emergent in the market. In some ways, the two groups have become more similar to each other over time (Tang and Yang, 2008). On one hand, rural migrants on a whole have been living in the cities for about three decades, and in many aspects have become less isolated and more assimilated into the urban core (Tang & Yang, 2008). Many have formed friendships with urban natives outside their migrant communities and have benefited from these social connections (Chang, Wen, and Wang, 2011). On the other hand, the massive layoffs from the restructuring SOEs in the late 1990s and the dwindling traditional urban subsidies have dragged the once more-advantageous urban natives down, have brought the two groups closer in terms of their earnings and welfare, and have sent many urban natives to seek opportunities offered by the growing private and service sectors (Solinger, 2002). Like rural migrants, many disadvantaged urban workers learn about job information through cheap accesses of internet cafés and low-tech digital devices (Cartier, Castells and Qiu, 2005). Furthermore, for both rural migrants and urban natives, network usage for job searches has perhaps become a repertoire that consists of a set of routines or habits that

individuals enact to solve problems they are facing in the environment (Tilly, 1995). Such network practices can be quite resilient as long as it continues to produce satisfying results for individuals (Chang, 2011).

Considering these arguments and counter-arguments, I expect there are at least three possibilities for the comparison of urban natives and rural migrants in terms of their job search methods. One is that both groups see a decreased reliance on networks when they look for jobs, especially when this method is contrasted with the growing significance of market channels. The second possibility is a resilient reliance on networks for both groups' job searches in spite of the market alternatives. In either direction, I expect that the degree of reliance on networks has become similar between rural migrants and urban natives. As to the method of hierarchy, it may be another repertoire urban natives have established over the course of their past experiences and continue to enact when they look for employment, which may explain why research (Obukhova, 2012) finds college students in urban areas continuing to search for employment through their schools, even though schools no longer assign students to jobs. This argument of repertoire may also be applied to the reliance on kinship networks for migrants. Thus the possible path-dependency suggests the third possibility that urban natives are more likely to rely on hierarchy than rural migrants when they look for jobs. Specifically, I expect **(1) rural migrants and urban natives do not differ in their reliance on networks and on market channels in their job searches (Hypotheses 3.1 and 3.2). (2) For rural migrants and urban natives, there is a decreasing reliance on networks in their job searches (Hypothesis 4.1) and an increasing reliance on market channels in their job searches over time (Hypothesis 4.2).**

4. Data Sources and Methods

4.1 Data Sources

Data for this research comes from the 2008 Shanghai Health and Migration Study, jointly sponsored by Fudan University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the University of Utah. This study collected information regarding health conditions, personal and work characteristics, and job search behavior from a sample of rural-to-urban migrants as well as local urban natives in Shanghai, China. The data was collected from five districts in Shanghai with high concentrations of migrants. Four residential communities (*juweihui*) were randomly chosen in each district. Fifty households — 25 with non-Shanghai *hukou* and 25 with Shanghai *hukou* — in each neighborhood were randomly sampled, and 1 person between the age of 18–64 in each household was interviewed. Among individuals who had non-Shanghai *hukou*, I excluded those who had a college education and those who had *hukou* from a different city. Many of the highly-educated individuals with rural *hukou* were “elites” whose migration to Shanghai was sponsored by the government, the SOEs, or large corporations (Fan, 2002). Individuals from other urban areas also tend to have more resources and often have very different backgrounds and experiences than the typical rural-to-urban migrants who move to Shanghai (often temporarily) to seek job opportunities and better income.

4.2 Measures

The dependent variable, *job search channels*, has three categories—hierarchy, market, and network—according to respondents' answers to the question, “How did you find your current job?” The hierarchy method refers to finding jobs via government job assignment, government recruitment via exams, and promotion within work unit. The market method includes finding jobs via job advertisement, job agencies and websites, direct application, self-employment, or business ownership. The network method includes finding jobs via

connections of family and friends, personal recommendations and employment with family businesses. The 2008 Shanghai Health and Migration Study asked respondents only for their current job or position. Among 33 respondents who had multiple answers for job search channels, 14 used both hierarchy and market methods, 8 used network and market methods, and 1 used all three channels. I excluded these individuals due to their small number. The resulting sample of individuals includes 540 local Shanghai residents and 334 rural-to-urban migrants.

In addition to migrant status, the other independent variable, *job search period*, is the period during which a respondent was looking for his or her current or last job. I used information of respondents' self-reported job duration (in years) to calculate when he or she found the job, then coded the year according to four categories: before 1990, between 1990 and 1999; between 2000 and 2004, and 2005 and after (until 2008 when the data was collected). I suspect that individuals' job search behavior may have been different depending on the period of time when they were looking for a job. The 1980s began the reform era and the rural-to-urban migration; the 1990s saw rural migration take off and the labor market expanded; the early 2000s corresponded with the booming economy; and the later 2000s witnessed labor shortage in urban areas.

In the analysis, I controlled a set of socio-demographic and job-related variables, including age, gender, education, and "private sector." Education is measured on a four-level scale, from low to high: elementary school and below, middle school, high school and professional school, college and above. Private sector is a dummy variable with value of 1 if a respondent's workplace is privately-owned (such as private enterprises, foreign enterprises, or family businesses), and 0 if the workplace is in state sector, such as a government institution, or state-owned or local government-owned enterprise.

4.3 Statistical Analyses

T tests, chi-square tests, and multinomial logistic regression models were used to examine questions regarding job search channels and migrant status, testing the hypotheses. In multinomial logistic regression models, several sequential models were performed by adjusting for different sets of covariates that noted in the above section. It turned out that the results of these models were more or less the same compared to the full model that included all covariates. Therefore, only the results from the full model were presented in the text.

5. Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for our sample. Similar to what past research has found, migrants in our sample were on average more than 6 years younger and less educated than the Shanghai natives. It is also not surprising to find that migrants in our sample were concentrated in the private sector while the majority of urban natives worked in the state sector. Most migrants secured their current or last jobs relatively recently (31.8% between 2000 and 2004, and 50.82% during 2005 and after), while a significant proportion of urban natives had had their current or last jobs since the 1980s (21.5%) and 1990s (19.47%). For our sample, compared to Shanghai urban natives, rural migrants relied more on market (27.85 % versus 17.9% for urban natives) and network (55.37 % versus 28.4% for urban natives) methods, and relied less on hierarchy (16.78% versus 53.7% for urban natives) in finding employment.

Table 2 presents odds ratios of migrant status for job search channels using multinomial logistic regression. Three sets of results are shown, each using a different base category of

Table 1. Sample statistics of migrants and urban natives in Shanghai 2008

	Mean/Percentage	
	Migrants (N=334)	Urban Natives (N=540)
<i>Dependent Variable:</i>		
Job search channels		
Market	27.85%***	17.90%
Hierarchy	16.78%***	53.70%
Network	55.37%***	28.40%
<i>Independent Variable:</i>		
Job search period		
Before 1990	2.30%***	21.50%
Between 1990 and 1999	15.08%***	19.47%
Between 2000 and 2004	31.80%***	25.96%
2005 and after	50.82%***	33.06%
<i>Control Variables:</i>		
Age	35.52	42.03
Male	45.81%***	53.70%
Education		
Elementary and below	14.97%***	2.24%
Middle school	66.17%***	25.61%
High school	18.86%***	40.93%
College and above	0%***	31.21%
Workplace		
Private sector	85.48%***	37.45%
State sector	14.52%***	62.55%

t-tests are used to examine the differences between migrants and urban natives for continuous variables. Chi-square tests are used for categorical variables.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

the dependent variable job search channel (market, hierarchy and network, respectively). Since multinomial logistic regression is used to predict probability of choosing one outcome category (a job search channel) over the probability of choosing the baseline category (another job search channel) based on multiple independent variables, the odds ratios differ depending on the base category specified, even though the underlying model is the same (hence the same summary statistics). Using market method as the base category, the first set of results shows that, compared to urban natives, rural migrants are less likely to use hierarchy (odds ratio=0.51; $p < 0.05$) over market method in finding jobs. Although the proportion *t*-tests find the differences between the proportions of using market versus network methods are statistically significant for both rural migrants and urban natives, the regression results are inconclusive to these differences. There is no sufficient evidence to support Hypotheses 1.2 and 2.2 that migrants and urban natives (respectively) are more likely to use network than market channels. Results also do not find significant effects on the likelihood of rural migrants versus urban natives for their reliance on network over market method, thus supporting Hypotheses 3.1 and 3.2 which expect rural migrants and urban natives to not differ in their reliance on network and on market method in their job search.

Compared to individuals who found their current or last jobs after 2005, those who found their jobs during the 1980s and the 1990s were more likely to use hierarchy than

Table 2. Odds ratios from multinomial logistic regression models on job search channels and migrant status

	Market as base category		Hierarchy as base category		Network as base category	
	Hierarchy	Network	Network	Market	Hierarchy	Market
Rural-to-urban migrants (ref: Shanghai natives)	0.51*	0.97	1.90*	1.96*	0.53*	1.03
	(0.17)	(0.29)	(0.52)	(0.64)	(0.14)	(0.31)
Job search period (ref: 2005 and after)						
before 1990	6.68**	3.15*	0.47*	0.15**	2.12*	0.32*
	(3.27)	(1.62)	(0.16)	(0.07)	(0.72)	(0.16)
between 1990 and 1999	2.95**	2.38**	0.807	0.34**	1.24	0.42**
	(1.01)	(0.79)	(0.23)	(0.12)	(0.35)	(0.14)
between 2000 and 2004	1.89*	2.26**	1.20	0.53*	0.84	0.44**
	(0.53)	(0.58)	(0.30)	(0.15)	(0.21)	(0.11)
Age	1.02+	1.02	0.99	0.98+	1.01	0.98
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Male	1.03	1.07	1.04	0.97	0.96	0.93
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.20)	(0.21)
Education (ref: Elementary and below)						
Middle school	1.58	0.80	0.50	0.63	1.98	1.25
	(0.88)	(0.33)	(0.24)	(0.35)	(0.93)	(0.52)
High school	1.50	0.45+	0.30*	0.67	3.34*	2.23+
	(0.86)	(0.20)	(0.15)	(0.38)	(1.62)	(1.00)
College and above	3.06+	0.30*	0.10**	0.33+	10.21**	3.34*
	(1.99)	(0.17)	(0.06)	(0.21)	(5.75)	(1.91)
Privately-owned workplace (ref: Government or state-owned enterprise)	0.50**	1.20	2.39**	1.99**	0.42**	0.83
	(0.13)	(0.31)	(0.52)	(0.50)	(0.09)	(0.22)
Constant	0.42	0.90	2.15	2.41	0.47	1.12
	(0.35)	(0.67)	(1.60)	(2.04)	(0.35)	(0.84)
N	684		684		684	
chi ²	208.93**		208.93**		208.93**	
BIC	1383.53		1383.53		1383.53	

Standard errors in parentheses. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

market channels. Odds ratios for job search periods indicate a decreasing trend, where the effect for the 1980s shows the strongest reliance on hierarchy over market channels for job searching (odds ratio=6.68; $p < 0.01$), a weaker effect for the 1990s (odds ratio=2.95; $p < 0.01$), and an even smaller odds ratio (1.89; $p < 0.05$) for the early 2000s. These results support Hypothesis 4.2 for an increasing reliance on market method. At the same time, odds ratios also show a similar decreasing reliance on network over market channels over time, thus supporting Hypothesis 4.1. Not surprisingly, compared to those who work in the state sector, individuals who work in the Chinese private sector are less likely to find jobs through hierarchy than market channels. Compared to those who have very little education, individuals who have college education and above are more likely to rely on hierarchy over market channels, but less likely to use network compared to market channels to find jobs.

The second set of results uses hierarchy method as the base category. The odds ratios

indicate that rural migrants are more likely to use network and market than hierarchy method to find jobs. Compared to the recent job search period after 2005, individuals looking for jobs in earlier periods were less likely to use network and market compared to hierarchy method. Using network method as the base category, the third set of results show that rural migrants are less likely to use hierarchy than network channels in their job searches. There is no statistically significant difference between rural migrants and urban natives in the likelihood of their reliance on market over network method, supporting Hypotheses 3.1 and 3.2. Regarding job search periods, compared to individuals seeking jobs after 2005, those who looked for jobs before 1990 were more likely to use hierarchy over network method. At the same time, compared with after 2005, individuals looking for jobs during the earlier periods are less likely to rely on market than network channels, with the effect changing over time. Compared to the period after 2005, the likelihood of using market over network method during the 1980s was the lowest (odds ratio=0.32; $p<0.05$), then a stronger effect for the period for 1990s (odds ratio=0.42; $p<0.01$), and an even stronger effect for the early 2000s (odds ratio=0.44; $p<0.01$). That is, the overall trend indicates the relative probability of individuals' relying on market method over network method is increasing over time. The results support Hypothesis 4.1 that suggests an increasing reliance on market method.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

Filling a void in previous literature, this paper examines job search methods in urban China by comparing rural migrants and urban natives using data from a 2008 survey in Shanghai. While past research suggest a predominant reliance on networks for job search by both groups in the 1980s and 1990s, this paper finds several interesting results regarding job search methods for each group of individuals, particularly when they have looked for jobs in recent years. The dominant job search methods in our data are networks for the rural migrants, and hierarchy for urban natives. These are not surprising. However, the results do not find migrant status matters in explaining individuals' usage of networks over market channels in job searching. Also, for both groups, these trends are conditioned by the period of time when individuals sought jobs. While there is a greater reliance on networks than market channels, the gap between the two job search methods is shrinking, since the reliance of networks is decreasing while the reliance of market channels is increasing. Relatively to market and networks, the results also find a decreasing reliance on hierarchy method in job searching over time.

Empirically, this study pioneers testing and comparing job search behaviors between Chinese rural migrants and urban natives using more recent data. Most of the past research investigated only one of the groups at the time, and they have produced some seemingly contradictory conclusions: Firstly, migrants and non-migrants should behave differently when they look for jobs (Bailey and Waldinger, 1991; Fan, 2002); secondly, both Chinese rural migrants and urban natives rely heavily on social networks for their job searches (Meng, 2000; Bian, 1997). This research, however, uses more updated information and finds ways to make sense of these previously conflicting results. Migrants and urban natives did, indeed, have significantly different job search methods; while members of both groups relied on social networks to find jobs, this reliance is changing over time in relationship to other alternative job search methods.

Theoretically, these findings have several important implications. First, the ways people find jobs not only vary according to institutional contexts (such as the differences between the U.S. and China (Granovetter, 1995; Bian, 1997), but they are also subject to change when institutional arrangements are in transition, such as in the case of China's economic reforms and social transformations. The comparison of rural migrants and urban natives

suggests that the decades of *hukou* system and the segregation between the rural and urban populations have created different segments in the larger Chinese institutional context, where each group of individuals likely responds to the different opportunities and incentives structures, which further shape people's job search behavior. The decreasing trend in using hierarchy method in job searching and the increasing reliance on the market channels over time correspond to the shrinking state employment system and growing market economy in China's transitioning institutional environment.

Regarding network method, on the other hand, this research does not find migrant status to be statistically significant. For both migrants and urban natives, people are more likely to rely on networks than market channels in their job searches, even though such reliance on networks is decreasing over time. Theoretically, the same behavior could be used by each group of individuals for different reasons. One approach to explain this similarity is to consider how individuals often use networks to cope with uncertainty (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). For rural migrants, networks had previously been a reliable remedy to resolve problems associated with limited or unavailable accesses to resources in cities (e.g., no access to the formal job channels under the strict *hukou* system). Networks were hardly an alternative to other job search methods; often, they were the only ways to find jobs, especially during the early years of rural migration (Meng, 2000). For urban natives, networks had been a remedy to solve different problems compared to those of rural migrants; they were used to obtain better information and job outcomes in an uncertain environment where information was obscure and resources (jobs) were controlled by powerful parties (i.e., the state and the government officials) (Bian, 1997).

To further explore the underlying mechanisms for similar network behavior between migrants and urbanites and the changes in behavior, future research can ask if individuals have changed from using networks to *find a job* to using them to find a *better* job. In the past, under the constraints of China's institutional environment, it is likely that rural migrants used networks to find any job, while urban natives used networks to find "better" jobs. These strategies often change as individuals respond to the changing structure of opportunities and incentives in their particular institutional segment over time. That is, for instance, as other alternatives became available, migrants may have changed their strategies and begun to use networks differently to find a better job rather than just any job. This may have contributed to the decreasing reliance on networks for migrants over the years. For urban natives, desire to find a better job still meets with uncertainty, now coming from market competition in addition to state control (Huang, 2008).

The idea of different network strategies provides an alternative approach for understanding China's urban job market. As suggested by Chang (2011), network behavior in China can take different forms or strategies, and the emergence and increasing or decreasing popularity of each strategy are affected by external factors in the institutional environment as well as by endogenous selection processes based on previous successful experiences and reinforced social structure. Following this argument, in addition to being affected by changing environmental conditions, the ways that people use networks are also the result of habits or routines; successful network strategies will continue to be adopted by people in hope to obtain similar outcomes. While this suggests a possible resilience of particular kinds of network practices, a change in routines can happen once unsuccessful outcomes from certain network strategies create negative feedback, gradually leading individuals to select strategies that have more positive consequences (Chang, 2011). Rural migrants' reliance on kinship or migrant networks is such an example. If, as previous research reported, jobs found via kinship ties tend to be lower-paid and in worse work conditions (Wang, Zuo, and Ruan, 2002; Chang, Wen, and Wang, 2011), this information can get summarized and circulated among job-hunting migrants, triggering a change in the

network strategy for them to decrease their reliance on kinship networks in the long run. This can be the case particularly when other alternative job channels have become more accessible.

Although these findings have important implications, admittedly, this research has several limitations. The data analyses are based on a cross-sectional design. In addition, the sample was drawn from Shanghai. The generalization of the findings is thus limited and should not be assumed in other settings. Furthermore, the data contains only self-reports from respondents. Without objective measures, some response bias is inevitable. Also, although some studies suggest that Chinese job searchers sometimes combine networks with other methods (Bian, 2008), only a very small number of respondents in the survey gave multiple answers for job search methods and, consequently, I was not able to test the possibility or prevalence of using multiple or combined methods at the same time. Finally, qualitative research that provides in-depth information about individuals' network behaviors would be helpful in gaining a greater understanding of the different network strategies and the decision-making behind the behavior. While rural migrants and urban natives may both prefer to use strong ties, motivations behind their behavior may vary for different sets of reasons. Qualitative information can also help us better evaluate the trend of an increasingly integrated urban labor market and a growing migrant assimilation as some researchers have claimed (Tang and Yang, 2008). These possibilities suggest a fertile ground for future research.

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No conflict of interest has been reported by the author.

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Ethics Statement

The study was approved by the survey and behavioral research ethics committee at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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