

The Changing role of Women in Rural China: a case study of “Peidu”

1.1 Historical transformation of women's roles in China and remaining issues

After 1949, China entered a period of socialist construction and set out socialist policies. The socialist policies advocated "gender equality" and promoted the social advancement of women. In the nearly 30 years from the founding of the country in 1949 to the reform and opening policy in 1978, more and more women left their homes to realize their own value and raise their social status through social work. Women are no longer just a “tool of reproduction” at home but are also now able to gain social approval through their own skills (Zhou 2014).

Since the reform and opening policy in 1978, social and economic disparities have widened in China along with the development of the market economy, and competition has intensified. While women are becoming more active in society, their competitiveness in the market has declined due to issues such as childbirth and childcare, making it difficult for women to find employment and promotions in the fierce market competition. Even in the 21st century, the “controversy over women coming back homes” continues in modern China, and “Good Wife Wise Mother” has been advertised as a modern, civilized, and advanced image of women.

In China, where socialist policies have drawn women out of the home into society, the question is how the role of women is changing due to economic development, especially in rural areas which has been neglected and left behind. In modern China, the female labor force participation rate is declining, but is this the result of women becoming housewives due to modernization of the family? How are women's roles changing in rural China today? Previous research on the transformation of women's roles in contemporary China has focused mainly on the urban middle class. There are few studies on the transformation of

women's roles in rural areas. Therefore, in this study, by focusing on “Peidu” we will examine what changes women's roles are undergoing in modern Chinese rural areas.

1.2 Necessity to elucidate the status of women's roles in modern China's rural areas.

After the founding of New China, to raise funds for national industrialization, prevent Western countries from blockading the new red regime, quickly build China's own industrial development system, and quickly achieve industrialization goals, the Chinese government adopted agriculture. The government selected and promoted a macro strategy that preferentially developed industries and cities at the expense of rural areas. By extracting the surplus value of agriculture, it was able to accumulate capital in industry and provide subsidies to cities. A unified system of selling and purchasing agricultural products, a people's communal corporation system, and a family register management system were implemented through policies that prioritized the development of industry and cities, and a dual economic and social structure was established and formed gradually that divided urban and rural areas. Because of this historical background, a large development gap has long existed between China's urban and rural areas and remains today. Therefore, it is highly possible that the development pattern in rural areas is different from that in urban areas, and it can be inferred that the transformation of women's roles in rural China has taken its own course. The phenomenon of “Peidu” that will be discussed in this paper is a phenomenon that is occurring mainly in rural China.

1.3 Interpretation of the core concept and the flow of major developments in “Peidu”

B.S.A. Yeoh and S. Huang (2005) translated the “Peidu mothers” who migrated to Singapore as “study mothers”. Since “study mothers” is not necessarily a suitable concept to represent “Peidu” rural women who lack cultural and economic capital, in this study,

the Chinese expression “Peidu” is used. In this research, “Peidu” means that adults from rural households migrate with their children to urban areas, rent a house there, and take care of their children to send their children to better schools.

The meaning of "Peidu" can be translated into some other word in other language, but subtle differences can be felt that way, so in this research, we will use the Chinese word “Peidu” as it is. First, if we interpret the literal meaning of “Pei” has a meaning corresponding to the verb “accompany”, and “du” is close to the meaning of the noun “study”.

In the academic world, "Peidu" is divided into “overseas educational immigration” which means migrating to developed countries such as Singapore, the United States, and Australia, and “domestic educational immigration” which refers migrating from rural areas to urban areas or from urban areas to school districts. In this research, I mainly take up "domestic educational immigration " from rural areas to urban areas as “Peidu”.

Wang Wenlong has analyzed the development process of “Peidu”. Wang (2012) divides the phenomenon of “Peidu” in mainland China into three stages along the time axis and examines them as follows.

The first stage is from 1990 to 1998. According to the literature search of CNKI academic database⁽¹⁾, the first literature on “Peidu” appeared in 1990.

The second stage was from 1998 to around 2006. During this stage, due to the continuous widening of the disparity between urban and rural areas the scale of the phenomenon has expanded.

The third stage was from 2006 to 2012, and it is said that the situation in which high-quality educational resources were monopolized further intensified, further exacerbating the “Peidu” problem.

1.4 Transformation of women's roles in urban areas of modern China

Hua Yi (2004) summarizes the characteristics of the transformation of women's roles in

¹ China's biggest academic literature database

urban areas of modern China, which actively implements economic transition while advocating a socialist market economy, into three main categories. The first is the shift from "following men" to "appealing individuality as a woman. More specifically, "following men" means "to have a durable and strong body like a man". It is more appropriate to say that the women's liberation movement during the planned economy era liberated women's power rather than their sexuality. After the transition to a market economy, the role of women changed from "androgynous" to "feminine and individual". Women began to do their best to express their femininity through graceful curves, delicate looks, and fashionable dresses. The second change is the shift from "abandoning the home" to "taking care of the home". At the time of socialist construction, a series of revolutionary narratives about women's emancipation and gender equality made women of that era happy in their work and proud of their careers. After the reform and opening policy, the image of "good woman" came to be called out, and women gradually shifted the balance between work and family to home. The third is the change from "others' narratives" to "self-narratives". During the construction period of socialism, the emancipation of women was linked to the emancipation of classes and the emancipation of the nation. After the reform and opening policy, women began to evaluate themselves by themselves.

After the transition to a market economy, women working in urban areas in modern China are forced into a predicament where they must simultaneously fulfill dual roles in society and at home. While women must play the role of wage laborers outside the home like men do, they also must play the role of housewives and take responsibility for household chores (Chen 2006; Li 2012; Zheng 2012). In addition, although the female employment rate in urban China declined over the 20-year period from 1990 to 2010, the decline did not last long. From 2010 to 2020, the female employment rate in urban areas of China has been rising (Zheng 2023). What about women in rural China? Amid drastic changes in national policies, the social environment, and ideological propaganda, what kind of rural women choose to "Peidu" by themselves, who are actively involved in their

children's education despite their lack of cultural knowledge? It is necessary to elucidate whether women are aware of their roles as women and how they are practicing them.

The purpose of this paper can be summarized as follows.

By analyzing the way of life of rural women who are experiencing “Peidu” or who had experienced “Peidu”, trying to figure out what kind of changes are women's roles undergoing in rural areas in modern China?

2 research overviews

2.1 Overview of research area and research method

All the participants in this research were from Jiangxi Province and had experienced “Peidu” in the past or were experiencing it at the time of the research. The people who cooperated in this research started with introductions from acquaintances, and then went on a snowball search. Considering the possibility and ease of obtaining the cooperation of the research subjects, the research destination was limited to Jiangxi province. In 2021, the Jiangxi Provincial Bureau of Statistics released the "Interpretation of the Key Data of the Seventh Population Census of Jiangxi Province by the Provincial Bureau of Statistics". According to the 7th Population Census of Jiangxi Province, among the permanent residents of Jiangxi Province, the urban permanent population is about 27.31 million, increased by 7.67 million compared to 2010, and the rural permanent population is about 17.87 million, decreased by 7.05 million compared to 2010. Over the decade from 2010 to 2020, the urban permanent population exceeded the rural permanent population, and an increasing number of the rural migrant labor force turned from “villagers” to “citizens”. In addition, the separation of people and family registers is becoming more and more normal, and the floating population in the province is doubling. Temporary migration from rural areas to cities is conspicuous.

We will elucidate the above questions through interviews with “Peidu” women in rural areas of Jiangxi Province, China, mainly through semi-structured online interviews.

2.2 Investigation details

From April to June 2022, I conducted the first round of semi-structured interviews online. In August of the same year, additional interviews were conducted online. Participants were from their 40s to their 50s. The total interview time per person ranged from about 1 hour to about 5 hours. In addition, the number of interviews conducted ranged from 1 to 4 times.

Table 1 summarizes the basic information of the survey participants.

Table 1 Basic information of survey participants.

name	age	educational background	"Peidu" time	Number of children	Gender/Number of "Peidu"ed Children	Occupation before "Peidu"	Husband's income (before the covid-19)	Trends of "Peidu"ed children
A	49	Middle school degree	6years	2	M1	housewife	about 1386USD/month	went to college
B	49	Primary school degree	7~years	3	F2/M1	migrant worker	about 1109-1386USD/month	older daughter: went to college, younger children: studying
C	46	Grade 4 of primary school degree	1year	3	M1/F1	housewife	about 1109-1386USD/month	older son: went to college, younger daughter: studying
D	47	Middle school degree	4months	2	F1	self-employed	secret	failed to go to college, started to work
E	45	Primary school degree	6years	2	M1	housewife	about 1109-1386USD/month	went to college
F	47	High school early dropout	6years	2	F1/M1	housewife	about 1386USD/year	went to college both
G	55	Primary school degree	6years	3	M1	housewife	about 416USD/month	went to college
H	51	Grade 4 of primary school degree	1year	3	M1	housewife	about 554USD/month	went to college

Many of our study participants are less educated and less well off. Many of them were full-time housewives before “Peidu” because there was no one to take care of their children due to their mother-in-law's age. Also, due to the impact of the covid-19, their household income was lower than before.

3 Analysis of the narratives of the informants

3.1.1 Marital relationship before “Peidu”

“Peidu” in urban areas is one of the socially acceptable limited means of distance from family and gaining autonomy, but all the informants said they started “Peidu” only for their children.

Mrs. A: I wanted to bring my child to the city to study. I didn't start “Peidu” because I had a bad relationship with my husband and mother-in-law. I started “Peidu” simply because I wanted my children to receive a better education (May 14, 2022).

Mrs. B: I heard from neighbors that It's hard for children to study outside, so I started "Peidu". After seeing how difficult it is for my eldest daughter to study, I think I should have started "Peidu" earlier (May 16, 2022).

Mrs. C: The fact that I started "Peidu" had nothing to do with my husband. Even when I wasn't doing “Peidu” most of time my husband was out working far away from home (May 27, 2022).

Mrs. D: In my daughter’s last semester, my daughter asked me to “Peidu”, so I started “Peidu” (May 28, 2022).

Mrs. E: I started “Peidu” just to make my child more comfortable (May 28, 2022).

Mrs. F: “Peidu” allows myself to stay close to your children's growth and calms my mind. I can't feel safe if I don't know what my children is doing unless I'm by my children's side. Because I think children are the center of my life (May 28, 2022).

Mrs. G: The family moved to an urban area for my son to enter junior high school (June 6, 2022).

Mrs. H: My child was repeating a grade and asked me to “Peidu”, so I started “Peidu” (June 7, 2022).

From the above, it turns out that taking care of the children was the primary purpose of

the informants who started “Peidu”. The informants said that none of them choose “Peidu” to avoid family violence or unhappy marriages. There were two main reasons why the marital relationship was not necessarily bad. The first is that the husband and wife often live separately from the beginning because the husband is working away from home, and there are few opportunities for family reunion. The second is that most informants live separately from their mothers-in-law, so there is almost no conflict between them, and even in the case of stem-family members, mothers-in-law are actively involved in the “Peidu” of the younger generation.

3.1.2 The process of deciding who will “Peidu”

In response to the question of who proposed “Peidu”, two answers were generally obtained. The first is that mothers voluntarily suggested it, and the second is that it was requested by children. It is noteworthy that there is not a single case in which her husband suggested “Peidu” in the informants.

For example, the following narration was seen.

Mrs A: My husband is responsible for the family, so he must earn money. I don't have the skills like my husband, so even if I work, I can't get a higher salary than him. Besides, I've been taking care of my son since he was born, so I can't suddenly let him go. He was still a student, and he wasn't independent. I was obliged to take care of him. And since my child was little, I have always been aware of the importance of his study. When my child started elementary school, I studied with him every night. I don't want him to play with bad company, because he will easily pick up bad habits with bad company (May 14, 2022).

Mrs. B: I've been hearing about it from people around me for a long time. High school study life is very painful. That's when I made up my mind that when my eldest daughter is in her third year of high school, I will quit my job and start “Peidu”. When my eldest daughter was in junior high school, I went back to hometown once.

But I couldn't find a job at the village. After a while, I went out to work again. After that, the eldest daughter wrote the following in a composition. "Does Mommy hate me?" she asked. "Does Mommy love my sisters more than me?" My daughter's homeroom teacher told me the contents of my eldest daughter's essay on the phone. But I didn't think it was a big deal at the time. Because I thought the naive child's feelings were not so important compared to making living (May 16, 2022).

Mrs. C: Our village doesn't have good schools. Even if there are, there are merely students. The class size is so small that you can count on your hands. Adults in the village went to town to "Peidu" for their children (May 27, 2022).

Mrs E: Because my daughter asked for it. When my daughter was in her third year of high school, she asked me to "Peidu" for her. At that time, the store I was running was going out of business because of the bad economy. So, I rented a house near my daughter's high school and started taking care of her daily life (May 28, 2022).

Mrs. E: My children passed the exam at a good high school, so I started "Peidu" for them. After my eldest daughter graduated from high school, my second son entered the same high school as my eldest daughter again. I was so happy that when I finished "Peidu" for my eldest daughter, I started "Peidu" for my second son again (May 28, 2022).

Mrs. F: I got married and started living in my husband's village. I was a little lonely at first in the unfamiliar place. Then, I gave birth to my eldest daughter and second son, and I have always cherished my two children. I want my two children to receive a good education, and I want to be with them until they reach adulthood.

Mrs. G: My son was accepted to an urban junior high school, and I was worried about my son going to an urban area alone, so I started "Peidu" with him (June 6, 2022).

Mrs. H: When my son, who was repeating a grade, asked me to "Peidu" for him, I initially refused his request, but later I was persuaded by my family and neighbors to start "Peidu" for him (June 7, 2022). Day).

As mentioned above, there are four main reasons for embarking on children's "Peidu". The first is that Mrs. A, Mrs. E, Mrs. F, and Mrs. G have always been close to their children since their children were young, so they continued to be close to their children before their children become adults. The choice seems to have arisen from the desire to have the child receive a good education and to raise the child to be a respectable adult. In the case of Mrs. A, Mrs. E, Mrs. F, and Mrs. G, the growth of children is the top priority of the family. The second is that, like Mrs. B, they must first solve more realistic and pressing problems in their lives, rather than watching over the growth of their children. Mrs. B says that nothing can be done without money. When her eldest daughter was in high school, she quit her job and began "Peidu". Before that time, Mrs. B was planning to go to work as a migrant worker after completing her one-year "Peidu". However, while she was doing "Peidu" she gradually changed her mind, and since then she has been a full-time housewife. Third, like Mrs. C, because it is difficult to regard the village school as a school, she rents a house within ten minutes' ride from their house in the village and takes care of the children in town. The fourth is that Mrs. D and Mrs. H they did not actually have a strong desire to do "Peidu" but they had no choice but to start because their children demanded it.

To summarize the informants' narratives, in a passive situation bounded by the social environment, rural women making use of their limited initiative, some choose to "Peidu" subjectively, while others choose to "Peidu" objectively. In some cases, it may be unavoidable to "Peidu". Perceptions about the importance of a child's educational background vary even among "Peidu" rural women. Some of the practitioners of "Peidu" thought before "Peidu" that "Peidu" was not necessarily a mandatory obligation.

Mrs. H: My son didn't try hard enough, so he didn't get into a good college and ended up repeating grade. That's why I didn't want to "Peidu" for my son at first. He didn't get into a good university because he didn't try hard enough. I thought

nothing would change even if I “Peidu” for such a son (June 7, 2022).

When I asked informants why they practiced (performed) “Peidu” instead of their husband, I got the following answer.

Mrs. C: The man is rude and doesn't pay close attention. He doesn't even know what kind of clothes he's going to put on his children. He can't cook, and even if he can, he cooks badly. Anyway, a man cannot take care of a child (May 27, 2022).

Mrs G: My husband has a job. If my husband doesn't work, we can't live. And since I've been watching over my child's growth for a long time, I wanted to keep watching (May 28, 2022).

I furtherly questioned why their husband were working outside instead of them. They laughed and thought.

Mrs. C: My husband has technology and is physically superior. Both my parents-in-law and my parents are old and unable to help me take care of my children. As a mother, I must take care of my children (May 27, 2022).

Mrs. F: Rural areas are different from urban areas. Women in urban areas may be highly educated and have good jobs, but women in rural areas are generally less educated and unable to find good jobs. In urban households, both husband and wife are likely to work, but in rural households, men usually work outside, and women do the housework at home. Even if I work, I can't get a good salary, so I've been a full-time housewife without working since I got married. My children's future is more important than my job, so I have devoted myself to taking care of my children (May 28, 2022).

Mrs. H: My husband was able to repair cars and earned more money than I did, so I did the “Peidu” (June 7, 2022).

Rural women were not highly educated, had no good educational background or skills, and had almost no work before “Peidu”. In addition, it can be seen from the above narrative that the so-called natural disposition and social mission of rural women made full use of them for “Peidu”.

Husbands seldom suggested that they should “Peidu” by themselves, but they tended to agree wife’s “Peidu”.

Mrs. A: When I said that I wanted to “Peidu”, my husband supported me, and my parents-in-law were happy (May 14, 2022).

Mrs. B: After I started “Peidu” for my children, I couldn't take care of my husband, but he understood and agreed with my choice. I still worry that my husband will not be able to take care of himself well, but I can't help it for the sake of the children (May 16, 2022).

Mrs. C: Of course, my husband agreed with my “Peidu”. I always had my husband send my living expenses (May 27, 2022).

Mrs. D: My husband had no objection to my “Peidu”. My mother-in-law was also very supportive and cooked for my husband (May 28, 2022).

Mrs. E: My family supported me to “Peidu”, but I think the financial burden on my husband is a bit heavy (May 28, 2022).

Mrs. F: When I was doing “Peidu”, my husband came to see me and the child when he had time (May 28, 2022).

Mrs. H: My husband was very supportive of my “Peidu”. He used to send me money all the time, and he called me and asked about our child's situation (June 7, 2022).

In all the households of the participants in this research, the attitudes of the families were highly consistent with the mother's suggestion of “Peidu”, and there was no

resistance whatsoever. It shows that most family members have a strong tendency to show similar attitudes regarding children's educational circumstances. Particularly, it shows that many informants, as mothers, are actively proposing “Peidu” for their children.

3.1.3 Summary

Before the “Peidu”, the family structure of the stem-family turns out that pre-modern elements remain in the lives of the informants. However, the idea that the husband is the breadwinner of the family, and the wife must take care of children represent modern characteristics. At the same time, even though rural households in China are generally not as well off economically as urban households, most “Peidu” rural women have not played an earning role for a long time since being married. Most of them have chosen to play the role of housewives in their homes and actively play the role of housewives.

3.2.1 Residence form during the "residence" period

Rents in urban areas are expensive and can be a heavy burden on informants' family. To maintain their finances, the informants spread the burden through various means.

Mrs. A started “Peidu” while her child was in junior high school when she was living with her son in a school dormitory. Mrs. A found her job at her son's school cafeteria, and she was able to live in the school dormitory as a school employee. Therefore, when her son was in junior high school, Mrs. A did not have to spend a lot of money on housing for the two of them. When her son entered high school, Mrs. A rented a basement room in an apartment near the school.

It was literally just a room. There was no furniture. It didn't even have a kitchen. Nothing. I bought two single beds and slept in that room with my son. We didn't have a kitchen, so we cooked outside in the basement with simple utensils. The rent was 400 CNY. My son couldn't sleep in the same room as me because I snore when

I sleep. So, every night around 11:00, when my son was about to go to bed, I left my room and took a walk for about 30 minutes near my apartment. Whether it was raining or snowing, I was outside at midnight every day. Especially in winter, it was unbearably cold. It was hard (May 14, 2022).

Mrs. A sacrificed her own sleep so that her son could get a good night's sleep. When she remembered that she was wandering outside alone for about 30 minutes every night, Mrs. A began to sob involuntarily. For a while after that, Mrs. A couldn't say a word.

After that, her son grew impatient to see Mrs. A waiting outside every night, and he started telling Mrs. A to move to a bigger house. Mrs. A was finally able to move into a 3LDK room on the 3rd floor of the same apartment when her son was in high school. The rent was about 200,000CNY a year. Mrs. A followed her son's advice and recruited share house applicants through villas to keep her rent expenses down. In the end, a male student rented a room and paid about 1/3 of the rent and utilities.

Mrs. A was able to keep her household expenses down while keeping a distance from the people in the share house, and both Mrs. E and Mrs. H adopted a similar strategy to renting a house. Mrs. E was renting a 3LDK apartment for 1,500CNY a month, and rented a room in the apartment to another student for 650CNY a month. Mrs. H was renting a 3LDK apartment with a rent of 6,700CNY a year paid by another student.

After her eldest daughter became a high school student, Mrs. F spent three years “Peidu” for her eldest daughter in a city near her hometown. Her son, who was in junior high school at the time, also moved with Mrs. F and transferred to an urban junior high school. When her eldest daughter had just graduated from high school, her son had just graduated from junior high school. After graduating from junior high school her son was invited to S High School in Jiangxi Province, a top class, and entered S High School in N City, far from her hometown. Mrs. F then began to “Peidu” his son in N City.

The wages of a house near S High School were higher than expected and exceeded Mrs. F's ability to pay. Basically, most of the students at S High School are locals, and most

of them live in their own houses, so S High School did not have a dormitory. However, to attract excellent students from outside the city, S High School recently built a dormitory for students from outside the city. Therefore, Mrs. F's son was able to live in the school dormitory. But Mrs. F still could not leave his son alone in N city. Mrs. F found a job as a life teacher⁽²⁾ at S High School and lived in the same high school as her son. Although they had separate rooms, they often ate together. After that, Mrs. F's son was selected for the school's Mathematical Olympiad class and moved to the main campus to attend the Mathematical Olympiad class. Therefore, Mrs. F also moved to this campus with his son and continued working as a life teacher.

The son lived in the student dormitory and Mrs. F lived in the staff dormitory, so the time they could eat and talk with each other was very limited. Even though Mrs. F could spend little time with his son, she cherished the time with her son. Mrs. F explains why she worked at his son's school as follows.

I feel safe when I'm in the same space as my child. If I work at my child's school, I'll know what kind of school it is, and I'll be able to interact with the school's students, making myself feel rejuvenated. Also, it is worthwhile because I can always check my child's situation (May 28, 2022).

When her son was in junior high school, Mrs. A got a job at her son's school and took care of her son. Similarly, when her son was a high school student, Mrs. F was doing “Peidu” through her work at his son's school. Although they lived in different dormitories to their son’s, they both appreciate the opportunity to be in the same school with their children. While working at the school, they closely monitored the children's situation to see if they are blessed with good teachers and friends, whether they are getting used to the new environment, and whether they are making progress in their studies. At the same time, the rent can be kept down, killing two birds with one stone.

² Life teacher is the teacher who guides students in their daily lives, encouraging students to organize dormitory hygiene and personal hygiene, correcting and guiding students' behavior, lifestyle habits.

When Mrs. B had just started “Peidu”, she lived very close to her eldest daughter's school. At first, Mrs. B didn't want to do a lot of dirty work as a cleaner, but she was invited many times by acquaintance, so Mrs. B eventually accepted the job as a cleaner and moved to the attic of her place of work with her children. Since she works as a building cleaner, she was able to live in the attic of the building for free.

As mentioned above, the informants have come up with several strategies trying to complete the “Peidu” while being constrained by the economic conditions of the family. They spread the burden by moving to a place with low or no rent or living in a share house.

3.2.2 Style of socializing with relatives during the period of “Peidu”

Most informants can only return to their villages on holidays or when their children's schools are closed. According to the informants, when their children enter high school, they can only get half a day off a week, so they merely could return to their hometown. Relatives in farming villages come to send freshly picked vegetables and new rice to “Peidu” mothers.

Mrs. A's daughter runs a large factory in the hometown, so Mrs. A often returns to her hometown to help her daughter with the chores in the factory. Most of the informants are tied up with taking care of their children every day, so they can't go back home except on holidays.

The attitudes of informants toward relatives and the husband's family can be broadly divided into two. The first type, such as Mrs. A, Mrs. C, Mrs. D, Mrs. E, Mrs. G and Mrs. H, who does not want to return to their villages so much. Rather, it is more attractive for them to be with a “Peidu” friend at the “Peidu” place. Of course, it's not that they don't like their home or relatives, but even if they go back to their home, there is no one they need to see and nothing to do, so they only go back to their hometowns on holidays to meet with their relatives. In addition, the place of “Peidu” was close to their hometowns, and there were many “Peidu” friends who came from the same area as their

hometowns. The second reason is that, like Mrs. B and Mrs. F, the places of “Peidu” were too far away from the hometowns that makes it inconvenient to go back home. There are those who feel alienated and lonely because they cannot fit in with the “Peidu” place, and those who are doing hard flexible work for children want to quit. I learned from the interviews that they were eagerly hoping for the day when they would quickly finish their “Peidu” and be released from it.

The informants have little contact with relatives other than their husbands during the “Peidu” period, and rarely feel the need to do so. Informants do not need extra contact with relatives in rural areas because they are fulfilling their duties if they are doing well in caring for their children. Relatives at the villages are more likely to be actively involved with the informants, and if the “Peidu” destination is close to informants’ hometown, they regularly send home-made food and inquire about the children's situation. However, even so, the informants cannot afford to remain indifferent to the husband's family during the period of “Peidu”. Informants are still concerned about families in rural areas, especially the health of their parents.

3.2.3 Work situation during the “Peidu” period: flexible work as an addition to the family budget

Even though they are “Peidu” rural women, there is actually a big difference in the economic situation of their families. They often have flexible work when family finances are tight. The types of jobs open to them are extremely limited. Jobs such as department stores

and hotel cleaners, pharmacy clerks are common choices for them.

Mrs. A worked in the school cafeteria when her son was in junior high school but stopped working when her son entered high school.

Mrs. B worked as a cleaner at a department store. At the beginning she was getting a monthly salary of 1,600CNY. After that, her monthly salary increased to 2,500 CNY, but Mrs. B still strongly wants to quit her job as a cleaner. However, after overcoming many

hardships, her salary increased to 2,500CNY. Mrs. B is having trouble quitting her job as a cleaner because it is difficult to find a job like a cleaner, which she could have more flexibility so that she can work as well as take care of her children.

Mrs. C also started working for the first time during “Peidu”. The monthly salary is from 600CNY to 700CNY.

We complain a lot too. Even though I work so hard, I don't get paid that much. That's why people don't want to work. Sometimes I skip work and go to the mountains to pick wild fruits. Recently, I haven't been able to do much work due to the pandemic (May 27, 2022).

What Mrs. C learned for the first time after working was that for someone like her, the most meaningful way to use her time was to spend it on her children. Mrs. C said she might be better off spending time with her children because she works long hours and earns only a small salary. However, it didn't take her much time because what she could do for the children was limited to taking care of children's life. Therefore, Mrs. C is still working.

Mrs. G has also been working at a supermarket since the “Peidu”. Her husband was forced into unemployment and moved to the city with Mrs. G. Mrs. G has been working at a supermarket for more than 10 years while changing her place of work, thinking positively that her work is shift work so she can also take care of the family.

Informants often decide whether to do flexible work based on their family's financial situation. They engage in menial work to supplement the household budget. Some informants do not have flexible work, and they have decided not to do so, knowing that they will not be rewarded well if they enter the labor market.

Mrs. D: I started “Peidu” for my children. It's only 4 months of “Peidu” life, I couldn't get a good job, and I didn't want to work (May 28, 2022).

Mrs. E: I am currently focusing on my children so that they can get a good job in the future. I can't get a good job, so I spend my free time playing with my smartphone instead of working (May 28, 2022).

Mrs. F: We "Peidu" rural women generally have low educational backgrounds, so we can't find good jobs. Therefore, I devote myself even more to my children and support them so that they will have good jobs in the future (May 28, 2022).

Mrs. H: I don't work. I didn't even have a job before "Peidu" because it's more beneficial to spend time on children than on work (June 7, 2022).

People who do not do flexible work have not yet been driven into a situation where they must work because their household's economic situation is relatively wealthy. For example, Mrs. D, whose husband works for government, is relatively wealthy among informants. Even if she doesn't do flexible work, her husband can cover the family budget. Mrs. D, Mrs. E, Mrs. F, and Mrs. H thought that even if they wanted to work, they could not get a good job and would receive a low salary. Therefore, they did not have (did not have) flexible work during the "Peidu" period.

The more they are placed in a disadvantageous position in social and economic activities, the more "Peidu" rural women must do flexible work. While the role they can play in the education of their children is extremely limited, the dual responsibilities of child-rearing and earning responsibilities weigh heavily on informants who have flexible work at the same time. People with flexible work choose jobs that allow them to take care of their children. We found that all informants, regardless of whether they had flexible work or not, always put their children first during the "Peidu" period.

3.2.4 Summary

Most informants eventually came to realize that spending time on their children was more meaningful than working, and that it was a far-sighted investment. Mrs. B stopped taking care of her husband at the place of migrant work to "Peidu" for her children. In

the beginning, Mrs. H wasn't very enthusiastic about her children's "Peidu", but her neighbors and relatives persuaded her, saying, "It's about the future of your children, so you have to do it as a mother." Finally, Mrs. H began to "Peidu". Informants C, D, and H began to have flexible work during the period of "Peidu" on the assumption that they would have no problem taking care of their children. Even though they work, they still consider taking care of their children their top priority. Most of the informants in their 40s and 50s have been full-time housewives since before the "Peidu" and have always given priority to the child-rearing role over the earning role, have taken the child-rearing role as the earning role during the "Peidu" period. Amid dizzying changes in society, the role of women as a norm has not been unrelated to these changes and has been fluctuating, and what is expected of women is changing. It's clear that women in rural China who chose "Peidu" to fully fulfill the mother's role put more weight on the child-rearing role than on the earning role, and on the mother's role rather than on the wife's role.

The modern ideological behavior of "child-centralism" appears in the lives of "Peidu" rural women. However, non-modern family elements, such as the form of residence during the period of "Peidu" and close relationships with non-relatives, such as other "Peidu" rural women, still exist. The informants live a life that is neither completely modern nor pre-modern.

3.3 Changes after "Peidu"

3.3.1 Re-focusing on children's various needs.

As already mentioned before Mrs. B did not pay much attention to her child's schoolwork before the "Peidu".

I've been skipping school since I was in elementary school. Especially during the busy farming season like autumn, my parents called me to harvest the crops without

waiting for after school. My parents didn't care about my schoolwork at all, so I didn't care either. I attended elementary school only in form. After graduating from elementary school, I devoted myself to farming and helping with household chores without going on to higher education. When my eldest daughter was little, I thought that earning money was the best thing. Because without money, nothing works. Whether or not a child does well often depend on the child himself/herself. I also thought there was very little I could do (May 16, 2022).

However, in the process of “Peidu”, Mrs. B participated in school parent meetings and interacted with schoolteachers and other parents through parents' SNS groups, etc. At the bus stop waiting for the child to go to school, mothers continue to talk about their child, the name of the child whose homework has not been completed is made public on the parent's SNS group, and other parents are urged by the teacher to supervise their child's homework. Mrs. B changed his way of thinking about his child's grades in an environment that emphasized academics. In addition, Mrs. B developed a complex about her low educational background through working as a migrant worker before and became keenly aware of the importance of education. Mrs. B came to recognize that educational background was the most important resource for people like herself who came from a farming family to be able to achieve class advancement and change social status.

For a long time, Mrs. B asked his mother to take care of his eldest daughter. Mrs. B could not understand her eldest daughter's loneliness and her feelings of being left alone by her parents. Even after her eldest daughter's teacher at the time sent her an essay written by her eldest daughter complaining about her parent's absence, Mrs. B only skimmed it and didn't think it was a big deal. Mrs. B overlooked the child's delicate emotional needs. Through “Peidu”, Mrs. B fostered a close relationship with her children to meet their economic and material needs as well as their self-esteem and emotional needs.

Mrs. G talked about his son's experience of school refusal and bullying during the period of “Peidu” as follows.

When my son was a junior high school student, his favorite teacher died of cancer, and he could not get used to the new teacher and was absent from school for a while. Because the new teacher was relatively old, my son felt a strong sense of distance and alienation from him, and for a long time he shut himself up in his room and could not go to school. His grades were also score falling fast. At that time, I was very flustered. "Regardless of who the teacher is, just study well. Even if the teacher changes, the knowledge won't change, so it's enough to get the knowledge from the teacher," I began to comfort him. From there, he gradually adjusted to his new teacher and his grades returned to normal. I can't imagine what would have happened to my son if I hadn't been by his side at that time (June 6, 2022).

Mrs. G said that through “Peidu”, she experienced trial and error in her daily interactions with her children and felt that both parents and children grew together. As a parent, she gradually breaks down the psychological barrier between her and her child. While Mrs. G was trying to solve her child's problems, As Mrs. G worked to solve her child's problems, she constantly reaffirmed the significance of her existence and her status as a parent.

Mrs. G said that she had a low educational background and could do little to help her children with their schoolwork. She became capable to encourage children and sense their delicate inner thoughts through her “Peidu” experience. Mrs. G was able to share with the child the subtle and complex emotional changes of the children. Mrs. G realized that children are highly plastic, and that if you let them do various things, they will be able to do it.

Some of the informants, such as Mrs. A, and Mrs. F, had been full-time housewives since before the “Peidu” period and were trying to meet the various needs of their

children. However, other informants, such as Mrs. B and Mrs. G, only after “Peidu” period, become aware of not only the material needs of children but also children’s emotional needs, need to be satisfied. In any case, it was found that most of the “Peidu” rural women were more aware of their mother's role through “Peidu” and were trying to fulfill their role as mothers.

3.3.2 Further emphasis and pursuit of privacy

It is said that all the informants other than Mrs. G returned to their villages after the “Peidu”. Those who returned did not have houses in the city and their families were living in the villages. Mrs. G still lives in urban areas. I asked her why.

Mrs. G: Even after my youngest child entered college, I’ll continued to live where I am now.

Writer: Are you not going to go back to the village anymore?

Mrs. G: I won't go back. At least I won't go back until I can't work. I hate it because there is nothing to do even if I go back, and the women in the village always gossip about people (June 6, 2022).

Mrs. G has no close relatives in the village because her parents-in-law passed away early. Her husband has already reached retirement age and is eligible for retirement benefits. The couple wants to live a more fulfilling and mentally comfortable life in a city where they have enough personal space.

Mrs. G experienced isolation at her home for about 15 days due to the influence of the Covid-19. Through this isolation, Mrs. G told me about her labor needs. In addition to the difficulty of finding a job in rural areas, people tend to waste their time by gossiping about others’ privacy. On the other hand, Mrs. G lists the reasons why she does not return to rural areas, saying that there are many opportunities to create one's own value through work in cities.

In cities, individual space is guaranteed, and individual privacy is respected, whereas in rural areas, many people have a weak sense of privacy and love to gossip. Therefore, Mrs. G said that she will not return to the villages if she is healthy enough to work.

Mrs. F also said that privacy is respected in urban areas.

When I got back to the village, I started hearing rumors again. In rural areas, people seem to like to gossip when they have free time, but I don't really like the gossip. People in urban areas seem to live far away from each other. In urban areas, privacy is less gossiped and people-to-people connections are weaker (May 28, 2022).

Mrs. G continues to live in the city because she is attracted to the merits of urban areas, such as respect for privacy, and meanwhile she does not have close family members in the village. Whereas Mrs. F has a family in the village, therefore, she decided without hesitation to return to the village. Mrs. F said that there may be various advantages in urban areas, but it has no place for herself. I heard similar thoughts from other informants.

Mrs. A: I think my children will be blessed with a good education if I live in an urban area, but I am used to living in a rural area. I don't want to buy a house in the city unless it's for my children's education (May 14, 2022).

Some informants (Mrs. A, Mrs. B, Mrs. D, Mrs. E, Mrs. F) said that they could not feel a sense of belonging in the city and wanted to return to their village and regain their connection with their families. Most of them cannot live in urban areas for long, but they are attracted to urban areas where privacy is respected.

3.3.3 Summary

Many informants have refocused their attention on the various needs of children through "Peidu". Mrs. B, who had a hard time with her flexible work, and Mrs. F, said they always wanted to go back to the villages. Despite Mrs. B, Mrs. H, and Mrs. J, said

they enjoyed the "Peidu" life, they wanted to eventually return to the villages. While attracted to urban areas where privacy is respected, many informants are unable to let go of their families and often return to their hometowns after "Peidu".

4 Discussion and Conclusion

I have so far focused on "Peidu" rural women in China and analyzed the perceptions and practices of women's roles in rural China based on the narratives of 8 research collaborators. They were by no means monolithic. However, they share, or are beginning to share, the child-rearing philosophy of "child-centeredness" in the current of modernization. In this study, the following conclusions were obtained for the research questions.

In the 20 years from 1990 to 2010, the female employment rate in urban China declined, but the decline did not last long. (Zheng 2023). In recent years, women in urban areas of China have become increasingly aware of the following trends: "In the period of the global market economy since the 2000s, as symbolized by the emergence of 'super moms,' 'working mothers,' 'mothers who practice scientific parenting,' Women who live for their hobbies" are now required to fulfill multiple roles at the same time" (Zheng 2023: 102). On the other hand, from 1990 to 2020, the female labor force rate has been declining in rural China (Zheng 2023). While women in urban areas are forced to play multiple roles, women in rural areas are now showing signs of a shift in roles, such as "child-centeredness". Women in China's rural areas have experienced a change in roles. It is necessary to elucidate in the future whether the changes in women's roles in China's rural areas is lagging urban areas and they will follow the path to fulfilling multiple roles at the same time in the future.

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