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Empowering Women through Rural-Urban Migration in China

An Analysis of Resources, Agency and Achievements

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Abstract

Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls were presented at the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG5) by the United Nations. It has been realized that empowerment of women plays a crucial role in development. This study examines the empowerment process of rural migrant women in China. It first describes the registration house system called hukou and general gender roles in China. This research is based on literature an overview and analysis of the empowerment process through the empowerment theory developed by Naila Kabeer (1999b). This theory presents three dimensions: resources, agency and achievements. Resources have been analyzed as economic, human and social ones. Agency refers to decision-making as empowering process. Achievements include women's participation in the labor market. Women through participation in labor market receive resources, became economically independent. Economic resources, like remittances increase their agency within family household and strengthen their social position.

Key words: empowerment, migration, rural migrant women, hukou system

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1 Introduction

The empowerment of women is fundamental in the development process and poverty reduction, and has been recognized as a very important factor for development by international organizations like the World Bank and United Nations (UN). In 2015 the United Nations officially launched the 2030 Sustainable Development agenda, which was signed by 195 member nations. The agenda calls for action in all countries to improve the lives of individuals globally. It consists of 17 goals, which have a transformative and universal character to be implemented on a global scale. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seek to change the world addressing the main challenges like poverty, inequality, and violence against women. Female empowerment is the main condition for this to happen (UN 2015).

Women have a fundamental role to play in all Sustainable Development Goals, with many targets recognizing female equality and empowerment. Out of the 195 members, 143 recognize and guarantee the equality between men and women in their constitution by 2014. The fifth goal in the Sustainable Development Goals aims at achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Women and girls represent half of the world's population and in this way carry half of the potential for global change. It is not possible to build good and prosperous societies without the rights for half of the population (UN 2015).

Women make up about half of the international migrants, yet there is still need to recognize their role (WB 2012). Many scholars claim that migration has an empowering and disempowering effect, however, there is a lack of research in this area even if female migration has greatly increased over the two past decades (Hugo 2000). The call for more research on the social dimension of empowerment of female migrants was recommended by Oishi (2005). The empowerment process initiated by migration may have effects on many dimensions for the migrant women (Kulczycka 2015). It affects their families, communities, and societies. Migration is not only exploitative and demanding, but at the same time, it may have positive outcomes as well.

As China has rapidly become industrialized and urbanized since the implementation of the economic reform at the end of the 1970s, hundreds of millions of rural people have migrated from their family village to urban areas to seek better and more prosperous lives (Xu Boman 2014). According to the ILO China experiences one of the most extensive internal migration and feminization of labor in the world (ILO 2006). The number of rural migrants represents the greatest ever-peacetime flow of migration. The number of rural migrants looking for work within urban areas has risen from two million in 1980 to as many as 277.5 million in 2015 (ILO 2006). The labor migration is one of the most complex and pressing problems for the China nowadays (ILO 2006). With this in mind, this thesis will examine the empowerment process of the rural migrant women in China.

1.1 Aim and purpose of the study

The aim of this thesis is to analyze how rural-urban migration has an empowering effect on women. This study will critically explore and analyze in what ways the existing resources, agency, and achievements gained during the process of migration lead to their empowerment. Economic income is underlined by scholars as very important in this process of empowerment (Ngan-ling Chow 2007), and can transform their position in the family and in the society. Migration may bring many opportunities to change not only women's standards of life, but their identity as well. A deeper analysis of the changes the rural women experience in their life during the process of migrating to urban areas will be carried out. The access to resources, agency, and achievements will be examined as contributions to their empowerment.

1.2 Research question

In order to conduct this study, the following research question will be addressed:

How does migration lead to the empowerment of the rural migrant women in China?

This question will be answered by shedding light on the implications of the migration of rural women in China, through the contribution of their resources, agency, and achievements. Migrant women participate in the labor market outside of their place of origin and through this participation they increase their education, income and contribute to their families' resources. They also increase their social and human resources like education, decision-making within their family and gain self-confidence. All these different factors are a contribution to their empowerment and are the ones that will be investigated in order to answer the research question. The female empowerment will be analyzed through empowerment theory written by Naila Kabeer (1999a). This theory model measures the empowerment process in three dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements.

1.3 Methodology

This research is based on the study of empirical material from the research literature. This is a desk study and secondary data is fundamental for this research. The collected data comes from secondary sources like articles, journals, academic books, websites, and reports published from different international organizations like: the World Bank (WB), United Nations (UN) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The qualitative data is analyzed on the basis of empowerment theory to get a better understanding of the complexities that empowerment processes entail. Different methods will be used to increase the understanding of the empowerment processes that migrant rural-urban women experience in China.

The secondary data analysis provides the opportunity to study empowerment of rural migrant women in China without conducting an actual field study in the country. The access to good qualitative data saves time and allows for being more concentrated on the already collected information, which can result in an in-depth analysis (Bryman 2008: 313). However, the secondary data analysis demands time to get familiar with the structure and contours of data as well there is a complexity of the secondary data, which may include many categories etc. (ibid). Nevertheless, new perspectives and new interpretations allow for an increasing understanding of the existing phenomenon. However, this is an interpretation of the data, which was collected for the different purpose, what can result in methodological and understanding obstacles (Bryman, 2008: 300, Punch 2014). The main source for this study is the secondary data collected by different scholars, which are described in the literature review, which as mentioned before will be used for theoretical purposes as well as for the purpose of providing empirical examples. The study includes qualitative methods like interviews, observations and surveys that are very helpful in this study since they represent the reality of those rural migrant women in their daily life. An example of this are the studies by Eklund (2000) and Mahmoud (2004), which represent high-quality fieldwork carried out in China. The techniques used during the construction of the empirical material include qualitative and quantitative methods. Mahmoud (2004) provides us with semi-structured interviews with 150 female migrants as well as structured interviews with scholars and government officials. Eklund (2000) gives twelve structured interviews with migrant women and a semi-structured interview with a government representative. As well different statistic concerning rural migrant women were used. Since no field work was conducted in this study, those secondhand interviews are of great importance as they demonstrate the opinions and realities of migrant women in China and represent their voice.

Data collected for this study comes from different researchers, and allows for the expansion of knowledge about this issue from different perspectives, which can result in new interpretations (Bryman 2008: 298). Another study conducted by Tseun Kweun Yu (2007) analyzes the empowerment and disempowerment of migrant women working in China's manufacturing industry as a case study. This provides us with crucial information about the process of empowerment, which will be analyzed in an appropriate manner according to the research question in close relation to the chosen theory. Connely et al. (2010) use a survey of over 3000 married and single rural women in Anhui and Sichuan

province and also examine the influence of migration on women's position in their family household as well as in the society, which is very important in this study. Bai and Li's (2008) study focuses on exploring different statistics used in different surveys that will allow for complementing the qualitative data collected on empowerment processes with quantitative data to view the case from various methodological perspectives.

This research also uses the reports from the World Bank, United Nations and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. (WB 2005, WB 2012, UN 2016, Sida 2015). The World Bank and the United Nations are key actors in the economic and social development on international levels. Therefore, their role is fundamental in the analysis of the empowerment of women in China. Their reports focus on the issue of development, especially exploring the empowerment of women through different approaches. They give reviews and evaluate different measures of women's empowerment that lead to a decreasing inequality between men and women and that reduce poverty. The report from Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency was chosen, because its findings specifically address the research question. The collected information helps to increase the understanding and knowledge about empowerment processes for rural migrant women in China. The diversity of the collected secondary data in form of reports and works of scholars is relevant and of great importance in order to gain a holistic picture and new understanding of the complexity of the empowerment processes of rural migrant women in China. On one hand the scholars provide valuable research conducted through fieldworks, which give an in-depth understanding and knowledge about the rural migrant women lives. On the other hand to complement collected data, reports provide structural factors; this gives broader picture of empowerment process.

2 Background

2.1 China's economy

Sustained economic growth in China over the last three decades has been enormous. China with its massive population of 1.357 billion people is the largest country in the world and until 2015 was the world's fastest-growing major economy (WB 2017). This incredible growth has allowed increasing per capita income and helped many hundreds of millions of people come out of poverty (Chen and Hamori 2013). It was driven by export and investment to and from foreign countries (Chen et al. 2014).

In order to reach such economic growth, China has chosen traditional a Stalinist-Socialist growth strategy based on rapid industrialization and concentration on big industries within urban areas (Chen et al. 2014). This perspective is notorious for the great exploitation of the rural areas and at the same time building a society characterized by huge disparities between urban-industrial and agricultural sectors, which has meant a great outflow of resources from the rural areas to urban areas (Cheng and Selden 1994). This has led to greater poverty among the rural populations who consequently move to urban areas in search for a better life. In 1950 rural migration reached its peak and the Chinese government then started to impose various measures in order to control this flow (Cheng and Selden 1994, Zhu and Wan 2012).

2.2 Household registration system

In order to provide a greater picture of migration process, this chapter will present existing policies (hukou system) and the gender roles in China. In 1958 a series of migration-control measures were introduced in the Household Registration System (hukou system) to control the population's mobility within the country (Knight and Song 1999). This regulation demands that all rural migration must be accepted and approved by the local government (Li 2005). Since this time, the hukou system has to some degree deprived the citizens of the freedom of residence and migration within their own country. The hukou mechanism registers all Chinese citizens in specific location defined as the agricultural type or non-agricultural type. Hukou status is determined by the place of birth and classified as 'rural' or 'urban' and is passed on from one generation to the next. The hukou mechanism as the main tool of a command system made for the big push industrialization has played an important role in controlling the movements of

people with rural hukou within the country (Cheng and Selden, 1994). The term 'rural hukou' symbolizes hukou status registered in rural areas under the agricultural type and 'urban hukou' means the status of those registered in urban areas under the non-agricultural type. This measure was taken to prevent undesirable rural to urban migration, which resulted in denied opportunities for the peasantry to move to the city. At the same time, it is the very fundamental factor in China's rural-urban division (ibid).

The hukou system is not only a division established to control migration flows and labor mobility, but also an instrument of social control and means of exclusion of the rural population from access to state-provided goods such as welfare, entitlements, better public services, more secure and better-paid jobs and schools (Xu Boman 2014). The possibility of receiving permanent urban hukou is offered to few, only to those who have gained special achievements like college or professional school, have joined the army or been chosen as a cadre, meaning being in charge of administrative affairs in villages or towns (Xing 2014). It can also be given as compensation to rural residents who were the owners of land occupied by urban construction projects; however, it removes their right to vote in their home villages. Their reward is the entitlement to higher income as well many other benefits coming from the urban hukou (ibid).

Many rural migrants move as a respond to employment opportunities and higher income payments in the cities. They search for work mainly through social networks, which is a great facilitator of opportunities when moving (Meng 2000). When they find a job, they move to cities and receive the name 'peasant workers' (nongmingong) due to their agricultural registration. They can work, but due to their rural origins, they are excluded from all the benefits exclusive to the urban hukou residents (Xing 2014). They have no right to health care, welfare programs, and public services. Education for their children cost them higher fees, which results in leaving their children in rural areas under the care of the elderly or close family. Furthermore, they have no political right in local elections. Peasant workers send remittances to their families, where they regularly return and will come back permanently; although many have the intention to stay in the city permanently (Chan 2010). However, due to their low wages, their possibility to obtain certain wealth and position in order to receive urban hukou remains small.

Their low wages related to their rural registration are barely enough for the workers to make a very minimal living within the city and fall far below the average urban industrial wages for the population with urban hukou (Zuo 2013). The low income of rural workers (200-500 yuan per month) is the the main cause of insufficient consumption demands, which resulted in the Chinese economy being heavily dependent on export for over 20 years (Zhu 2012). Their temporary status makes them vulnerable and easily expendable, being trapped in the captivity of lowest-end factory and other jobs. Many cities and export zones have local decrees that forbid migrants from taking up jobs other than those in the low-skilled 3-D category ('dangerous, dirty and demeaning', often physically demanding) (Chan 2010). Although there have been some improvements within local governments related to urban hukou, these adjustment did not change the dualistic structure of this system (Chan 2010). This dualistic structure is based on a division to access social benefits, which is currently provided only for one-third

of the population. In order to remain competitive in the global market the Chinese government uses formal division strategies and apparatus. The exclusion of rural migrants from local hukou, gives them limited access to legal information and supports the building of a great, exploitable, highly mobile and flexible industrial labor force for the Chinese economy, that is at service to global consumers (Lee 1998). The driving force behind China's economic growth strategy to be the world's most efficient and cheapest producer is labor force from rural to urban and exports processing zones (Chan 2010). Although China's government has initiated many changes to improve the situation for the rural migrant laborers the changes have remained ineffective or marginal in terms of outcome (Chan 2010).

Female migrants made up 49 percent of the total migration flow in 2000 and its proportion has increased since (ILO 2003). It has also changed its patterns, there are more women nowadays, who move on their own in the search of better economic opportunities rather than following the husbands or other family members. The increased number of female migrants comes from the demand in industries and the service sector, which prefer the young females as they view them as more cheap and docile than men. Migrant women are also engaged in sex work, either voluntary or forced to prostitution, and deal with health problems like AIDS (Tseun Kweun Yu 2007). In existing demand for 'nimble fingers' and 'disposable labor' the global market has made a new division of labor, which allowed China to become a 'world factory'. This made the female migration more flexible, extensive, and complex (Pun 2005:4).

2.3 Gender roles in China

In the case of China traditions, the eldest son in the family is responsible for taking care of the clan and care for his parents. The daughter will marry and move to her new family in law. In this way, it is more important to take care of and educate the sons, since he will take care of the family household (Eklund 2000:12).

Moreover, filial piety makes daughters responsible for bringing income early to their parents' home in order to help and support their parents economically through wages and remittances (West et al. 1999). Also boys are more respected than girls, so the daughters are obligated to work early in order to enable their brothers to enroll in school longer. In this way, we can see how the market shapes and underlines the values presented in the family and at the same time it produces different gender effects in the relations to their role in the family. Economic growth within the urban areas results in the migration of the youth in order to ensure the survival of the individual and their family (Ngan-ling Chow 2007). This migration very often results in the traditional value of filial piety, which demands from offspring to give their income, partially or whole in order to help their family left in less developed or prosperous places of origin. In this way, we can see how the migrant women control and dispose their income in order to support their family. Economic expansion of China resulted in the feminization of

the labor force as a great migration of the young women for work, especially in the manufacturing sector in the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in South China. Foreign or privately owned companies favor the young women with little or some education. Corporations and firms tend to prefer women as cheap labor and the women face a stereotype of passivity, meekness and obedience and therefore as ideal factory workers. Especially the majority of the women referred to as the 'floating population' in urban China will not receive permanent legitimacy to stay (hukou) and eventually will need to go back to their place of origin (ibid). Therefore, many women migrants are in preference over the men in the big companies, which build their profit on the cheap labor source.

The Chinese society is a patriarchal society, that presents women as subordinated and reinforced by their material and ideological conditions, possessing less economic sources and being considered as having lower social status than men. Many studies show that men are traditionally perceived as the main laborers and key providers for the family where the income of the women is only merely to augment the family's financial support. In the Chinese society women have inferior social status in paid labor market and in the home (Knight and Song 1999). According to study done by Lee (1998) women's bargaining power with spouses did not increase their chances of getting paid labor. Moreover, the researcher noticed that before involvement in the labor production women could exercise substantially greater than bargaining power much better. This may show that the role of culture, gender role ideology design relations of power within the family. Traditional Chinese family treats each gender differently. Boys in that family are in preferences over girls, male laborers over female laborers, seeing boys and men as economic capital and girls as a burden (Eklund 2000). This culture creates norms of life-based on obedience, loyalty, and obligations to the family, which strengthens and encourages the young generation to follow filial piety (Smyth et al. 2010). In this way, women are obliged to hand in their income to be at the disposal to their parents, spouses and parents in law.

According to research done on this subject, it is said that parents invest a disproportional amount of money between girls and boys due to patriarchal ideology, which devalues women's labor and familial contributions in comparison to men's (Lee 1998). The Chinese society has cultural traditions and expectations about gender behaviors and the meaning of social obligations, depending on gender, age, and class. Although the recent economic development of industrialization, modernization, and Westernization of China, as well as a strong communist ideology which stresses ultimate loyalty to parties and the state, Mao Zedong's idea of equality for women have greatly challenged the Chinese family to uproot the traditionalism and the Confucianism within family and society (Tseun Kweun Yu 2007). Furthermore, Chiang et al. (2013) argues, Chinese families are a veritable engine for the economic development. State policies stress the importance of the economic growth, which is also supported by Chinese values on collective orientation and hard work with emphasis on education, trust, and personal relationship. In this line, the rural family encourages migration of the youth to give them autonomy and better economic opportunity in order to collect remittances as expected contributions to compensate for the family's investment

in their education and upbringing (ibid). This not only reinforces the existing system but also gives it their high dynamics.

3 Literature overview

Internal migration has a long history in China, but only after the 1980s the study on this subject expanded due to a previous lack of information. After this time the interest of scholars provided much information about the population and its contribution and impacts on labor import and export areas. The existing data on this subject is enormous. The largest amount of surveys focuses on the exploitative and harsh conditions for the migrants. Although this thesis stresses on empowerment, it is important to provide a literature overview, which can help to see the whole complex situation of migrant workers' lives. In the literature overview the first part will describe the empowerment process and the second part will include conditions for migrants: accommodation, working conditions, low wages, trade unions, contracts, health care, welfare state and education.

3.1 Empowerment process

The number of studies on migrant workers conducted in China is enormous, however the majority of this research represents constraints of the hukou system for the migrant workers and the exploitative nature of their work. Within all literature about rural migrant workers in China, there is little research done about empowerment of rural migrant women. Oishi (2005) calls for social research on this issue. Tseun Kweun Yu (2007) tries to fill this gap. This study is a qualitative study, using migrant women working in China's manufacturing industry as a case study. This research describes female migrants' position in empowerment and disempowerment in the migration process. It shows migration as multiple fronts for women to define or redefine, gain and lose at different locales, where agency and structure meets.

Another research related to this issue is the case study conducted by Lisa Eklund (2000), which explores motives for migration and the effects of migration process on women. This study is a collection of in-depth interviews with migrants in Beijing. Eklund (2000) argues that economic issues are not the only reasons behind the motivation for the migration of young women. The social norms and customs related to marriage and childbearing in the home villages also make young girls wish to migrate. The text follows with the different impacts of migration that makes migrant women change the way of thinking and behaving in more urban style life. Eklund stresses, that migration strengthens women's agency within their household due to economic resources like remittances. Bai and Li (2008) present research based on a study of the empirical research literature. This study concentrates on migrant workers in China, giving the numbers concerning its contribution to labor export areas, their structural distribution, and their influence on labor import areas. This analysis includes different statistics used in

different survey and give panoramic picture of migrant workers in China. Bai and Li findings show that migration of rural migrant women leads to their economic independence. Labor wage, which they earn, supports their family and contribute to other sectors of economy.

A number of studies have found that rural Chinese migrant women due to their migration are able to experience more autonomy and freedom within cities than in their family's villages. Rachel Connelly et al. (2010) examine the influence of migration on women's position in their family household as in the society. Connelly et al. (2010) using a survey of over 3000 married and single rural women in Anhui and Sichuan provinces, explores different status of migrant women and their relation towards others family members. Another research discussing women's empowerment are the reports published by the World Bank, United Nations and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. These are international and regional financial institutions, which support economic and social development in developing countries. This economic involvement gives them very important role in addressing the Sustainable Development Goals, which includes empowerment of women and the reduction of poverty. Reports focus on the issue of development, especially the empowerment of women through different approaches. One of the reports published by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (2001) is written by Dr. Naila Kabeer (1999b) from institute of development Studies in Sussex, United Kingdom. This report, like others gives reviews and evaluates different measures of women's empowerment, the value they embody and the appropriateness of these values in the process of empowerment.

There are different explanations and concepts of empowerment and it is difficult to find clear-cut terms to describe it. Many scholars used different approaches to empowerment processes. Kabeer (1999a) discusses a three-dimensional conceptual framework in order to measure women's empowerment. In her paper first explains resources and the concept of 'agency', and then she explains those indicators that could explain 'achievement'. Achievements are used to measure the outcomes. This thesis shows the indicators of empowerment like: marital benefit, financial independence, self-determination (ibid). Amartya Sen (1999b) describes development as a freedom. The freedom is an instrument to live a valuable life, and it helps to understand the action and behavior of individuals. The factors like education, health care, and secure jobs are the factors that contribute to this freedom of choice. Also Sen (1999) attains an integrated global perspective in his studies, concentrating on empowerment as an issue of development.

3.2 Conditions for migrants

3.2.1 Accommodation for migrants

Studying the situation in China gives a new view of how the market reform can affect the lives and opportunities for many. The very weak position of migrants in the housing system is well documented. Migrant workers are described as the 'floating population'. Also the term 'temporary' is commonly used to describe their stay in the city and as well as non-official status. These terms include a distinction between 'local or non-locally registered' (Wu 2002). This registration shows that the urban-rural division is the most important factor that makes great differences between people daily life. Migrants have restricted access to urban housing and therefore many rent cheap and low-quality housing in peripheral zones (Goldstain 1993). Scholars describe the villages as a place to live in very demanding accommodation. They are far away from the city, isolated, without any social and residential communication with urban centers (Zheng 2004).

It is well documented that factories build dormitories in order to facilitate long hours of work by the young workers. Through data collected in the late 1990s, Wu (2002) presents that dormitories or temporary housing on construction sites are occupied by 75% of labor migrants. Another scholar shows that 78,5% labor migration has only 3.8 square meters as a living space (Knight et al 1999). Moreover, it is common that migrants share a rental unit with others or sleep in shifts as a way to reduced rent cost. This is classified as collective housing since it does not fulfill the categories of standard housing. The average cost for rent is double the price of what is paid by those with urban registration (Li 2005). Only 24 per cent of the migrant population have the privilege of having an independent kitchen or bathroom and the accommodation area has no libraries, gyms, and public facility nearby, what result in a boring life in their spare time (Logan et al. 2009).

3.2.2 Working conditions

As the literature points out migrants take up low-skilled and low-paid gender specific jobs in textile and manufacturing factories as well as in the service sector, where there is a lot of abuse of workers rights and labor law (Zhang 2011).

Another existing issue that is well documented is the high amount of working hours. According to Zuo (2013), median hours worked by migrants in China were 56 hours per week, while 75 percent worked more than 50 hours per week. Other studies show that female migrants work 12 hours a day in shifts or more, especially when orders are due (Pun 2005). A survey in Guangdong shows that that 80.5 per cent of migrant workers works for 11 to 14 hours per day. 47.2

per cent do not have time off in the weekends (China People's Congress News, 06- 09-2002) (Li 2005). There is a feminization of the workforce in supply chain factories and chain services as well (Yates 2004). However, the female workers in order to fill these norms suffer physical and mental harm. There are documented cases of female workers working in the export processing zones who develop urinary infections, because they are allowed to use toilets only during the meal breaks (Smyth et al 2013). There are also documented cases that women working long hours and taking continual shift rotation are affected by different health problems like disrupted menstruation, insomnia and an intestinal problems (Smyth et al. 2013).

3.2.3 Low wages, trade unions and contracts

Concerning low wages, the study done by Pakrashi and Frijters (2016) found that hourly wage earnings for workers with urban hukou are on average about twice of that of workers with rural hukou and two and a half times, when hourly compensation is considered. The existing Trade Union Law says that all employees should have the right to be member of a trade union. However, very few factories have the trade unions, and even if they exist they fail to address the workers needs and are not able to protect their rights (Chan 2000). The majority of the workers do not sign contracts with their employers. It is found that a lack of written contract by migrant rural women working in the private sector puts them in a situation to work hard, often to extremely long working hours in order to earn as much as possible in order to be able to stay in the urban areas. This creates many advantages for the employers to control and exploit them (Li 2005). As a garment factory owner in Shantou says: "It is a mutual selection. I will dismiss them if I am not happy with their work. They have complete freedom to leave at any time, too. There are plenty of migrant workers anyway" (Zhang 2011: 591).

3.2.4 Health care, welfare programs and education

There is a lot of surveys, showing the same results that in China social welfare and the benefits they bring are closely connected to the residence status. Therefore migrant workers, who are not official residents of those cities are largely excluded from access to social security and medical benefits within cities (Li 2006) (Xu et al 2011). Another major issue discussed by researchers is the lack of access to public school for migrant children, because they lack the urban residency. Due to expensive fees to public schools migrant children go to informal schools with inferior quality (Li 2005). Scholars also argue about social discrimination, which often leads migrant workers to live in alienation and isolation from local residences (Wang and el. 2015).

4 Theoretical framework

There has been much debate about empowerment and many scholars contribute to the debate with a different perspective. According to Lee (2001) empowerment aims to increase the personal, interpersonal and political power of oppressed and marginalized population for an individual and collective change. Also it underlines the need to increase the personal, interpersonal and political power of marginalized people to come work for the improvement of their life (Gutierrez, 1990). Others see empowerment as a theoretical framework that can facilitate people to take more control over their lives (AlMaseb and Julia, 2007). There are many concepts of empowerment and empowerment of women. For this study the concept given by Naila Kabeer (1999a) has been chosen as the theoretical framework. Also writings about empowerment by scholar Amartya Sen will be used. Both of them gain an integrated global perspective in their studies presenting empowerment as an issue of development. This model will help to analyze collected data and develop strategies for empowerment of rural migrant women in the process of migration. This theory of empowerment is applicable, since it describes and explains the empowerment in the three different dimensions. This aspect of different dimensions is complex, but helpful for an in-depth analysis regarding processes of empowerment.

Rural migrant women migrate to urban places in order to work. During this migration process different situations occur and they gain new experiences related to labor market and urban society (Smyth et al 2013). This study will concentrate on the empowerment process, which is gained through their participation in migration within the country. Migration may carry different outcomes, but as well benefits for the women in their daily life. This includes economic independence, increased decision-making powers within their household, and strengthens their social position. However, as it is well-researched, Chinese labor market for women put up many constraints like the working conditions, long hours, lack of access to healthcare and welfare programs due to the household registration system. It is important to consider it and mention the existing policies in order to have a better understanding of the empowerment process.

According to Naila Kabeer (1999a), the model of empowerment has three different aspects: resources, agency, and achievements. The resources are not only the economic ones, but they constitute of all social and human resources, which help a woman strengthen the ability to make choices. They may differ for each individual. Each person has a different level of education, skills, or creativity. Other resources are the social ones, very fundamental in life like: relationships, connections, and networks. These social resources can play very important roles in the improvement of one's position. The second dimension presented by Naila Kabeer (1999a) is the agency: "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them". Resources and agency together constitute achievement, which is the third

dimension. Achievements are given in order to measure the results of outcomes. The more details concerning the theory of empowerment will be described later. Furthermore, the notion of empowerment has been used in different ways and has different dimensions. Empowerment takes place at different levels, to cover a range of different dimensions and to materialize the different processes. The central and the most important role in empowerment play is ‘power’. This is the starting point to clarify in order to understand how the notion of empowerment will be used in order to explain the empowerment of rural migrant women by the process of migration.

Power can be presented in terms of ability to make choices: to be disempowered, therefore means to be denied of choice. The notion of empowerment is bound with disempowerment and is related to the process by acquiring the ability to make choice by those who have been denied such ability. In a simple way empowerment consists a process of change. In this way people who exercise abundant deal of choice in their daily life may belong to very powerful people, however, they are not empowered in this sense, since they were never disempowered in the previous choices (Kabeer 1999b). In order to analyze power, the perception of choice has to be categorized in different ways. It is important to stress that choice necessarily implies alternatives, the possibility to choose otherwise. Also some choices are more important than others in terms of consequences. In this line, we can distinguish two different orders of choices. The first one is the order of the strategic life choices: choice of livelihood, where to live, whether to marry and have children, how many children to have, freedom of movement and choice of friends. These are very important choices in our lives and they are not necessarily something that we consider in our everyday life. However, they are crucial in our life, because they express the way we want to live our lives. The strategic life choices help us design other choices, which implies fewer consequences, but rather the quality of life. The ability to exercise strategic life choices can be presented in three different moments in the process of social change:

resources >	agency >	achievements
(pre-conditions)	(process)	(outcomes)

Resources include material resources in the economic sense and as well the various human and social resources, that allow for the possibility to make choices. In this way resources are also acquired through a variety of social relationships conducted in the different aspects of our life including schools, family market and state (Kabeer 1999b). Such resources can exist in the form of allocations and later in the claims and expectations. Accessibility to these resources may include rules and norms, which covers distribution and exchange within society institutional arenas. These norms and rules give certain actors authority over others in designing distribution and exchange within society. Heads of the household, chiefs of tribes, directors of firms, managers of organizations, elites are all in the authoritarian position, which includes decision making. In this line rules and norms can thus be seen in a position of ‘enabling’ or ‘disabling’ social resources for the individual (Kabeer 1999a).

The second dimension is agency, the ability to define one's goals and act upon them. Agency is not the only action, which we can observe, it also has meaning motivation and purpose of the individual – as it called by feminists: 'the power within'. According to scholars agency is defined in the decision- making, as well it can take form of the bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance besides cognitive process of reflection and analysis. This can take form in the individual and in the organized form like formal or informal groups (Kabeer 1999b). Agency's relation to power can have positive sense and refers to people's capacity to define their own life choices and to persuade their own goals, despite difficult circumstances like oppression, and opposition from others. Also it may take a negative form of power over in situation when an actor or category of actors imposes their goals over other people against their wishes (Kabeer 1999a).

Resources and agency both together constitute what Sen (1999) describes as capabilities: the potential, which people have and exercise to live the lives they want to live, which are structured by the valued ways of 'being and doing'. This being and doing are constructed by functioning idea, which is characterized by 'functioning achievements' realized by individual people. In this line, if the cause of the failure to achieve valued ways of being and doing can attribute to laziness, incompetence or individual preferences and priorities, then the factor of power is not relevant. It is only when failure to achieve one's goal can be address to the existing constraint on the possibility to choose, than it can be manifestation of disempowerment (Kabeer 1999a).

5 Analysis

In order to analyse the empowerment of rural migrant women, the analysis will be done through the tool of theoretical framework given by Naila Kabeer (1999a). To answer this complex question three dimensions will be used: resources, agency, and achievements. Rural China is a traditional society with its strong patriarchal norms. Women's role is to be a devoted mother and daughter and take care of the household. They get married early through the marriage arranged by their parents. Their role is to take care of the family and often to work in agriculture. Many women due to economic issues and in search for increased standards of life choose to migrate. Through their participation in the labor market, they receive economic resources, support their family and develop their agency within their household. This following text will present this process.

5.1 Resources

Resources are described as a precondition to empowerment. It is considered economic, human and social resources. As Kabeer (1999b) claims, access to resources cannot be considered as an indicator of direct empowerment. Migrant women through their migration process enter into the labor market. This participation allows them to receive economic resources in form of labor wage. In their place of origin, many of them never received a payment for their work within the household or for agricultural work. This is the first time they have their own income and can decide what to do with it.

5.1.1 Income

The control over the economic income can be seen as a precondition for their empowerment. It makes them independent individuals. This independence allows them to be able to support themselves and as well support their family in their village. The possibility to earn their money and be economically independent makes them strengthen their own value and self-confidence. Their identity also changes from the agricultural invisible worker to the visible employee (Eklund 2000). This new identity makes a transformation of their person. One of the obstacles to women's empowerment is their unpaid work within household and agricultural work. This may increase their poverty and restrict their time to engage in the formal and paid work, which leads to a poverty trap. Wages can be seen in this study as resources and "resources are at once removed from choice, a measure of potential rather than actualized choice" (Kabeer 1999a: 28). The wage income has great influence on the transformation of migrants' lives, as Sida claim:

“Women’s economic empowerment is a precondition for sustainable development and pro-poor growth. A stronger focus on gender equality and women’s economic empowerment is essential to reduce poverty. The World Bank argues that addressing gender inequalities with women’s economic empowerment is ‘smart economics’ (Sida 2015:6).

Moreover, according to the World Bank (2012) economic empowerment of migrant women is a very important factor, which may contribute to equality between men and women. The role of these women is often subjected to serve their family and men, economic independence makes their position strengthened and they may gain more power in their households. The access to resources not only increases their position, but as well their opportunities in life. Besides in China by giving them work women's contribution to the national economy is formally recognized. The scholar Bai and Li (2008:98) gives the same argument based on research on rural migrants in China. Their research gives detailed information about their income, position within society and role in the economy. He stresses the fact that rural migrants through their income contribute with 20 per cent of the GDP in China (Bai and Li 2008:98). Migrants earn their money and are able to support themselves and their family as well. Through income, their economic independence grows and they contribute to other sectors of the economy.

Other scholars support these arguments, as Tseun Kweun Yu (2007) claims that economical independence empowers rural migrant women to be transformed from the invisible laborer within a household to a visible independent cash earner within the urban area and this makes a transformation of their person (Tseun Kweun Yu 2007). This transformation also plays a very important role in their empowerment. Moreover, as Sida claim: “The economic empowerment of women is a human right and social justice issue, but it also reduces poverty, and strengthens economic growth and development” (Sida 2015:11). Women's participation in the labor market in China allows them to strengthen their human rights and gives them recognition in the economic process of development in China (Sida 2015:12). In this line economic independence has not only contribution to their well- being by strengthening their human rights and social justice, it also allows them to break domestic violence. Domestic violence for them may be one of the greatest obstacles, which migration may allow them to overcome. This argument is supported by Connelly (2010), who argues that independent income increases a woman’s agency in terms of domestic violence as well. Furthermore, as Sida stresses: “Women’s economic empowerment is intrinsically linked to gender-based violence. Economic independence strengthens the position of migrant women not only within family, society but within country also. It underlines their contribution to the economy and makes their rights to be recognized within the economic process of development in China” (Sida 2015:13). In this perspective it is argued by scholars and international organizations that economic income is a precondition for the empowerment of rural migrant woman. This income makes her economically independent, which affects her possibilities in life, but also her human rights and social justice like break of domestic violence. All these factors contribute to increasing empowerment in their life.

5.1.2 Remittances

As Kabeer (1999b: 23) claims: "Resources once removed from choice, a measure of potential rather than actualized choice". How changes in women's resources will translate into changes in the choices they are able to make depend, in part, on the other aspect of the conditions in which they are making their choices. In the case of migrant woman this resource allows them to make choice, which they could not do living within their place of origin. They have not only access to this resource, but also this access allows them to exercise their choice, which leads to their empowerment. In this way control is used as a means of operationalizing empowerment for measurement purposes to define power (Kabeer 1999a). Rural migrant women through their participation in the labor market receive resources. The possession of these resources allows them to make choices; they can have control, which did not take place in their rural areas. They exercise their choice by choosing to send this money to their families. This is a fact that they have this opportunity now, which leads to their empowerment. Moreover, if they send their money to their family their claim over these resources also is strengthened. This can help to improve their bargaining position within family. As Hugo argues, that it is considered as a fact that social status is dependent upon economic position and educational level. It is believed the migrant women's new economic role may strengthen women's bargaining-power (Hugo 1993).

Another factor, which allows for empowerment of migrant women within their family through remittances, is the fact that their money may reduce poverty. According to the World Bank (2012) migration can reduce rural poverty and, by implication, inequality. In the same line, Bai and Li (2008) argue that very often economic support has become the main or the only support migrant workers give to their parents (who may also take care of the migrant's children). Migration increases the chances to obtain work, and is thus a major source to improve household economy and reduce poverty (Castles et al.2013). Another survey done on farming on household found that rural poverty may be greatly reduced by remittances or transfer income coming from migratory work (Bai and Li 2008:98).

5.1.3 Other resources

There are many more resources besides the economical ones like economic income or remittances or land possession bought from income saved money. Human resources play a very important role in the process of empowerment for rural migrant women in China. It may be education, skills, self-confidence and self-value not only allow the migrant woman to increase their possibilities, but as well to strengthen power to exercise their own choice. Social resources may include the relationships, belongings, and identity. It is not easy to measure these resources and their role in the empowerment process. However, they are also crucial and their development depends individually from each migrant woman. Each individual perceives differently her own identity and relationship in the empowerment process. For many migrants, migration allows not only to become independent, but get educated also. This is much more easy to work and go to

school in urban areas than in their village place, where they are occupied with household work and have long distance to school. They develop their human resources, which play very important role in their empowerment process. Moreover, it is found that single women who migrated experience greater level of confidence and felt that they have improved themselves (Eklund 2000, Mahmoud 2004). The fact that they become economically independent improves their social status in the eyes of the rural natives. Their economical contribution to support their family makes them feel more respected and self-valued. Nan who works as a shop assistant since 1998 says:

It may be because I have been in migration for such a long time – I now feel I am more mature than before in every aspect. In my family, when my parents have some problems, they all turn to me and ask for my opinion” (Eklund 2000: 31).

Migration leads them to maturity, as well as to the development of their critical evaluation on their personal positioning and these reflections may allow them to make changes to the family and their household. As Sen claims: “the expansion of the people’s capabilities to lead the kind of lives they value – and have reason to value” (Sen in Kabeer 1999a). The capabilities can be built up by public policy. It is the possibility as well to choose the life the migrant woman wants. It can be described as a freedom, which allows those women to set the life goals and attain them (Kabeer 1999a).

5.2 Agency

Agency can be defined as the ability to define one’s goal and act upon them (Kabeer 1999a:21). This process includes action, meaning, and motivation to realize one’s goal. It is connected to power to choose goals and act in order to achieve it. But at the same time, it can have the negative effect of ‘power over’ by other actors on the individual through violence, persecution, and threat. While income earned as a migrant worker improves a woman’s family resources, and perhaps her claim to these resources, agency – the ability to act as a decision maker – is also needed to achieve results (Kabeer 1999a). Migration of rural women separates them from their family and makes them live ‘alone’. From this time their responsibility as employees increases at the same time their agency for decision-making about their life is strengthened, which was not exercised much within their family life (Conelly 2010).

5.2.1 Decision-making

The role in the decision-making process is greatly connected to the woman’s position in her family and the general position of women in society. In this way according to Eklund (2000) that remaking and working over women’s identity is

related to their awareness of how their status as the daughter, women is connected to the domination of family, industry, society and they can develop their selfhood and belong while arguing, contesting or rejecting different opinions. Strengthened position of their decision-making agency within the household is a contribution to their empowerment. Women who migrated and work within urban areas are considered independent and more experienced. Besides they are believed to have much information about the labor market and the opportunities in the city and in this way their opinion is more valued by their family members. Also their contribution to family resources can increase their claim to resources, which results in their increased involvement and strengthened agency in decision-making on different matters within family household and relatives. “The findings all testify to the importance of women’s ability to contribute to their households’ survival and security to their own sense of self-worth and the ability to have a say in household decision-making” (Kabeer 2003).

5.2.2 Marriage

China is a country with traditional gender norms and roles. That way it is common for the majority of young girls to get married early and take care of their family in-law. For this reason, many young girls migrate in order to postpone their marriage. As Si acknowledges:

“If I had not left my native area I would probably have been married by this time and had a child”. Another respondent told: “To get married too early is not good. As soon as you have a family and a child you have so much pressure on you.”
(Eklund 2000:73).

Moreover, as World Bank argues that, early marriage is one of the fundamental reasons, which lower women participation in the labor market (World Bank 2005). The migrant woman doesn’t want to marry young, to have children at an early age and live the life as a farmer. Their distance from home and their economic independence allows them to exercise their autonomy concerning strategic life choices like marriage.

Another factor contributing to their empowerment through agency is their changes of attitudes. As they move to the cities they are affected by the lifestyles, and their way of thinking and behaving changes (Bai and Li 2008:98). At the same time, it increases freedom in speech with parents to express her wishes future life partner (Eklund 2000). The migration process also changes their attitude towards the free marriage and divorces, as well their reflection on sexual and fertility behavior, for example, non-consensual sexual intercourse becomes unacceptable (Connelly et al. 2002) and fewer children are born. This expansion of choices and action for the migrant woman has many outcomes, and each factor is important in contribution to their empowerment. Also Sen (1990:114) claims that individual claims are to be assessed by the freedom they can enjoy in choosing between different ways of life they value. This freedom represents capability to achieve possibility for ‘being and doing’.

According to data from All China's Women's Federation, many women migrated, because they did not want to be housewives left behind, while the husband migrated to the city and acquired the experience (Eklund 2000). Therefore rural women choose not to submit to marriage and become independent and experience persons. As Kabeer (1999a) emphasizes, that power relations are not only expressed in the terms of choice itself, but also the kind of choice. The aspect of the culture, which is so taken for granted, is that they become naturalized (Bourdieu in Kabeer 1999a, 441) which does not question if women fail to conceptualize the possibilities of making another choice. Although, there exist social and cultural order within rural society, which may affect their choice, the migrants' opinions describe that their critical consciousness was awakened during a process of migration. Migration gave them experiences and an understanding of the urban labor market and has strengthened their position by letting them know that there are many conditions in order to pursue their life goals. This aspect of empowerment has the positive effect not only on the women, but also functioning through the tightly-knitted rural social network to increase and strengthen others own agency and collective agency of female kin (Tseun Kweun Yu 2007).

5.2.3 Mobility

Regarding traditional attitude towards women, it's a fact that female labor migration allows them to be empowered in their mobility (Connely 2010). Due to existing social and cultural norms many rural women are surrounded and controlled by their families. In this way, their family tries to arrange the marriage for them as early as it is possible so they do not take the responsibility for their being. In this line, her mobility is restricted because the family's wish is to preserve young women's virginity and thereby her marriageability. In this way, the migration changes this pattern and makes previous restrictions surrounding women's mobility to loosen up. Their possibility to see the world outside of the village, mobility factor allows them to increase their self-value and confidence (Eklund 2000:78). The devaluation of themselves allows them to perceive their own level of status as something much greater as it was in their place of rural origin. This gives them the feeling of respect and human dignity as an individual. This consciousness about their low status allows them to improve it, which would be not possible if they would have stayed in the rural household, where they didn't reflect about it. As Wu Jianjun acknowledges:

If I look back on my life I think that the fact that I migrated has enriched my life (...) due to the difference between rural and urban areas I have been inspired to fight for the position I have today. The difference gave me pressure but also motive power and that has paved the way for where I am today (Eklund 2000:79).

5.3 Achievements

The third dimension presented by Naila Kabeer (1999a) represents achievements. Through resources and agency, we can measure the results of outcomes. They can be measured on basis level like nourishment or place to live. According to Sida's emphasis: "Empowerment refers to the process of change that gives individuals greater freedom of choice and action. The development of economic empowerment for women is contingent upon available resources and whether women have the skills to use them" (Sida 2015:4). Rural migrant woman left their place of origin, where the traditional and patriarchal community norms are dominating. They migrated to urban areas and changed their identity from agricultural to factory workers. Participation into labor market allows them to become economically independent and receive resources. This participation in the labor market is an achievement in their process of empowerment. It is in line with the UN's (2016) claim of the importance of women's participation in the labor market. The international organizations recognize the need for participation of women in the labor market. This allows giving greater freedom for the rural migrant woman to have access to the resources and exercise their choice. It is very important in the process of empowerment. As Sen (1999:116) argues: "The freedom to seek and hold outside jobs can contribute to the reduction of women's relative – and absolute – deprivation. Freedom in one area seems to help foster freedom in others".

6 Conclusion

This thesis examines the empowerment of rural migrant women in China. Although migration in China is a very known and researched topic by scholars, the empowerment of migrant women in China is still in need of research. In order to measure the empowerment process, the study was based on an empirical material of literature reviews that were conducted. Empowerment theory of Naila Kabeer (1999a) was used as an analytical tool to measure the empowerment process for rural migrant women in China. This theory provides three dimensions of empowerment: resources, agency, and achievements. Resources were presented as economical, human and social ones. Agency as a decision-making process includes different aspects of life, that were examined and the achievements as labor participants were discussed. All these aspects are important and reflect the complexity of the empowerment process, where one dimension is related to another one. However, this study explores the empowerment theory model of Naila Kabeer (1999a), without analyzing conditions of migration process.

This desk study describes the situation of the rural migrant women who leave their home village and migrate to urban places in search for more 'promising' prospects of life and better economic incentives. The reason for the migration of rural women is not included in this study. These women migrate to cities, start to participate in the labor market and receive economic, human and social resources through work. The findings show that through economic resources they became economically independent. Resources like remittances strengthen their position within the household and increase their opportunities in life (Eklund 2000). The agency process includes their ability to make choices acquired through decision-making, which they had not experienced in their place of origin due to existing patriarchal and social norms. Strengthened position of their decision-making agency within the household is a contribution to their empowerment. Their contribution to the family's resources can strengthen their claim to resources, as a result it leads to increased agency in decision-making within the household (Conelly 2010). Migrated women are considered more independent and more experienced. Their distance from home and their economic independence provides them with the opportunity to exercise their mobility and own autonomy concerning strategic life choices like, marriage, childbearing. Many of them change their way of thinking and behaving into more urban style life, which makes them bargain with their family and they make better strategic choices in their life (Tseun Kweun Yu 2007). Their change of attitudes due to their adaptation to the urban life style increases their freedom of speech with parents to express their wishes related to their future strategic life choices. It results in them perceiving themselves as able to set the agenda for their life, no matter how small and insignificant they might seem to be. Those migrant women create a new individual understanding about their life (ibid). Thus migration opens many ways for them to not only to make and redesign their strategic choices in

life, but also their own social identities, cultural values, and practices, which leads them to empowerment.

The limited research done on agency of rural migrant women in China within empowerment processes points to a future research design in the migration study. This further study would investigate agency in order to increase understanding and knowledge about the decision-making in the empowerment process of rural migrant women within their marriage, family household, and society.

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