

A Political Economy Analysis of the Chinese Delivery Worker's Daily Communication Practice

by

Yiqian Liu

B.A., Communication University of China, 2013

Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the

School of Communication (Dual Degree Program in Global Communication)
Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

© **Yiqian Liu 2016**

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Summer 2016

All rights reserved.

However, in accordance with the *Copyright Act of Canada*, this work may be reproduced, without authorization, under the conditions for Fair Dealing. Therefore, limited reproduction of this work for the purposes of private study, research, education, satire, parody, criticism, review and news reporting is likely to be in accordance with the law, particularly if cited appropriately.

Approval

Name: *Yiqian Liu*
Degree: **Master of Arts (Communication)**
Title: ***A Political Economy Analysis of the Chinese Delivery Worker's Daily Communication Practice***
Supervisory Committee: Program Director: Dr. Alison Beale

Alison Beale
Senior Supervisor
Professor

Yuanqing Tang
Senior Supervisor
Professor
School of Journalism
Communication University of China

Date Approved: August 19, 2016

Abstract

This extended essay explores the interaction between delivery workers' political-economic status and their daily communication practice. The daily communication practice means the mobile phone and social media usage since the mobile phone and Internet are the media they use most often.

The delivery workers are marginalized in political status since they have rural household registration while their income is closer to the income of urban white-collar workers. Moreover, the delivery industry needs more policies and laws to regulate the industry since it is an emerging industry. It exploits the vulnerable position of, and creates opportunities for, delivery workers to struggle for better citizenship rights and income.

Their status excludes them from public discussion and they use private social media such as QQ and Wechat more than the public social media such as Weibo . However, the mobile phone and social media have the potential to impact on their political-economic status and struggle for better life.

Keywords: Migrant Workers; Mobile Phone; Social Media; Political Economy Analysis;

Table of Contents

Approval	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
1.1. Background of the topic	1
1.2. My motivation	3
Chapter 2. Migrant Workers in China.....	5
2.1. The Political Economy Situation of Chinese Migrant Workers	5
2.1.1. Hukou System	6
2.1.2. Hukou Reform in China	8
2.2. The Transformation of Migrant Workers: From the Construction Industry to the Service Industry	11
2.3. Mainstream media coverage of migrant workers.....	12
Chapter 3. The E-Commerce Delivery Service in China.....	15
3.1. The Development of Internet Technology and E-Commerce Delivery Service in China	15
3.1.1. The Internet Development in China.....	15
3.1.2. The E-Commerce boost in China	18
3.1.3. The Delivery Industry in China	19
3.2. The Political Economy Analysis of Chinese E-Commerce Delivery Service	20
Chapter 4. The Daily Communication Practice of the Migrant Workers in E-Commerce Delivery Service	22
4.1. The Migrant Worker's Media Usage	22
4.1.1. Mobile Phone and Migrant Workers: Promoting Social Network and Job Mobility	23
4.1.2. Social Media and Migrant Workers: Enhancing the Social Network but Marginalizing Migrant Workers to Public Discussion.....	25
4.2. E-Commerce Delivery Worker's Trade Union	27
4.3. An E-Commerce Delivery Worker's Day	29
4.4. Analysis – the Interaction Between Delivery Worker's Political Economy Status and Their Communication Practice	32

Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion 35

References37

List of Tables

Table 1.	The Requirements to Apply for Official Resident Status.....	10
Table 2.	The industrial distribution of migrant workers' employment.....	12
Table 3.	The business volume and growth rate of delivery industry.....	20

List of Figures

Figure 1.	Chinese Netizen Population and Internet Penetration Rate	16
Figure 2.	Amount and proportion of Chinese mobile Internet users.....	17
Figure 3.	Urban and rural proportion of Internet users.....	18

Chapter 1.

Introduction

1.1. Background of the topic

Alibaba's (an e-commerce company in China) initial public offering ranks as the world's biggest at \$25 billion after additional share sold in 2014 (Reuters 2014). Operating profit at Alibaba advanced to \$1.1 billion in the three months ended June in 2014, or 42 percent more than the combined profit of Amazon and EBay for the period (Bloomberg 2014). Alibaba's prosperity indicates the economic boom of e-commerce in China. Meanwhile, China's prime minister Li Keqiang proposes developing the "Internet Plus" action plan in the report on the work of the government in 2015 (China Daily 2015). "Internet Plus" refers to the strategy to add Internet technology (e.g., cloud computing, big data, mobile Internet) to conventional industries, fostering an economic development and economic transition in China. This "Internet Plus" plan reflects government's attention and the significant position of the e-commerce in Chinese economy.

Even though the e-commerce depends on the Internet technology, the e-commerce boom in China is inseparable from the support of the delivery industry. The average delivery price of each package is 13.4RMB (\$1.99) and is continuously decrease from 2013 to 2015 according to the data from State Post Bureau of China. Moreover, it usually takes three days for the transit and delivery when the destination is not in remote area. The cheap and quick delivery service promotes the consumer

experience in e-commerce and facilitate the e-commerce development. The cheap and quick delivery comes from the cheap and tiring work of the delivery workers. The delivery workers contribute to the delivery service and e-commerce industry while the research on them is insufficient.

As a graduate student in communication, I am curious about delivery worker's daily communication practice and the power relationship behind their communication practice. Moreover, how to use media and communication practice to struggle for better income and citizenship right is also needed to be explored regarding the delivery service is an emerging industry and more new policies are going to be designed and implemented in this field. Hence, a political economy analysis is a bridge to connect their daily communication practice and the macro political economy situation of them.

The development of Internet technology brings not only the updating of hard devices and software but also more opportunities to star up companies. Internet technology produces huge profits for international companies such as Google and Facebook, on the one hand, and promotes connections between individuals on one hand and between individuals and merchandise on the other hand. The US government built information highway in the 1980s (Kettinger 1994 P361), and indeed most of the influential Internet companies were based in Silicon Valley. Since then the US has played a leading role in the Internet and information industries.

China is in a period of economic transition and is trying to catch up with the advanced development of Internet technology in other parts of the world in an effort to occupy an advantageous position in Internet technology and mobile markets. E-commerce booms in China, with the development of Internet technology, have become

the backbone of Chinese economy. The central government of China shifted its economic strategy from an emphasis on exports to promoting domestic consumption during the financial crisis in 2008. The government also developed its Internet Plus strategy – encouraging the development of e-commerce and Internet technology – to stimulate and develop the economy. Moreover, the e-commerce is interdependent with the delivery service industry. Cheap and quick delivery is facilitating the prosperity of the e-commerce.

The e-commerce is supported by both the high technology and the traditional cheap labor. The Internet technology – that is often regarded as the tool to empower the subordinated people – seems to play the role as the mechanism to maintain and reproduce the dominant power of global capital and knowledge elite. The prosperity of e-commerce presents the advantages that Internet technology brings to us. However, the business model that makes profits for delivery industry depends on the delivery service. The delivery workers are overshadowed by the high technology. Customers enjoy the convenience of e-commerce but ignore the delivery workers.

1.2. My motivation

Even though migrant workers stay and live in the cities, they remain the outsiders of the city. When they leave their villages and enter the city, they are the newcomers to the cities. I feel empathy with their situation since I have had a similar experience. When I was in primary school my family moved from a little town to large city. This move from an undeveloped community to a modern city initially made me feel like an outsider. Now I want to help the migrant workers to promote their living condition and sense of happiness in the cities. This motivation first led me to explore how media is used to

promote the urbanization of migrant workers. However, I then started to be aware of the possibility that the idea of helping migrant workers achieve urbanization is an urban-centric perspective that contains the view that they can achieve happiness only when they become urbanites.

To overcome the difficulty of contacting the delivery workers directly, this essay is going to explore their political economy status and daily communication practices through secondary material. The interaction between their political economy status and communication practice will then be analyzed. The communication practices addressed in this essay includes mobile phone usage - including use social media - since they use mobile phone mostly in daily life and they also use social media through mobile phone.

Chapter 2.

Migrant Workers in China

2.1. The Political Economic Situation of Chinese Migrant Workers

Migrant workers refer to the labor population who register in the rural area but are engaged in non-agricultural work in urban areas, which is a special group in the economic and social transitional period under the special household management system of China (Zhang Luo 2013 P171). The migrant workers are mainly young males, who are married, come from eastern China and central China, and tend to get jobs in manufacturing, construction and service industries (Zhang Luo 2013 P172).

The group of migrant workers emerges as China transformed from a planned economy to a socialist market economy at the 1980s. The economy system changed and that drove peasants to leave their home and to find jobs in the cities. Even though the economy system has changed, the Hukou system - a household registration system that was established in the 1950s - remained the same. The central government did not reform the Hukou system to suit the resulting migration. On the other hand, the decentralized nature of the Chinese government made it difficult for the central government to impose and implement policies to protect migrant workers' rights at the local government level. Migrant workers' income has continually increased, however, the Hukou system and decentralization gap between the central government and local

governments have made migrant workers' vulnerable position in social welfare, overdue payments, health issue, and children education.

2.1.1. Hukou System

The Hukou system (household registration system) came into being to help the Chinese government implement control of the urban population so as to preserve the important principle of 'agriculture serves industry and sacrifice rural areas for urban areas' growth' in 1958 since the government proposed the economic strategy that made heavy industry the core of national economy at the birth of the Peoples' Republic of China (Gui 2012 P600). The Hukou system stemmed the flow of rural peasants to urban areas. This control of population mobility helps to produce agriculture products to support the heavy industry. Urban welfare rights and job positions are limited, on the one hand, and heavy industry requires sufficient food surplus from the countryside, on the other hand. The population mobility is strictly controlled by the government. You need to be approved by both the origin government and the destination government to change your location. It is more difficult to transfer from rural to urban than move from one city to another.

The Hukou system became more restrictive when the food stamp came into being. The food stamp is a part of the planned economy system and has a tight connection with the Hukou registration system. The rural Hukou and urban Hukou has a significant difference. The food stamp is only distributed to urban citizens. The urban citizen uses the food stamp to purchase food and merchandise. Non-urban householders who hold the rural Hukou need to fend themselves. A rural resident who moves to a city without permission will be repatriated to the original location.

This household registration system divides individuals into two categories, rural or urban. The Hukou system expands the gap between rural and urban. The social welfare system is different in rural and urban areas. Even though the government loosened the household registration system since the economic reform in the 1980s so the peasants can leave their hometown and find jobs in the urban area, the rural citizenship holders still have limited ways to transfer to urban citizenship (e.g. university education, joining the army). The migrant workers usually do not have the citizenship at their work location since they mostly do not have university-level education and their work is not qualified for the citizenship. That means social welfare is not accessible for them. They cannot receive the reimbursement from medical insurance when they are injured in work. And their children cannot enter the public elementary school since their parents do not have local citizenship. The migrant workers choose to leave their children at their hometowns.

The Hukou system excludes migrant workers from the urban social welfare system. Even though the rural householder also has a minimum living guarantee and rural cooperative medical care, they are still vulnerable. The minimum living guarantee varies from different location since the different locations have different living standards. The gap between rural and urban leads the rural minimum living guarantee is usually lower than the urban's. The cooperative medical care is affordable for peasants and migrant workers, but it does not cover serious illness. If the migrant workers are injured or ill in a place that is different with their Hukou location, the cooperative medical care does not cover either. The migrant workers work in the cities, but the cities government and their employers do not undertake the insurance and welfare to protect them. The absence of welfare decreases the cost of the city government and employers and helps

China to become the factory of the world. In other words, the shortage of protection to migrant workers contributes to the China's economy development in the past 30 years.

2.1.2. Hukou Reform in China

Hukou reform is a prominent and inevitable issue in China. Not only the migrant workers but also some urban middle class who don't have the local citizenship face difficulties in medical insurance and children's education since the Hukou system excludes them from local social welfare. Some urban middle class are well-educated and have a good incomes, but it is still not easy to get local citizenship if they are from another place, especially for the very largest cities (e.g. Beijing, Shanghai).

Taking Beijing as an example, the number of Beijing residents who do not have Beijing citizenship was increasing on an average of around 420,000 people annually between 2000 and 2013, while only about 180,000 non-citizenship residents of Beijing successfully obtained a Beijing citizenship annually between 2000 and 2012 (NFZM 2014). The Beijing Hukou is mainly distributed by Beijing Municipal Human Resources and Social Security Bureau, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China, Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee (Tencent 2015). They are the different level of government and CPC that manage on human resources and the change of government officials. Only these people have the chance to obtain a Beijing Hukou: soldiers, graduates, civil servants transferred and relocated to Beijing, entrepreneurs who return to Beijing from abroad, and investors. Whether they can obtain the Beijing Hukou is depended on the quota and distribution of Beijing Hukou. It's very similar to the process to obtain a working visa in immigrant country. Since the difficulty to obtain a Beijing Hukou and the difficulty you face without a

Beijing Hukou, the quota of Beijing Hukou has a high price in a black market. Some companies that are qualified to obtain the quota are willing to sell the quota. A company that provide service to the student who want to study abroad sells its quota of Beijing Hukou with the price of 74,000 RMB each (Xinhua 2013). That reflects the value and difficulty of a Beijing Hukou.

The urban middle-class and migrant workers both have the requirements of Hukou reform. The necessary of Hukou reform has reached the consensus within Chinese society while the specific policy of Hukou reform is still in a debate. Even though the State Council of China publishes the policy of Hukou reform, the reform does not solve all of the problems that are bought by the Hukou system. The Hukou reform makes it easier to transfer to urban Hukou for migrant workers. However, the migrant workers still face two dilemmas with Hukou reform.

Firstly, giving up the rural Hukou means you are not qualified to own land. You have to give up the land when you give up the rural Hukou. A survey by the Sichuan province bureau of statistics in 2014 found that 90% of migrant workers don't even want an urban Hukou (WSJ 2014). The rural residency is more valuable than the health welfare and children education for them since the rural residency including an agricultural land. Furthermore, the urbanization process transfers rural lands to urban lands that have commercial value. The owner of the rural land will receive relocation compensation when the government or commercial companies require purchasing and this land.

Secondly, Hukou in the three largest cities' (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou) is more difficult to obtain after the Hukou reform. The very largest cities retain the strict and

limited allocation of Hukou since the central and local governments need to control the scale of a population in the very largest cities. Even the people with high education face difficulty in applying for the very largest cities' Hukou. The following table presents the requirements to apply for official resident status according to the documents of State Council of China. It indicates that the more population the city has, the more difficult to apply the resident status.

Table 1. The Requirements to Apply for Official Resident Status

	Country-level cities and other small towns	Population 500,000 to 1 million	Population 1 million to 5 million	Population 5 million and above
Stable accommodation	√	√	√	√
Steady job		√	√	√
Paid into local social security for minimum time		√	√	√
Steady job for minimum time			√	
Minimum continuous residency				√
Other, unspecified requirements				√

2.2. The Transformation of Migrant Workers: From the Construction Industry to the Service Industry

China is experiencing a structural transformation of its economy. After 35 years of extraordinarily rapid growth, the Chinese economy is undergoing a major transition from export-led growth to a model increasingly driven by consumption and services, with less emphasis on debt-financed public investment (Rhee 2015). That also might lead to the migrant workers move from factories and constructing industry to service industry since the economic transition brings more job opportunities in the service industry.

The proportion of the migrant worker's employment in the service industry continually increased in 2014 (0.3%) and 2015 (1.6%) according to the 2014 Survey Report of Migrant Workers and 2015 Survey Report of Migrant Workers by the National Bureau of Statistics. 44.5% of the migrant workers are in the service industry in 2015. The proportion of the migrant workers works in service industry increase in central (1.9%) and western (3.1%) region in 2015. The average monthly income of transportation, storage, and postal services increase 7.7% and reach 3553 RMB (\$531) in 2015 which is the highest one in the survey.

Although not rapidly, the growth of the migrant workers in the service industry has been continuously increasing for three years - 0.3% from 2013 to 2014, 0.6% from 2014 to 2015 – according to the table below. The continuing growth and the economic transition indicates that more migrant workers will flow from secondary industry to tertiary industry in the future. It requires more attention and research on the migrant workers who work in the service industry since the working environment and difficulties they face are different with the workers in secondary industry. E-commerce delivery is an

emerging part of the service industry, the policy to manage e-commerce delivery and delivery workers needs more discussion and research. However, the research of the delivery workers is insufficient. The need for this research provides an opportunity for both the delivery workers and the researchers to explore the political economy status and daily practice of delivery workers.

Table 2. The industrial distribution of migrant workers' employment

	2013	2014	2015
<i>Primary industry</i>	0.6%	05.%	0.4%
<i>Secondary industry</i>	56.8%	56.6%	55.1%
<i>Service industry</i>	42.6%	42.9%	44.5%

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China

2.3. Mainstream media coverage of migrant workers

The mainstream media coverage has a tight relationship with the political economy environment and migrant worker's working and living condition. Firstly, the mainstream media plays the role as "mouth piece of the Party" and it reflects on the political economy strategies of the government and the Party. Secondly, the mainstream media coverage of migrant workers provides a perspective to see their working and living condition. In other words, the mainstream media coverage is a complement to the directly policy economy analysis since it reflects the policy and presents their working and living condition.

The mainstream media's coverage of migrant workers is divided into three periods. First is between 1980-1988: a strict control of migrant worker's flow and mainstream media's unawareness of them. The media reports of migrant worker are

very few and the topic of the reports are mainly in the migrant worker's impact on urban employment and their contribution to economic development. It also reflects the strict limits on worker's flow from rural to urban at the beginning of the economic reform and in the 1980s. The migration of workers was not supported by policy at that time.

The second period is 1989-2001: a "migrant worker tide" and related policy discussion. The government started major urban infrastructure projects around 1989. That led to the migrant workers initially hidden at the construction sites becoming exposed to the city. The "migrant worker tide" step into urban citizen's sight. The discourse of mainstream media is standing from the city's position and seeing migrant workers as the outside groups. The mainstream media mostly focus on policy discussion to manage and regulate migrant workers and present the inconvenience they bring to the city and the more intense competition they bring to the local employment market. It is easy to understand when combining the political economy environment at that time. The policy impacts on migrant workers are guided and managed by the urban local government. The local government's policy making considers more about the urban resource, the urban management, and the protection of urban local resident's employment. Moreover, the migrant worker's household registration remains in their hometown and the urban government feels no responsibility to provide service to them. Finally, the SOE (State Owned Enterprise) reform causes a large number of laid-off workers at that time. The laid-off workers are local residents. It becomes the top priority to solve the life guarantee and re-employment of the laid-off workers. The migrant workers become a threat to the local employment market at this point.

The third period is from 2002 until now: the central government's attention and the mainstream media's focus. The mainstream media's discourse on migrant workers

had a significant turning point around 2003. The migrant workers as the potential threat to urban areas turn into vulnerable groups that need extra focus and protection.

Briefly then,, even though the migrant workers remain excluded from the urban life and urban welfare, the central government and public pay more attention to the working and living condition of the migrant workers. The central government releases Hukou reform and rural corporative medical scheme to promote their quality of life. There are difficulties with implementing these policies. However, we can see a possibility of migrant workers' better social and economic status.

Chapter 3.

The E-Commerce Delivery Service in China

3.1. The Development of Internet Technology and E-Commerce Delivery Service in China

The e-commerce delivery service is a combination of the service industry and Internet industry. It is insufficient to analyze e-commerce delivery service without a deep understanding of Chinese Internet industry and online shopping. This part is going to introduce the Internet technology infrastructure and development in China firstly, and then to explain why online shopping becomes so popular and so critical to the Chinese economy. Meanwhile, the symbiotic relationship of online shopping and e-commerce delivery service is also explained in this section. Even though online shopping is the development of new technology, the way that it makes the profit still relies on the e-commerce delivery service. And the e-commerce delivery service is supported by migrant workers.

3.1.1. The Internet Development in China

Chinese netizens reach 688,000,000 at December 2015. The Internet penetration rate reaches 50.3% and half of the Chinese residents have the Internet access. 39,510,000 new netizens increase in 2015. The growth rate of netizen is 6.1% in 2015,

that is an increase of 1.1% compared with 2014. The growth rate of the Internet users has improved.

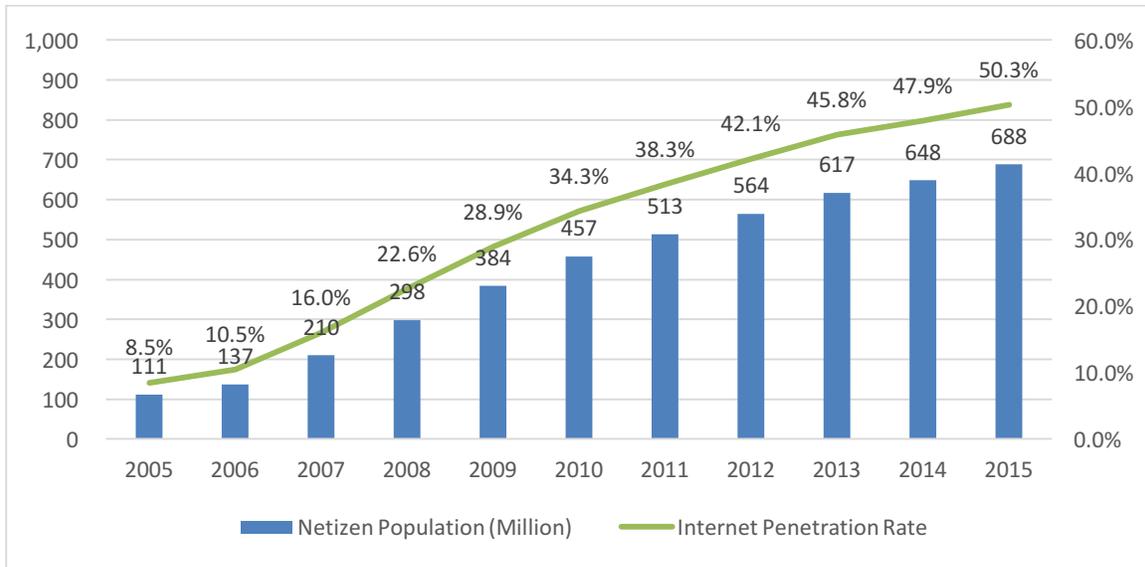


Figure 1. Chinese Netizen Population and Internet Penetration Rate
 Source: CNNIC, China Internet Network Information Center

The scale of the mobile Internet users reaches 620 million in December 2015, increasing 63 million users by the end of 2014. The proportion of mobile Internet users increases from 85.8% to 90.1%. The mobile phone is the primary device that increases the number of mobile Internet users.

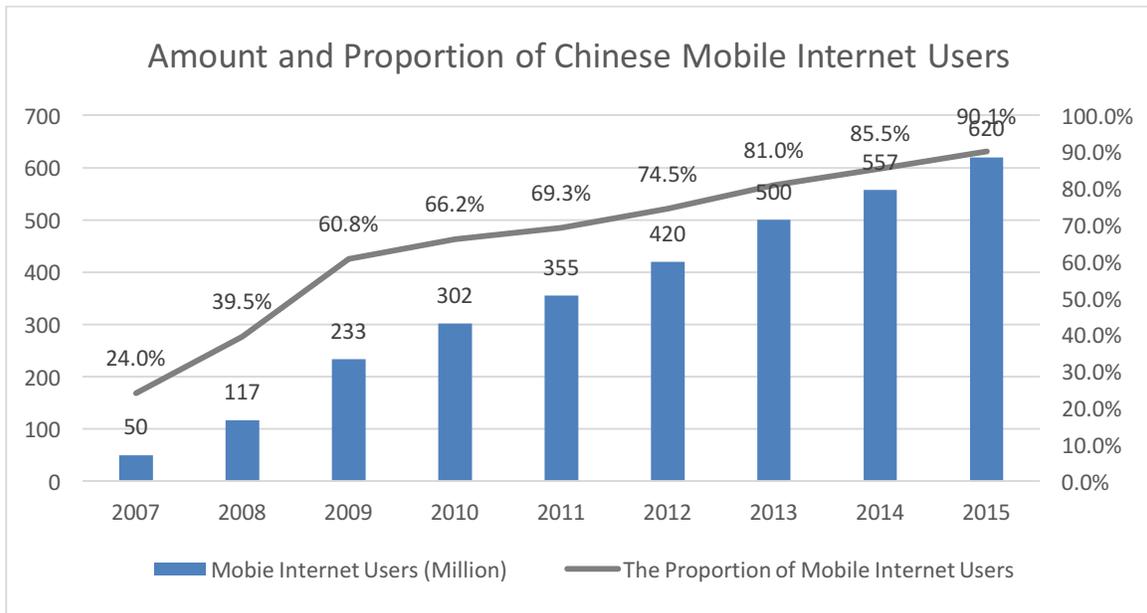


Figure 2. Amount and proportion of Chinese mobile Internet users
 Source: CNNIC China Internet Network Information Center

The proportion of the rural Internet users has increase. And the growth rate of the rural Internet users is twice the urban growth rate. The proportion of the rural Internet users reaches 28.4% in 2015 and increases 16,940,000 users from 2014, the growth rate is 9.5%. The growth of the urban Internet users reaches 4.8% that is 1/2 of the rural growth.

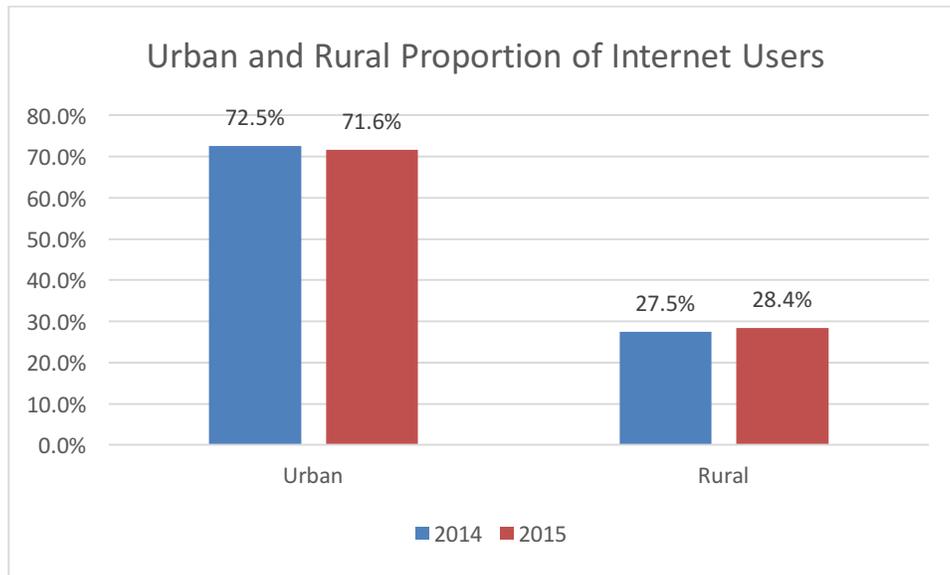


Figure 3. Urban and rural proportion of Internet users
 Source: CNNIC China Internet Network Information Center

It's not difficult to conclude that the amount of Internet users is continuing to increase in the past ten years. Mobile phone and rural area is becoming the engine to drive Internet development.

3.1.2. The E-Commerce boost in China

2003, 2008 and 2015 are the three crucial years in e-commerce development in China. Taobao – a consumer-to-consumer online shopping website of Alibaba – is established in 2003. And the SARS - Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, a severe infection disease - in 2003 makes many residents minimize their time for going out to avoid the SARS infection. That changes individual's consumption patterns. The global financial crisis brought the Chinese economy to an economic transition era in 2008. The exported-oriented economic growth becomes unsustainable after 2008. The central government releases investment package and monetary expansion to response the financial crisis in 2008 (Yu 2010). That requires the stimulus of consumption. And Tmall

– a business-to-business online shopping website of Alibaba – is established in 2008 as an attempt to expand its competitive strength in B2B market.

Premier Li Keqiang unveiled the Internet Plus plan to integrate mobile Internet, cloud computing big data, and the Internet of Things with modern manufacturing, to encourage the healthy development of e-commerce, industrial networks, and Internet banking, and to get Internet-based companies to increase their presence in the international market in 2015 (China Daily 2015). It indicates that the e-commerce plays a significant role in the economic development and central government's Internet Plus strategy to sustain and promote the economic growth. China's E-commerce Market is estimated to reach \$713 billion in 2017 (WSJ 2014). The transactions on Alibaba totaled \$248 billion in 2013, more than those of eBay and Amazon.com combined. The rapid economy growth in the past 30 years promotes the individual income and wealth to contribute the e-commerce development. And now, the e-commerce becomes the backbone of the Chinese economy.

3.1.3. The Delivery Industry in China

Even though the e-commerce has a tight relationship with the Internet technology, the business model support of the e-commerce is the delivery. The users enjoy less pleasure of the e-commerce without the cheap and quick delivery. The booming of the delivery industry has emerged with the rapid development of E-commerce. There are 14,000 delivery companies and 132,000 branches in China at the end of 2014 and the rural coverage is more than 50% (State Post Bureau 2015). The growth rate of the delivery industry volume reaches more than 20% each year on average from 2008 to 2012 (Zhou 2012 P110) and around 50% each year averagely

from 2013 to 2016, while the growth in 2016 decreases to 48% (China Post 2016). The business income of the delivery industry is \$41.2 million that is 35% growth compared with 2014. In other words, the delivery industry has also experienced the same rapid growth as the e-commerce, and now the growth starts to decrease.

Table 3. Business volume and growth rate of the delivery industry 2013-2016

	2013	2014	2015	2016
<i>Business volume (million)</i>	9200	14000	20600	27500
<i>Growth rate</i>	62%	52%	48%	34%

Source: State Post Bureau of The People's Republic of China

3.2. The Political Economy Analysis of Chinese E-Commerce Delivery Service

The former Ministry of Posts and General Post Office registered as a legal entity in 1995 but it plays both the role of regulator and operator. It is then divided into China Post Group Corporation and State Post Bureau in 2007 with the separation of government and corporation. This separation also opens the curtain of postal reform. The delivery industry, especially the private company of delivery service, exist on the boundary of a reasonable but illegal position for more than ten years. The city delivery is included in the first nine projects in the delivery industry revitalization plan that is introduced in 2009 (Li 2010 P64). The new Postal Law also come into being implement in the same year in October. It provides the standard of delivery companies and admits the legal status of the private delivery companies. It promotes the development of private delivery companies and ends an era of Chinese delivery industry – the delivery service is mostly monopolized by the state-owned postal service enterprise.

The delivery companies have three categories according to their ownerships: state-owned enterprise, foreign-funded enterprise, and private enterprise. The state-owned enterprise – China Post Group Corporation – remains its dominance in the postal service while the e-commerce business corporates with private enterprise mostly. The private enterprise has the price advantage and the price is continually decreasing. The China Post Group Corporation has the remote area advantage since it is a state-owned enterprise and has postal branches in the remote area.

State Council of the People's Republic of China publishes "State Council on Promoting the Development of Delivery Industry" in 2015. This document claims the delivery industry is an essential part of the modern service industry and is also the leading industry to promote consumption upgrade and transformation of circulation. This document encourages to deepen the marketization of delivery industry, encourage the delivery company to set the Internet plus as direction and promote the service quality and the transportation safety. This document is an implement of Internet Plus strategy in the delivery industry. It reflects the central government's determination to stimulus consumption through the development of Internet economy. Four of the top seven delivery companies (according to the business volume ranking from State Post Bureau) intend to start IPOs to enter the stock market within two years from 2016 (Huxiu 2016). The delivery companies' enthusiasm for entering the capital market comes from policy encouragement and the companies' own financing requirement.

Chapter 4.

The Daily Communication Practice of the Migrant Workers in E-Commerce Delivery Service

4.1. The Migrant Worker's Media Usage

Research conducted in Shanghai discovered that the mobile phone and the Internet are the media that migrant workers use most in their daily routines. And migrant workers use the QQ (an immediate message tool) and Baidu (Chinese version of Google, the essential function of Baidu is as a search engine) mostly for entertainment and interpersonal communication (Zhou 2011 P146). Another research in Hangzhou (a city in the southeast of China) also claims that the Internet and mobile phone is the media that migrant workers use most (Wei Chen 2015 P121). Mobile QQ and Wechat (a mobile IM application, similar to Whatsapp but which has more function than Whatsapp) is the first two social media application that migrant workers use, and percentage of migrant workers who use Weibo (13.7%, Chinese version of Twitter) is much less than Mobile QQ -44%- and Wechat -42.3% according to a survey in Beijing (Wang 2015 P119). In a short, mobile phones, and the Internet are the first two media that migrant workers use. QQ, mobile QQ (the cell phone application of QQ), and Wechat are the social media they use the most.

Since the Internet is a broad communication technology, and the mobile phone is also accessible to the Internet, the mobile phone becomes the communication tool that

this essay focuses on. Moreover, regarding the development of mobile Internet and the social media can also be used through the mobile phone, the social media is included in this essay.

4.1.1. Mobile Phones and Migrant Workers: Promoting Social Networks and Job Mobility

The mobile phone promotes migrant workers' social networking and job mobility. The mobile phone's extension of migrant workers' social networks is in the following two aspects. First is the connection and support with the traditional blood and geographical relationships. (Ding and Song 2010 P97). Second is the building of their social network of urban communication – the communication with their new friends and colleague in the city (Cao 2009 P76).

Even though their workplace is different from their hometown, the mobile phone provides them a tool to keep the connection with their family members. Their family members also support them emotionally. In a gender perspective, mobile phone helps female domestic workers in Shanghai mobile phone helps female domestic workers in Shanghai to rebuild their social network of urban communication and fulfill their responsibility and obligation as a mother given that they work in Shanghai and their children are in their hometown. However, these women fail to step over their social status and gender identity constructed by the dominant categories of urban-rural, districts, technology and economy (Cao 2009 P77). Furthermore, mobile phones provide young migrant women with an important means for expanding their social networks but for the most part those in their contact lists are like them – other female migrant workers (Wallis 2013).

Meanwhile, the mobile phone has the potential to promote migrant worker's job mobility by finding more job information and negotiating with employers when they connect together even though they are still trapped in the existing gendered and socio-political relationships and remain the Other in the city. Migrant workers are usually employed by the informal and non-standard system of enterprises (Ming 2015 P2). They don't have stable social relationship in the urban area but find it easy to change places to chase better life. Although research argues that temporary migrants might have longer job durations and shorter unemployment than local people, they are still constrained in changing jobs because of the institutional discrimination (Zhang 2010 P60). Yang considers the 'Alienation' working condition of the unstable migrant workers makes the mobile phone becoming the tool to confirm self-subjectivity because the mobile phone is the object they can use and control (Yang Zhu 2009 P172). They confirm their freedom and subjectivity through the expression and connection with other individuals. The mobile phone is convenient for connecting relatives and friends who are working outside of the hometown and it transfers the model of finding job information from occasional job information model to interactive model that is built upon the blood and geographical communication relationship (Ding Song 2010 P97). Female domestic workers in Shanghai generate a collective negotiation and resistance to the employers through the mobile phone connection (Cao 2009 P76).

The expansion of social network and the job mobility is interdependent with each other. The mobile phone has the potential to promote the mobility of migrant workers because the mobile phone provides a means for migrant workers to connect with their relatives and friends to obtain work information and to unite together to strive for self-empowerment and rights.

4.1.2. Social Media and Migrant Workers: Enhancing the Social Network but Marginalizing Migrant Workers from Public Discussion

Social media is deeply saturated into everyday life including that of migrant workers. The use of social media helps the rural-urban migrants to build and expand social networks and social capital. The network of social relationship constructed by social media and the social capital embedded in social network expands or increases the resources and contacts of the migrants (Wang 2015 P123). The social media broadens their weak connections but is limited to the possession of social support and true participation in social activities (Wei Chen 2015 P126).

Migrant workers usually use Wechat, QQ for interpersonal communication through mobile phone and the Internet. The use of Wechat and QQ (including mobile QQ) has higher frequencies comparing to Weibo. QQ and Wechat are more private than Weibo because the users in Weibo can see other users' expression and opinion, but QQ and Wechat need to add the users to friend list first. Some scholars and journalists consider Weibo to have the possibility to be the public sphere in China, because firstly, it challenges the traditional information control and censorship as a new social medium, and secondly it provides a platform for discussing public issues. A Chinese journalist commented that Weibo has already become a public sphere independent of the nation and private, because the discussion is not about private issues and is not intervened in by the nation (Ji 2013 P42).

Why do migrant workers use Weibo much less than QQ and Wechat? It is essential to look at how they use QQ, Wechat, and Weibo to understand this question and the migrant worker's position in social media. From a survey in Guangdong, four of

the seven respondents put down the name of the current city of residence as “hometown” in their personal information on QQ, while the other three chose neither the name of the current resident city nor that of their actual hometown (Liu Boden Wulf 2014 P715). Social media provides a virtual space to migrant workers on constructing their online identity. It seems that they place their expectations on the online identity and to use the online identity fulfill their imagination of themselves.

The most influential users of Weibo tend to be media figures, scholars, and government officials (Zhang 2013). If the use of Weibo in migrant workers is much less than an another group, it seems that such an open and public platform as Weibo is dominated by the users who are well-educated and have good economic status while the migrant workers could not participate in the public discussion and are marginalized in Weibo. According to the features of these social media applications, the migrant workers use QQ and Wechat to reinforce the relationship they already have and therefore they are still in a marginal position in public discussion.

In short, even though migrant workers are still constrained by the Hukou system, mobile phones and social media are potential means to promote the mobility and social network of migrant workers. Since they do not have urban household registration, they do not participate in public issues or public discussion either. This helps to explain why they use private social media (QQ and Wechat) more than the public social media (Weibo). They have no position in Weibo and public discussion. It is hard to have the courage to resist their unequal status and discrimination, but they can negotiate with and resist the inequitable treatment by employers when they cooperate together. Social media and cell phones provide tools to connect migrant workers together.

Mobile phones and social media alone cannot serve as the bridge to enable migrant workers to integrate into urban society or become urban citizens. They will attain official urban status only through the transformation of the household registration system. They will have the right and chance to share the same welfare, medical insurance, and children education when they obtain a local Hukou. While mobile phones and social media can be seen as empowering migrant workers by contributing to their social networking abilities and job mobility these very conditions, of mostly connecting with other migrants and serving as transient labour reinforce migrants' struggles and weaken their negotiation position with employers and governments. However, the only way to fulfill the political economy status change is when the struggle and negotiation transfer to institutional reform and change. For now, the social network assistance and job mobility that mobile phones and social media offer only result in emotional support; mollifying workers to their conditions rather than promoting systemic change.

4.2. E-Commerce Delivery Worker's Trade Union

The All-China Federation of Trade Union claims that they requires the ten largest delivery companies to establish trade union to include the front-line migrant delivery workers into the trade union and include their salary into the collective agreement (Li Wang 2015 P05). Even though the delivery companies have to establish trade union according to the All-China Federation of Trade Union's requirement, they usually establish the trade union in head company and only include a few of the front-line delivery workers. Moreover, the trade union in delivery industry is difficult to protect the delivery worker's welfare and rights if the company establish it only to meet the

government's requirement and the delivery workers are not aware of participating in trade union to protect themselves.

The mainstream delivery companies have set up the trade unions while the full protection of the front-line employee's welfare is still difficult regarding the company's affiliate system and high job mobility. The affiliate system means that each branch is an independent legal entity and manages its own issue. The head company establishes trade union to meet the government's requirement. However, the front-line delivery workers of the branches do not have direct connection with the head company. The gap between the central and local, the head company and the branches leads to difficulty in implementing the trade union on the ground.

The All-China Federation of Trade Union is the leader of the local federation of trade union and the trade union of the different industries. And the All-China Federation of Trade Union is under the Communist Party of China's (CPP) leadership at the same time. The All-China Federation claims to require delivery companies to establish a trade union in the delivery industry. It reflects CCP's attention on delivery workers' rights. However, whether the trade union protects the delivery worker's rights and welfare relies on whether it includes the delivery workers work at the front-line. Moreover, establishing the trade union increases operational cost for the company. And some companies view the salary including the welfare since the delivery service is piecework – the salary is based on the number of the package you deliver.

The critical difficulty is the full implementation of the employee benefits standard rather than the establishment of a trade union in the head company or branches. In addition, the high job mobility in the delivery industry has a direct impact on the

employee benefits. The work patterns of temporary workers mean that delivery workers may not enjoy sufficient benefits. Some migrant workers only work to earn extra money in the season that they do not need to farm or at the peak of delivery requirements.

Even though there are difficulties in implementing trade union and employee welfare fully, the government and company's attention and the attempts to address this issue brings a hope and brighter future to the delivery worker's welfare and benefits. The mainstream delivery companies have begun to focus on building the corporate culture, providing basic welfare to employees, and reducing the staff turnover rate. The delivery companies also have begun to resolve the labor demand in the peak of delivery requirement (e.g. the annual sale festival) through outsourcing (Li Wang 2015 P05).

4.3. An E-Commerce Delivery Worker's Day

This section is going to delineate a picture of an e-commerce delivery worker's day according to media coverage and a TV show. As we do not yet have sufficient research, or surveys of the e-commerce delivery migrant workers' communication practice, this section will combine media coverage of e-commerce delivery workers and the migrant workers' media usage to describe the work condition, life situation, and media usage of the migrant workers in e-commerce delivery service industry. The e-commerce delivery work is tiring, and involves long working hours and high job mobility, although the salary is acceptable. And discrimination against delivery workers and the lack of regulation leave difficulties in delivery workers' working conditions.

The median monthly salary of delivery workers is 5,250 RMB (\$785) and the average voluntary turnover rate is around 30% in 2014 (Xinhua 2016). The e-commerce

delivery workers are mostly migrant workers since they are the supply of cheap and hard-working labor. Zhangcai – a young male e-commerce delivery worker from Guizhou – delivers hundreds of e-commerce packages in Beijing on an electrical e-commerce delivery tricycle every work day. His salary is around 5,000 to 6,000 RMB (\$748 to \$897) every month, which is double of the income he could earn in his hometown. The e-commerce delivery workers work approximately 12 hours per day, sometimes reaches 17 hours a day. The branch that Zhangcai works in delivered only 10 packages (how often- per day?) 10 years ago and now is in the thousands. The tiring work and long working hours contribute to frequent resignations by delivery workers. There are more than 160 branches of e-commerce delivery companies and 10,000 employees in Xiamen – a coastal city located in the Southeast of China, and the staff turnoff rate reaches 20% there in 2015(Jiang 2015 A07).

Discrimination from receivers is another issue that e-commerce delivery workers face. The e-commerce delivery workers have immediate connection and communication with the receiver. The e-commerce delivery workers usually give the package right to the receiver's hand and then they need the receiver's signature to prove that the package is delivered. If the delivery branches reach some agreement with the community, the delivery workers can send the package to the community center or the community office managing on the packages. Then the receiver comes to the package center to pick up. Zhangcai says he feels discrimination sometimes when he communicates with the receiver. He says he calls the receiver when the address is not clear and difficult to recognize, and that when he makes these calls while the receivers' respond is not polite.

The lack of regulation leaves another problem for delivery workers – how to deal with the damaged and delayed packages. The delivery worker is the only person that the

receiver can talk to when a damaged package is delivered. To illustrate this problem: on the TV show a movie star experiences a delivery worker's work day. He delays the delivery by two hours since he has never done this job before. A package of bananas is damaged and the receiver notices it when she receives it. Then she turns angry and refuses to receive this package. The delivery worker (the movie star) tries to explain the delay and damage while the receiver asks him to repay her for the cost of this package.

The delivery worker's communication practice might be similar to the most migrant workers. The difference between delivery workers and other migrant workers has two characteristics. First, delivery workers come face to face with discrimination from angry consumers. Second lack of regulation leaves it to delivery workers to deal with damaged or delayed packages.

The mobile phone and social media play a significant role in their work and daily life. Moreover, the mobile phone and social media promote their social networks and job mobility. Can this increased social networking and job mobility challenge their existing social status and citizen rights by influencing institutional reform? Or it is only an emotional support for their marginalized position? The discrimination and responsibility faced by delivery workers for and delayed or damaged packages, and how to use the media to promote institutional reform and deal with customer relations are essential issues and need to be further researched.

4.4. Analysis – the Interaction Between Delivery Worker’s Political Economy Status and Their Communication Practice

The delivery workers’ social, economic and citizenship status and their communication practice impact on each other. Their status contributes to the fact that they cannot participate in public political discussion, and they face discrimination at work. Their communication practice – meaning the mobile phone, including the social media, in this essay – provides the potential to struggle and change their status through connection with each other, on one hand, but preserves their marginalized position through undermining their struggle, on the other hand.

The delivery workers’ political economy condition is similar to other migrant workers – they have a marginalized position under the household registration system while their income is closing to the white-collar worker’s income. The delivery workers are excluded from urban welfare and urban identity since they don’t have urban household registration. Their political status – rural household registration – excludes them from the public discussion either. It’s hard to see delivery worker’s voice on Weibo – an online space to discuss public issue (e.g., air pollution). Even though the Hukou reform makes the urban household registration accessible for the delivery workers, most of them do not choose to transfer their household registration since they want to keep their land for economic reasons. The Weibo – a social media similar to Twitter – is seen as an emerging public sphere in China, but the migrant workers, including delivery workers, are absent in Weibo. They prefer to use the more private social media – QQ and Wechat. The public discussion and public issue are dominated by the emerging urban middle class. Their rural household registration also brings them to the identity

that is different from urban citizens. And that makes them become outsiders officially and brings the discrimination to the migrant workers. This discrimination impacts on delivery workers the most since they have frequent direct connection with the urban citizens. The receivers of deliveries get angry and impatient when the packaged is damaged or the delivery worker contacts them to ask for a clearer address. The receivers' anger and impatience come from many causes but discrimination might be one of them.

The mobile phone and social media extends the delivery workers' social networks and job mobility. and then it might lead to the struggle with the political economy status or to undermine their struggle. Whether it transfers to a struggle for better life or a damage of struggle depends on whether the objective of negotiation can be achieved. If the objective of negotiation and struggle is too far away to achieve, they have less encouragement to pursue it. The positive perspective of mobile phone and social media is that it promotes the information flow within the delivery workers. That makes the objective that initially seems to be impossible to be closer to them. The increase of social network and job mobility promotes their power to struggle for better social and economic status. However, the mobile phone and social media might also damage their struggle and encourage their marginalized position. The social network and job mobility could not always transfer to a real change of economic and social rights. Sometimes it only provides emotional support from relatives and friends. Delivery workers return to work after they release their emotion and pressure. The mobile phone and social media are more like a tool to release their pressure but not change the reality unless it leads to a change in reality or institutional reform.

The migrant workers do not choose to leave their hometown and become migrant workers. Economic reform condenses and collapses traditional agricultural production

and its economy. It is hard to make a living in the countryside. The new generation of migrant workers – who are born after 1980 – do not know how to grow crops and engage in agriculture production. They have no choice but to become migrant workers. They also have little choice in their communication practice. Political and economic factors drive them to choose certain communication tools and to use them in a particular way.

In conclusion, delivery worker's political and economic status and communication practice have a dynamic interaction. Their marginalized status – well-paid with rural household registration – excludes them from public debate in the cities. After all, the public discussion in China – a developing country that is in its economic transition and urbanization period – concentrates more on the economic development and economic transition, leaving no position for the delivery workers. On the other hand, their communication practice challenges and changes their political economic status when they connect together and apply it to a struggle. Otherwise, the social networking and job mobility that the mobile phone brings to them only becomes an emotional support to release pressure and maintain the existing power relationship.

Chapter 5.

Discussion and Conclusion

The migrant worker's work and living conditions are based on the government's economic policy encouraging E-commerce, on the Hukou system, and on the disappearance of traditional agricultural work. The migrant worker's communication practice also has a potential to impact on their work and living condition. Media, especially mobile phone and social media, has the potential to promote their social network and connect them together. It also contributes to migrant workers' negotiation with employers. Whether it can improve their status depends on whether they have the motivation to struggle. This concerns their willingness and ability to negotiate or struggle and whether they believe their objective is possible to be achieved.

As delivery services are an emerging industry, existing employment regulations do not fit the development and characteristics of delivery service. Government has already published policies to encourage and regulate the delivery service. More new policies will be published in the future: especially the "Internet Plus" plan and the All-China Federation of Trade Union's attention to building trade unions in delivery services. It is a chance for the delivery workers to struggle for a better position through the impact on the policy development. The mobile phone and social media promote delivery worker's social network and job mobility. How to use this increased social networking and job mobility to influence on policy development and policy implementation needs

more research since only these changes can change the status and working conditions of these workers.

It is worth noting that the function and application of mobile phones extend with the development of mobile Internet, while research on the mobile phone mainly focusses on its traditional functions without the mobile Internet (e.g., message and call). Even where research on migrant workers' media usage of mobile phones is adequate, the applications in smart phones (e.g., use social media through mobile phone) need more continuously research to keep up with the pace of mobile Internet development.

To continue this project and help improve of delivery workers' political and economic status, there are several options for deepening this project. The first is to keep track of the development of policies and laws affecting the delivery industry and the development of trade unions in the delivery industry. A second strategy is to develop direct contact with a sample of delivery workers to collect first-hand material on their communication practice. The research can explore how to use media to better communicate with receivers about the delayed or damaged package, and to identify what circumstance facilitate increased social networking and job mobility for workers, and how to transfer their struggles to wider institutional reform. A further issue is the subjectivity of deliver workers, includes their willingness to seek change, the identification of possibilities for reaching their objectives, and whether they believe the objective is achievable. These and other questions can be addressed in follow- up research that will engage directly with the delivery workers.

References

- Wong, K., Fu, D., Li, C. Y., & Song, H. X. (2007). Rural migrant workers in urban China: living a marginalised life. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 16(1), 32-40.
- Cara Wallis (2013) *Technomobility in China: Young Migrant Women and Cell phones*, New York University Press.
- Cartier, C., Castells, M., & Qiu, J. L. (2005). The information have-less: Inequality, mobility, and translocal networks in Chinese cities. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 40(2), 9-34.
- Cao, J. (2009). Communication Technology and Gender: A Case Study of the Use of Cell-Phone by Migrating Domestic Women in Shanghai, *Journalism & Communication*, 16(1), 71-78.
- Chan, K. W. (2010). The global financial crisis and migrant workers in China: 'There is no future as a labourer; returning to the village has no meaning'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34(3), 659-677.
- Chan, K. W. (2010). The household registration system and migrant labor in China: Notes on a debate. *Population and development review*, 36(2), 357-364.
- China Daily. (2015). Report on the work of the government.
http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015twosession/2015-03/05/content_19729663.html
- Ding Wei, Song Chen (2010) On the Road: Autonomy of Migrant Workers and Cell phone, *Modern Communication*.2010(9), 95-100.
- Gui, Y., Berry, J. W., & Zheng, Y. (2012). Migrant worker acculturation in China. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 36(4), 598-610
- Huxiu. (2016). Four of the top seven delivery company are going to the stock market.
<http://www.huxiu.com/article/137585/1.html>
- Ji, D. (2013). Whose power field? – a political economy study on Weibo. *Journalism Bimonthly*. 2013(5),38-44.

- Kettinger, W. J. (1994). National infrastructure diffusion and the US information super highway. *Information & management*, 27(6), 357-368.
- Li, D., Wang, Y. (2015). To promote the organization of trade union in delivery industry within ten years – the implementation of welfare and salary guarantee still need to be solved. *Beijing Business Daily*, 2015(7), P005.
- Liu, J., Boden, A., Randall, D. W., & Wulf, V. (2014, February). Enriching the distressing reality: social media use by chinese migrant workers. *In Proceedings of the 17th ACM conference on Computer supported cooperative work & social computing* (pp. 710-721). ACM.
- NFZM. (2014). 180 thousand quotas and 8000 thousand non-residents in Beijing. NFZM.
<http://www.infzm.com/content/103415>
- Rhee C. (2015). Managing China's Economic Transition. The International Monetary Fund's Global Economy Forum.
<https://blog-imfdirect.imf.org/2015/10/05/managing-chinas-economic-transition/>
- Shen, Yang. (2015). Why does the government fail to improve the living conditions of migrant workers in Shanghai? Reflections on the Policies and the Implementation of Public Rental Housing under Neoliberalism. *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 2(1), 58-74.
- Tencent. (2015). How to acquire a Beijing Hukou. Tencent News.
<http://news.qq.com/a/20150803/040955.htm>
- Tian, M., & Xu, L. (2015). Investigating the job mobility of migrant workers in China. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 0961463X15595328.
- The Wall Street Journal. (2014). China's Hukou Reform starts to take shape.
<http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/08/04/chinas-Hukou-reform-plan-starts-to-take-shape/>
- Wang, X., & Li, X. (2015). Research of social media and identity – Case of rural to urban migrants in Picun, *Modern Communication*, 2015(6), 118-124.
- Wang, X., Wang, S., & Yuan, J (2011). Self-empowerment of migrant workers: case study of Picun, *Modern Communication*, 2011(10), 21-26
- Wei, L., Chen, W. (2015). New urban migrants' social media use and subjective well-being. *Chinese Journal of Journalism & Communication*, 2015.01, 114-130

- Wong, K., Fu, D., Li, C. Y., & Song, H. X. (2007). Rural migrant workers in urban China: living a marginalised life. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 16(1), 32-40.
- Xiaohua, Shujun, Jiang (2005) Media, Home and the Harmony Society: Newspaper Influence and the Recognition of the City Adscription of Shenzhen Migration, *Journalism & Communication*.
- Yang Shanhua, Zhu Zhiwei (2006) Cell phone: The 'Active' Choice in Globalization, *Social Science in Guangdong*. 168-173.
- Yu, Y. (2010). China's response to the global financial crisis. East Asia Forum.
- <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2010/01/24/chinas-response-to-the-global-financial-crisis/>
- Zhang, H. (2010). The Hukou system's constraints on migrant workers' job mobility in Chinese cities. *China Economic Review*, 21(1), 51-64.
- Zhang, S., & Luo, G. (2012). China's Migrant Workers: How Far from Being Citizens. *Asian Social Science*, 9(1), p171.
- Zhang, H. (2010). The Hukou system's constraints on migrant workers' job mobility in Chinese cities. *China Economic Review*, 21(1), 51-64
- Zhou, B & Lv S. (2011). The empirical research on new generation of migrant workers' use of new media. *Journalism Quarterly*, 2011.02, 145-150.