

Analysis on the Impact of Legally Paid Land Acquisition on the Employment of Land-Lost Farmers in the Process of Urbanization

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ABSTRACT

In order to improve the employment quality of land-lost farmers and safeguard their employment rights and interests, this paper introduces the effect of legally paid land requisition on land-lost farmers in the process of urbanization through qualitative and quantitative analysis. It is found that urbanization, agricultural modernization and the new employment trend in rural areas promote the legally paid land acquisition to make better use of rural land resources. In turn, the legally paid land acquisition also promotes urbanization and agricultural modernization, creates more employment opportunities, and liberates the employment concept of land-lost farmers. However, the land-lost farmers face the dilemma of unstable employment, low income and lack of employment channels. Therefore, this paper argues that relevant institutions should strengthen vocational education and employment training of land-lost farmers, actively widen employment channels, and formulate employment protection policies to promote the employment of land-lost farmers.

Keywords: Urbanization, legally paid land acquisition, land-lost farmers, employment

1. INTRODUCTION

With the acceleration of urbanization, the industrial structure has been transitioning from the primary industry to the secondary industry and the tertiary industry. The demand for land has increased greatly, and much land used for agricultural production has transformed into non-agricultural land. This is particularly reflected in the continuous decline of the total cultivated land area from 2001 to 2008 (Fig. 1), which is mainly due to the increase of cultivated land used for construction (Fig. 2). To ensure China's food security, the country has proposed to stick to 1.8 billion mu of cultivated land. Although the area of cultivated land used for construction in 2009-2019 is not significantly different from 2001-2008, the area of cultivated land has been relatively stable through rational planning and intensive use. In the process, some farmers voluntarily lost their land due to legally paid land acquisition. These farmers have a fixed title "land-lost farmers". Generally, the land-lost farmers are defined as those whose average farming area is less than 0.3 mu after legally paid land acquisition. The land-lost farmers in this paper refer to the farmers who have been legally expropriated land in whole or in part.

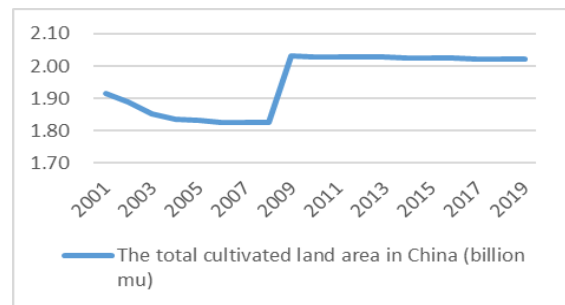


Figure 1. The national total cultivated land area in China from 2001 to 2019

Source: Ministry of Natural Resources of the People's Republic of China

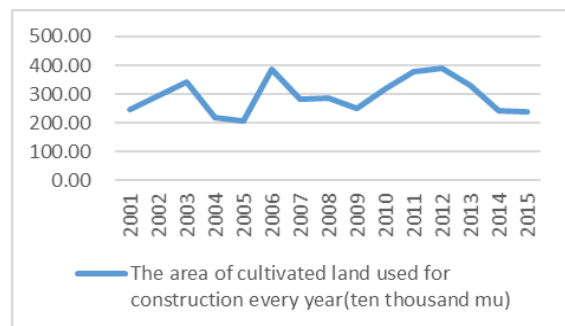


Figure 2. The area of cultivated land used for construction from 2001 to 2015 (ten thousand mu)

Source: Ministry of Natural Resources of the People's Republic of China

At present, there are no official statistics on the number of land-lost farmers in China. However, some scholars speculate that according to the development speed of urbanization in 2003, there will be about 100 million land-lost farmers by 2020 [1]. For farmers, land means jobs, economic benefits and social security [2]. Therefore, most people think that after losing their land, farmers are different from farmers who rely on agricultural income, and different from urban residents. They are not only faced with the embarrassing situation of identity, but also faced with the dilemma of how to obtain family income, which makes them become vulnerable group [3]. According to the interviews, most of the disputes among land-lost farmers are about compensation for land acquisition. As far as their employment is concerned, this is not negative. On the contrary, it changed the employment concept of land-lost farmers to some extent.

2. RESEARCH STATUS OF LAND-LOST FARMERS IN CHINA

There were 296 CSSCI articles with CNKI as the data retrieval source and "Employment of land-lost farmers" as the main topic by July 1, 2020. The first paper was published in 2003. Since then, it has shown a trend of increasing at first and then decreasing. Among them, the number of papers in 2009 was the largest, with 34 papers (Fig. 3). When the cultivated land area is decreasing, more and more scholars pay attention to the social phenomenon of employment of land-lost farmers. With the introduction of national policies, the cultivated land area is in a stable state, and the rights and interests of land-lost farmers in the process of paid land expropriation are well protected, so the number of papers has decreased.

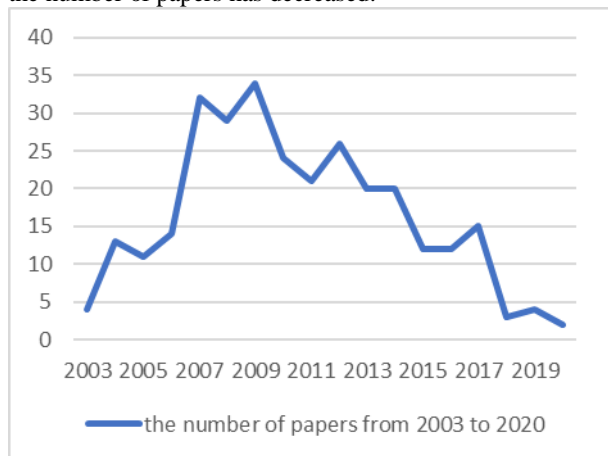


Figure 3. The number of papers from 2003 to 2020

The current research on the employment of land-lost farmers in China mainly shows the following characteristics.

In terms of content, scholars have defined the concept [4] of land-lost farmers and summarized the existing research [5]. Scholars agree that the emergence of land-lost farmers is a normal phenomenon in the process of urbanization,

and the problem lies in how to solve the social security problems such as employment for land-lost farmers [6]. As far as the employment of land-lost farmers is concerned, there are two different opinions in academic circles: some scholars believe that legally paid land acquisition aggravates the instability of farmers' employment to some extent, while others believe that paid land expropriation actually increases the family income of land-lost farmers. And the scholars actively researched the employment of land-lost farmers from the perspectives of sustainable livelihoods [7], social exclusion [8], endogenous development [9], shared development concepts [10] and so on. In terms of form, on the one hand, scholars combine the whole exploration with local research. In addition to the overall discussion on the employment of land-lost farmers, they also conducted targeted empirical investigations in some areas (such as Sichuan Province [11], etc.). On the other hand, scholars combine qualitative research with quantitative research [12][13], which makes the research on the employment of land-lost farmers more comprehensive and persuasive.

3. THE REASONS FOR THE APPEARANCE OF LAND-LOST FARMERS

Based on China's basic national conditions, the current land system is based on socialist public ownership of land. After the reform and opening up, the household contract responsibility system has greatly liberated rural productivity and laid a solid foundation for industrialization. The process of urbanization, agricultural modernization and the new trend of rural employment make scattered land to be requisitioned with compensation, resulting in the appearance of land-lost farmers.

3.1. The Promotion of Urbanization

Since the reform and opening up, rapid economic development has been accompanied by a rapid urbanization process. The rate of urbanization increased from 10.64% in 1949 to 60.60% in 2019. This means that more land is needed to support the development of secondary and tertiary industries. Compared with the relatively saturated urban land at a higher cost, the cost of rural land is lower. Therefore, more and more agricultural land has been expropriated as non-agricultural land with compensation according to law. Land-lost farmers appeared.

3.2. The Requirement of Agricultural Modernization

Although China is the third largest country in terms of land area and the fourth largest country in terms of cultivated land area in the world, its population base is huge, and the

average cultivated land area is only one third of the world average. Under the condition of relatively stable cultivated land area, the average cultivated land area is reduced by population growth. The agricultural production model with family as the unit can no longer meet the demands of social development. We need to create high yield, high quality and low consumption agricultural production system and agricultural ecosystem through modern management techniques, transforming from traditional agriculture to modern agriculture. In this process, it is necessary to make use of scattered land to form agricultural production scale.

3.3. The New Trend of Employment in Rural Areas

Nowadays, China's rural areas have great changes compared with the rural areas before the reform and opening up. One of the manifestations is that more and more rural families attach importance to their children's education, and more and more people are unwilling to stay in the countryside, and often go out to work. One question is who will continue to engage in agricultural production? Therefore, it is prescient to acquire land and contract it out to tenants step by step.

4. THE IMPACT OF LEGALLY PAID LAND ACQUISITION ON EMPLOYMENT OF LAND-LOST FARMERS

Every coin has two sides. Traditionally, land means everything to farmers, but in today's society, land is no longer the only means of making a living for farmers. In a sense, paid land acquisition in accordance with the law conforms to urbanization, agricultural modernization and new rural employment trends. For the employment of land-lost farmers, it is "Misfortune might be a blessing in disguise." The following will analyze the positive and negative impacts of legally paid land acquisition on the employment of land-lost farmers.

4.1. Positive Effects

4.1.1. More job opportunities

As an important means of production for social development, land plays an important role in the process of urbanization and agricultural modernization [14]. Obtaining land with compensation according to law ensures the land demand for urbanization. The development of urbanization provides more employment opportunities for land-losing farmers, and their employment options are more diverse.

4.1.2. New concept of employment

In the past, farmers often relied only on land to earn family income and regarded land as important personal security. However, the efficiency and benefits of traditional decentralized family agriculture are very low. The policy of legally paid land requisition "forces" farmers to seek new ways of employment to some extent [15]. Later, land-lost farmers found that the income of migrant workers was often more than that of agricultural production, which changed their employment concept and daily life.

4.2. Negative Effects

As the land-lost farmers were mainly engaged in agricultural production before, their employment concept was backward, employment training was lacking [16], and employment skills were deficient. Therefore, there are some problems in re-employing land-lost farmers.

4.2.1. Lack of stability in employment

Firstly, since the land-lost farmers have been engaged in agricultural production, they lack skills and experience in other industries. Secondly, most of the land-lost farmers are older, so it is difficult for them to learn new skills, and they are reluctant to start their own businesses. Thirdly, some land-lost farmers have been accustomed to the loose agricultural production mode and are unwilling to accept the restrictions of factory regulations, so they often take some temporary jobs with low guaranteed wages. As can be seen from the above aspects, the land-lost farmers are mostly engaged in temporary work and lack of stability in employment [17].

4.2.2. Lower wages

China's industry has changed from labor-intensive to knowledge-skill-based. Because of age, education level, employment skills and other reasons, land-lost farmers can't meet the current employment needs. They are mostly engaged in some temporary and scattered jobs with low guaranteed wages (such as the catering industry). These jobs are not only unstable, but also not well paid.

4.2.3. Lack of employment channels

At present, there are three main employment channels for land-lost farmers: self-employment, enterprise recruitment and government resettlement. Self-employment and employment opportunities provided by the government are very limited, which is not the first choice of landless farmers. And enterprises prefer young people, land-lost farmers have relatively few employment channels limited by age and skills. In addition, people's legal awareness is

relatively weak and they lack relevant legal knowledge in rural areas or the underdeveloped combination of urban and rural areas, which makes the basic workers' rights and interests, including working environment, not effectively protected.

5. MEASURES TO IMPROVE THE EMPLOYMENT QUALITY OF LAND-LOST FARMERS

5.1. Strengthening Vocational Education and Employment Training for Land-lost Farmers

Lack of vocational skills is one of the important reasons for the employment difficulties of land-lost farmers. Therefore, further improving the labor force training system is a fundamental measure to improve the employment quality of land-lost farmers [18]. Local governments should collect relevant information suitable for the employment of local land-lost farmers. On the basis of understanding the relevant situation, the government shall formulate an employment training plan suitable for local land-lost farmers, ensuring that the content of employment training is targeted and practical. In addition, specialized employment training institutions for land-lost farmers, appropriate employment training time and vigorous employment training publicity are also essential.

5.2. Actively Broadening the Employment Channels for Land-lost Farmers

In view of the land-lost peasants who have the consciousness of self-employment, corresponding technical and financial support should be provided. First of all, it is necessary to formulate self-employment projects and corresponding preferential policies for land-lost farmers. Secondly, on the issue of venture capital, relevant institutions can give start-up subsidies according to regulations, so as to reduce the entrepreneurial burden of land-lost farmers. Finally, in view of the lack of experience and technical difficulties encountered in the process of self-employment, the government can organize land-lost farmers to learn from advanced units, and offer technical training courses to provide technical and experience support for land-lost farmers. The self-employment of land-lost farmers not only solves their employment problems, but also provides some jobs, which is a good way to improve the quality of employment.

5.3. Establishing Laws and Policies to Protect the Employment of Land-lost Farmers

Land-lost farmers have a low level of education, and their legitimate rights and interests are vulnerable to

infringement in the process of re-employment. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate legal protection policies for the employment of land-lost farmers, so as to protect their employment rights and interests. Perfecting the corresponding employment legal system and urging employers to sign labor contracts with farmers in strict accordance with the law are the primary guarantees for workers' rights and interests. Then, the establishment of specialized non-profit employment legal aid institutions can help the land-lost farmers safeguard their legitimate rights and interests and improve their employment quality.

6. CONCLUSION

As an agricultural country, China has a long history of agricultural civilization. The issues of agriculture, rural areas and farmers are fundamental to the national economy. The development of urbanization means the growth of economy and improvement of people's living standards. In this process, land-lost farmers are faced with opportunities and challenges. Although land-lost farmers indirectly get more employment opportunities through legally paid land acquisition, land-lost farmers face difficulties such as unstable employment, low income and lack of employment channels. Land-lost farmers are the vulnerable group in urbanization development, and improving their employment quality is an important task. Relevant institutions should actively carry out vocational education and employment training for land-lost farmers, actively expand employment channels for, and establish employment protection policies, which is significant to the development of the social economy.

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