YOUNG FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS’ LIFE SKILLS LEARNING AND PRACTICE, ITS SOURCES AND EMPOWERMENT PROPERTIES IN THEIR OWN WORDS

A dissertation submitted to the Kent State University College of Education, Health, and Human Services in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2017
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This study investigated the experiences of informal learning of life skills, the learning sources and possible empowerment properties on the part of young female migrant workers in China. This study employed a basic interpretive research design, using semi-structured interviews, observations and field notes. The Capability approach provided the conceptual framework underlying the research and analysis.

This research found that the migrant women, though impeded by many structural constraints, informally learned and practiced key life skills to some extent as they adjusted to the urban life. Most of them had developed aspirations to learn better communication and occupational skills to integrate better into the urban environment. The sources of learning were confined to rural migrant social network from home, at work and church, the occasional self-help book, and growing phone and Internet use. Informal learning created a fertile space for empowerment, where migrant women enhanced their agency, capabilities and material and inner well-being. Yet, government policy, social-economic and residential segregation often confined the migrants to second-class status in the city and diminished the empowering impact of life skills.
This research covered a gap in literature by investigating life skills and capabilities of migrant women and the connections between life skills and empowerment. It applied theory to explain practices and provided theoretical support for the importance of life skills which NGOs failed to address. Moreover, since internal labor migration is undertaking worldwide, this study is useful to suggest explanations of similar phenomena in other countries.

Keywords (Life skills, young migrant women, rural-to-urban migration, informal learning, empowerment, capabilities, well-being, China)
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I am crossing the finishing line to get my cherished doctoral degree, I want to thank many people for their help and support. First, I want to thank my advisor Dr. Vilma Seeberg for her continuous encouragement, generous financial help, and professional guidance to me. Dr. Seeberg gives me freedom to choose whatever I want to pursue and always keeps an eye on me. Whenever I need help or go astray, she is there to pull me back and guide me towards the right way. Her belief in me inspires me to continue this long and tedious dissertation-writing journey until I finish it successfully.

Second, I want to thank my committee member Dr. Suzanne Holt for her kind inspirations and lots of support mentally and academically. Dr. Holt always shows her care and confidence in me during our conversations and encourages me never giving up. In addition, I would like to give me sincere thanks to Dr. Natasha Levinson for her willingness to join in my committee at the last moment and her unceasing, generous support. Dr. Levinson’s high expectation on me always pushes me to work hard and aim high. I also want to give my deep gratitude to Dr. Patrick O’Connor for being the graduate faculty representative despite his busy schedule. Dr. O’Connor encourages me to have passion in doing research and continuously supports me academically. Dr. Quentin Wheeler-Bell is another professor I want to thank because of his professional suggestions on my dissertation proposal. Finally, I want to thank Gerald H. Read Center of Kent State University for their financial support on me to continue this study.
Beyond my respectable professors, I want to thank my church fellows, my host families and best friends for their prayers and comfort during hardship. Without them, I could not go through all the difficulties of dissertation writing and enjoyed inner peace. I want to thank Pastor Samuel Huang and my mentor Dr. Mei-chen Lin. Mei-chen always provides me help in time of needs and shows her deep care for me. She gave me great suggestions both in dissertation writing and in private life. I also owe my deep gratitude to my host family, Kathy Hayden, Bob Hayden, Tammy Jeffery, David Jeffery and my dearest friend Monty who always accompany me, encourage me and bring lots of fun to my life. They are the honey and sunshine in my bitter, dark journey.

In addition, I want to give my thanks to my dear family in China. My parents have always believed that I can achieve great things, including getting PhD. They have been patiently waiting for me to fulfill my dream and always support me emotionally and financially. I want to thank my youngest sister Ping for her generous financial support, which gives me the privilege to work on dissertation full time.

Lastly, and most importantly, I own deep, earnest thanks to my dearest Heavenly Father, to Jesus. God brings all the good people to my life and shows me His abundant love. He is the one I turn to when I am frustrated, helpless, and hopeless. During those times, God told me He was there and would always be there to support me. I can only achieve great things through Him and decide to follow His guidance throughout my life.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................................................................................. iv

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................................... 1
   Problem Statement ....................................................................................................................... 6
   Need for the Study ....................................................................................................................... 7
   Purpose of the Study ................................................................................................................... 9
   Research Questions .................................................................................................................. 10
   Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................................. 11
   Methodology ............................................................................................................................. 13
   Significance of the Study .......................................................................................................... 14
   Limitations of the Study ........................................................................................................... 16
   Key Terms ................................................................................................................................. 17
   Organization of the Dissertation .............................................................................................. 20

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ...................................................................................... 22
   Life Skills Study ......................................................................................................................... 22
      Definition of Life Skills ........................................................................................................... 22
      Key Life Skills of Chinese Migrants ....................................................................................... 25
         Decision making and problem solving skills ....................................................................... 25
         Communication and interpersonal skills ............................................................................ 26
         Emotional and stress-coping skills ..................................................................................... 27
      Gender Vulnerabilities and Risks ......................................................................................... 28
   Summary .................................................................................................................................. 30
   Informal Learning of Life Skills ............................................................................................... 32
      Definition of Informal Learning .............................................................................................. 32
   Informal Learning Sources ....................................................................................................... 35
   Capability Approach and Empowerment .................................................................................. 37
      Definition of Empowerment ................................................................................................... 37
   Summary ................................................................................................................................... 47

III. METHODOLOGY ....................................................................................................................... 49
   Research Design ......................................................................................................................... 49
   Setting ........................................................................................................................................ 51


LIFE SKILLS LEARNING AND EMPOWERMENT

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

Research Question 1: Life Skills Learning and Application in the City
- Decision making and problem solving
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Coping with emotions and stress

Research Question 2: Informal Learning Sources

Research Question 3: Empowering Properties and Impact

Sampling
Participants
Researcher Roles and Bracketing
Data Collection and Procedure
- Interview
- Observation and Field Notes
Data Analysis
- Preliminary Analysis
- Deep Analysis
- Using Data Analysis Software

Trustworthiness

IV. FINDINGS

Life Skills of Migrant Women
- Decision Making Skill
  - Choose migration destinations
  - Choose satisfactory jobs
  - Choose further learning and entrepreneurship
- Problem Solving Skill
  - Obtain and adapt to jobs
  - Cope with gender vulnerabilities
  - Cope with discrimination
  - Solve problems in life
- Communication and Interpersonal Relationship Skill
- Coping with Emotions and Stress

Summary

Informal Learning Sources

Empowering Properties and Impact
- Well-being
- Agency
- Achievement of Valued Outcomes
- Social-economic Constraints

Chapter Summary

V. LIFE SKILLS LEARNING AND EMPOWERMENT

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

Research Question 1: Life Skills Learning and Application in the City
- Decision making and problem solving
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Coping with emotions and stress

Research Question 2: Informal Learning Sources

Research Question 3: Empowering Properties and Impact

vii
Gender, Life Skills, Capabilities.................................................................157
Conclusion...............................................................................................160
Implications and Recommendations.......................................................162
Limitations...............................................................................................165
Recommendations for Future Research.................................................166

APPENDICES ..............................................................................................168
APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .................................................169
APPENDIX B. IRB APPROVAL LETTER....................................................175
APPENDIX C. SAMPLE OF FIELD TRIP NOTES ....................................180

REFERENCES ............................................................................................183
The Chinese household registration system (hukou system), established in the late 1950s, has segregated the rural and urban populations in geographical terms. Rural population were “tied to the land to produce an agricultural surplus for industrialization” and “had to fend for themselves”, while urban population “worked in the priority and protected industrial sector” and “had access to …social welfare and full citizenship” (Chan, 2010, p. 358). The initial purpose of hukou system was to bar rural-to-urban migration. Yet, after China’s social-economic reform in late 1970s, rural residents have been encouraged to migrate to cities in order to meet industrial labor demands. They are referred as “rural migrant labors/workers”¹ (nongmingong). Chinese government has restricted the change of hukou for these rural migrant workers. Millions of them have rural hukou in cities and are “deprived of access to most of the basic welfare and state-provided services enjoyed by regular urban residents” (Chan, 2010, p. 357). They live in poor residential conditions, taking up physical demanding jobs that urban residents are unwilling to do, such as manual laborers, assembly line workers in garment, toy or electronic factories, domestic servants and other service workers (Wong, Li, & Song, 2007).

¹ Due to its complexity, the detailed definition of rural migrant worker adopted in this study is elaborated under the section "key terms" of this chapter.
Since 1980s, rural migrant workers in China have continued to increase because China has become the “world factory” with huge job markets in big and coastal cities. According to the yearly report from National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBSC), there were “168.84 million^2 migrant workers who left their hometowns and worked in other places” in China in 2015 (NBSC, 2016a, para. 4), among which, female migrant workers were 31.2% (NBSC, 2016b, para. 4). The migrant workers between 16 and 30 years old were 32.9 % of the total migrant population (NBSC, 2016b, para. 4).

The majority of scholars and researchers tend to treat migrants as a homogeneous group without paying attention to the differences in terms of gender, age, and other factors (Zhu & Lin, 2014). Yet, there is a growing body of literature focusing on two subgroups of the migrants due to the distinctive features of these subgroups: the new generation migrants (Pun & Chan, 2013; Wang, 2001), and female migrants (Jacka, 2006; Zheng et al., 2001). In the following, I briefly discuss about the specific challenges and vulnerabilities faced by these two subgroups.

Migrant workers who were born between 1980 and the early 1990s are considered “new generation migrants” or “second-generation migrants”, compared to the older

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^2 According to NBSC (2016 b), “The total number of migrant workers in 2015 was 277.47 million… Of which, the number of migrant workers who left their hometowns and worked in other places was 168.84 million…, and those who worked in their own localities reached 108.63 million...” (para. 4). NBSC (2015) stated that, “The number of migrant workers includes those who are employed outside their villages and towns for more than six months in the year and those who do non-agricultural work in their villages and towns for more than six months in the year” (endnote 4).
generations born before 1980 (Tian, 2011; Chan, 2012). New generation migrants are increasingly gender-balanced and leave the countryside at an earlier age than their parents do.

Compared to their parents’ generation, new generation migrants are younger and more aware of their rights and unsatisfactory conditions they face (Tian, 2011; Chan, 2012). Additionally, they have better education and greater aspirations to stay in the city. However, their years of education are still limited. The data on education attainment of new generation migrants is lacking, but for the overall migrant population, over 70 percent have less than high school education (NBSC, 2016 b, para. 6). New generation migrants, like their parents’ generation, are constrained to find low pay, unskilled, labor-intensive jobs. They face high pressure from work, and have low satisfaction in terms of their wage and uncertain self-identification (villager or citizen) (Hu, 2012). The working condition and environment are sometimes harmful to their physical and psychological well-being. Their legitimate rights and interests are also often violated by employers, including working for extremely long hours, receiving unequal pay, delays in payment of wages, being subjected to physical assault and personal humiliation from supervisors and so on (Tian, 2011).

Another constraint faced by the new generation migrants is that they have rural hukou like their parents’ generation. They are not considered official urban residents despite the fact that some of them were born and grew up in the city. Chan (2010) pointed out that, “Rural migrant is not a probational status but permanent” (p. 359).
Migrants are not qualified for urban social welfare benefits (government entitled public education for children, urban pension plans, and public housing). Most of them have very limited access to various kinds of insurance (urban health insurance, unemployment insurance, work accident insurance, maternity insurance) (Chan, 2012; Yang, 2013).

There is gender segregation of migrant jobs: male migrants are usually channeled to do physically demanding jobs such as working as construction workers, miners, carpenters and so on; while female migrants are channeled to work in garment/electronic factories, hotels, restaurants, or do domestic services (Fan, 2003). On one hand, women face severe gender-based discrimination and sexual exploitation in segregated occupations (Jacka, 2006; The Asia Foundation, 2011). For example, since women are usually thought to be submissive and quiet, their rights are easily infringed by employers. In factories, females are demanded to work extremely long hours daily to ensure high production (Tian, 2011). Females are also expected to docilely submit to management authority which was mostly held by men in factories (Fan, 2003). Employers target young, single migrant women at their 20s and discriminate older women because young women are perceived to be efficient, easy to control and capable of handling delicate work (Fan, 2003).

On the other hand, young migrant women faced high sexual and reproductive health related risks. Premarital pregnancy is prevalent phenomenon among young, unmarried female migrants because they lack basic information about reproduction and contraception. They choose induced abortion for unwanted pregnancy (He et al, 2012;
Zheng et al, 2001). In entertaining establishments or personal services (e.g. night bars, beauty salons, massage parlors, etc.), female migrant workers engage in risky sexual practices much more frequently than those working in non-entertainment establishments (e.g. restaurants, stalls, domestic service, factories) (Yang et al, 2005).

It is important to investigate the migration experiences of young migrant women because their problems are specific and important to society and themselves. A large body of literature has provided sufficient evidence regarding the beneficial transgenerational effects of women's education and empowerment (e.g., for China see Li & Tsang, 2003; Stephens, 2000; for cross-cultural studies see Abu-Ghaida & Klasen, 2004; Lewis & Lockheed, 2006). A well-educated woman is more likely to have delayed marriage and reduced number of offspring. She is more able to improve family health care and promote children’s wellbeing. Addressing the challenges and vulnerabilities of migrant women will not only promote women’s wellbeing but also generate transgenerational effects and contribute to the development of the nation.

Because of the specific challenges and vulnerabilities faced by new generation female migrant workers (hereafter referred as young migrant women or migrant women) and the significance to care about this group, they are chosen to be focus of this study. This dissertation study aims at bringing a needed gender perspective to the literature on new generation migrants.
Problem Statement

Millions of young migrant women in China are mainly depicted as vulnerable and deprived population in literature. Yet, despite constraints and problems, migration also provides women with great opportunities and freedoms, for example, economic independence and chances to broaden their horizons. In addition, migration may present rural women the freedom to escape from “parental, spousal and other forms of authority” and experience a “liberating sense of autonomy” (Jacka, 2006, p. 7). Migrant women may be capable of developing new skills and capabilities to deal with constraints and problems. The skills and capabilities of the migrant women have been much less explored in literature.

In order to enhance capabilities of young women in disadvantaged situations, large or small non-profit agencies have been providing life skill programs in developing countries since 1990s (UNICEF, 2012; WHO, 1997, 2001; CASEL, 2012; Room to Read, 2011; FHI 360, 2007). These programs focus on the teaching of life skills-- “a range of psychosocial skills…which… point towards their importance to our protection and well-being and our ability to live productive, meaningful and fulfilling lives” (UNICEF, 2012, p. 7). Life skills have been deemed highly valued skills for young people because these skills enable vulnerable adolescents to deal effectively with the challenges of life through adaptive and positive behavior (Care, Kim, Anderson & Gustafsson-Wright, 2017; CASEL, 2013; UNICEF, 2012; Chow, Chiu & Wong, 2011; WHO, 1997). Though non-profit agencies have contributed to an increasing body of literature on life skills, there are
three gaps in the literature. First, non-profit agencies mainly focus on the education of life skills but fail to provide sufficient theoretical or empirical research to back their claims for the importance of life skills. Second, although World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) has raised 10 key life skills, which are widely accepted by other non-profit agencies, the definition of these key life skills are too abstract and call for a deep elaboration from perspective of empirical studies. Third, the learning of life skills outside of non-formal or formal education settings has rarely been investigated.

Most of the young migrant women in China have no access to any kind of life skill programs due to a shortage of these programs for a huge migrant population. However, they may have learned life skills informally as they transit from rural to urban areas, because life skills are practical skills related to individual well-being, protection and life adjustment. Scholars have found connections between informal learning of life skills and personal transitions among participants in different culture (McLeana & Vermeylena, 2014; Rao & Hossain, 2012; Seeberg & Luo, 2012). This study assumes that young migrant women could learn life skills informally in the urban environments. As they learn more life skills, they may enhance their capabilities and have better life adjustment. In the literature, informal learning of life skills and its possible relationship with capabilities on part of Chinese migrants have never been examined.

Need for the Study

Since the literature has mainly addressed challenges and risks faced by migrant women while overlooked their capabilities, it has presented a biased perspective. There
is a need to explore migrant women’s capabilities in order to provide a holistic picture of their lived experiences in the city. Such study may generate possible suggestions for policy makers and non-profit practitioners to address the needs of migrant women.

Migrant women's capabilities seem related to their informal learning of life skills, because life skills are psychosocial skills for protection, well-being and abilities to live better lives. Mohanasundaram and Chandrasekar (2014) claimed that “for a fully enhanced freedom and development, as expressed in the Capabilities Approach, education must move from rote learning towards specifically addressing the development ...of life skills” (p. 118). Such statement asserted the connection between capabilities, empowerment, and life skills. Yet, there is a need for more theoretical and empirical evidence to support the assumption and illustrate the relationship between life skills and capabilities.

Life skill programs in African and South Asian countries are of top concern to international agencies such as World Health Organization, UNICEF and numerous NGOs. Such programs have demonstrated evaluated effectiveness in assisting vulnerable children and adolescents to positively deal with challenges and risks in their living environment. Before proposing large-scale non-formal life skills education for migrant women in China, there is a need to investigate what kind of vulnerabilities and risks they face in the local context since life skills are context-related. Furthermore, it is necessary to explore what kind of life skills they have informally learned and what the informal learning sources are.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore gender and age related vulnerabilities, challenges, capabilities and life skills learning experiences of young migrant women. I concentrate on how young migrant women informally learn life skills from life and work, and how they apply life skills to deal with challenges and risks. The process of learning and applying life skills may reveal capabilities and sense of empowerment migrant women have obtained in the city with respect to survival and life adjustment. Therefore, I also investigate the possible empowering properties and impact of life skills learning on the migrant women as they perceive them to be.

This dissertation study focuses on a special sub-migrant population: new generation female migrant workers between ages of 18 and 29, in order to contribute to the growing literature on female migrants and new generation migrants. This age group is very critical. For new generation migrants born in the 1980s and 1990s, the average age of first departure from the countryside is 18 and 16 respectively (ACFTU, 2010). I focus on migrants who are 18 and above because they are considered adults. Compared to the age group above 29 years old, life skills are more in need for the age group between 18 and 29 years old (WHO, 1997; UNICEF, 2012). Migrant literature reveals that young single women in their late teens or twenties are in danger because they are exposed to risky, dynamic urban environment at young ages with less experience, preparation and mental maturity (Shi et al, 2012; Zhang, 2011; Feng, Ren, Zhan, & Shen, 2005).
**Research Questions**

This study first examines what kind of life skills migrant women have learned informally in the city context, how they apply life skills, and what the informal learning sources are. The second part of the study explores possible empowering properties and impact of life skills learning on migrant women from the women’s own perspectives.

WHO (1997) posited ten key life skills which have been adopted by many international NGOs (Room to Read, 2011; FHI 360, 2007; UNICEF, 2012). Several of these key life skills seem to overlap or have similar meanings. The focus of this dissertation is on the following six key life skills: Decision making/problem solving, effective communication/interpersonal relationship skills, coping with emotions/coping with stress.

The following are the research questions:

1. What kind of life skills have the young migrant women learned informally in the city?
   
   a. What kind of challenges and risks do migrant women face in the city and how do they apply life skills to cope with these?

2. From the migrant women’s perspective, what are the informal learning sources for life skills?

3. What are the possible empowering properties and impact on migrant women as they perceive them to be due to life skills learning?
Theoretical Framework

Capability approach provides the basis of the theoretical and analytical framework of this study. Capability approach, developed by Sen (1999), Nussbaum (2000) and other scholars, is a normative framework for the evaluation of “individual well-being and social arrangements” (Robeyns, 2006, p. 78). The key focus of capability approach is what individuals are effectively able to do and to be, which “contrasts with philosophical approaches that concentrate on people’s happiness or desire-fulfilment, or on income, expenditures, or consumption” (Robeyns, 2005, p. 94). Capability approach places individuals at the center and investigates how individuals define empowerment based on their own values and judgments, which is different from a persuasive body of literature that sees young women largely as “tools” for development but ignore women themselves (Seeberg & Luo, 2012; Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005). This study believes that freedom and achievement should be judged in terms of individuals’ own values and objectives instead of external criteria such as income, assets or resources. Thus, capability approach is chosen as the theoretical framework. This study targets the actual beings and doings individuals value and get engaged, exploring the real freedoms that people enjoy and cherish. Therefore, it presents a more comprehensive view of development.

Sen (1999) argues that to evaluate development, we should concentrate on the quality of people’s lives and the elimination of obstacles in their lives; thus, they have the freedom to live the kind of life that they have a reason to value. In other words, development is a “process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (p. 3). He
gives detailed explanation of freedom as both (1) the primary end and (2) the principal means of development. They can be called respectively the “constitutive role” and the “instrumental role” of freedom in development.

Constitutive freedom refers to the expansion of substantive freedoms including “elementary capabilities like being able to avoid such deprivations as starvation, undernourishment, to enjoy political participation and uncensored speech and so on” (Sen, 1999, p. 36). Instrumental freedoms refers more to the effectiveness of freedom as a means—not an end in itself; it “concerns the way different kinds of rights, opportunities, and entitlements contribute to the expansion of human freedom in general, and thus to promoting development” (Sen, 1999, p. 37).

The reasons to apply the capability approach as theoretical framework for this study are twofold. First, it focuses on the migrant women themselves and listens to their voice about what they are capable to do or to be, and what kind of unfreedom and freedom they experience from the young migrant women’s perspective. Thus, it could answer both Research Question 1, what kind of life skills have the migrant women learned informally in the city; and Research Question 2, what are the informal learning sources for life skills? Second, capability approach is a normative framework for the elaboration of “individual well-being and social arrangements” (Robeyns, 2006, p. 78), thus it provides a theoretical lens to analyze the answers to Research Question 3, What are the possible empowering properties and impact on migrant women as they perceive them due to life skills learning? Based on the descriptive and normative properties of the
capability approach, Seeber (2011; 2014; 2015) has developed a *Capabilities and Empowerment Framework* to explore the relationship between schooling and women’s empowerment. The framework has demonstrated its effectiveness in theorizing the connection between formal learning and empowerment among rural Chinese girls. Seeberg’s Capabilities and Empowerment Framework guided the analysis of answers to Research Question 3 in this study.

Empirical studies done by individual scholars and NGOs regarding urban challenges and risks faced by young migrant women and their life skills learning and application are used to compare to my findings in the discussion section of this study.

**Methodology**

This study employed a basic interpretive qualitative research design. Participants who could provide the richest information for this study were selected and interviewed using open-ended interview questions. Observations were conducted in research sites to pull out rich contextual information. The data collection and analysis process were elaborated in details in Chapter 3.

Informal learning does not have a structured learning context such as the existence of formal instructors, learning materials, and settled time or place for learning, which makes it hard to quantify the learning outcome. Besides, the quantitative evaluation methods used by international organizations are usually of limited use in investigating the possible empowerment of life skills as the learners perceive them. Empowerment as understood in this research is not primarily an external, structural status
change, but is defined by the participants themselves. A qualitative study of women’s views allows a rich understanding of the process, and in so doing, a clearer understanding of the underrepresented women, their ways to enact their aspirations and achieve their valued freedoms in the urban areas through life skills learning.

Thus, in order to explore what life skills the migrant women have informally learned, the informal learning sources, and the possible empowering properties and impact of life skills on migrant women as they perceived, there is a need to apply a qualitative research method that focuses on the participants themselves, and listen to their voices on what changes have happened to them due to the informal learning of life skills.

**Significance of the Study**

Internal migration is a worldwide phenomenon and occurs in a great many countries increasingly in this era of economic globalization. The internal rural to urban migration in China is remarkable in its scope and influence in the whole country. It is significant and timely to focus on new generation migrant workers because they are a huge population in the city and call for concern and help from government and society. The body of literature on female Chinese migrants is increasing, however, too little of it attends to females' life skills and capabilities. This dissertation fills some of this void.

There have been increased calls globally for young people to develop a broader set of skills beyond academic, vocational, and technical skills within education system in order to meet the demands in the 21st century (Care et al., 2017). Key life skills such as decision making, problem solving, social and emotional skills are now seen as highly
valued skills for young people (Care et al., 2017; CASEL, 2013; Chow et al., 2011). Large or small non-profit agencies such as UNICEF (2012), WHO (1997, 2001) and CASEL (2013) have been working on projects to incorporate life skills into formal education system or to provide non-formal life skills training for needed population. Many such projects are designed for girls and young women at disadvantaged and deprived positions (Room to Read, 2011; FHI 360, 2007). By focusing on life skills learning experiences of migrant women in China, this study will add to the knowledge of life skills acquisition in informal setting. Little if any research has been done on how informal life skill learning occurs in the normal course of events. Thus, this study will cover the gap. In addition, this study may also provide valuable suggestions regarding what specific life skills are needed and how life skills should be incorporated in schooling and non-formal life skills training programs.

Though an increasing number of researchers have been working on instruments for measuring life skills, few have been tested for validity or reliability (Mangrulkar, Whiman, & Posner, 2001). A qualitative study of the women’s perspective would help us account for their understanding of their own life skills and the process in which the life skills are accumulated. Exploring the relationship between life skills and empowerment through capability approach provides theoretical support regarding the significance of life skills in China’s migration context, and enriches capability approach theory with empirical research.
This study will also contribute to the women’s studies literature on the lived experiences of vulnerable women in dynamic, risky situations in less developed countries. It provides an opportunity for scholars in the field of Comparative and International Education to compare and contrast women’s survival experience in different social-economic, cultural context, and thus to increase world-wide awareness and promote strategies on empowering women.

It is my hope to inform the national government in China and local or international NGOs, and induce them to address the issues of young rural migrant women in the city. The government and NGOs could assist girls and young women with non-formal or informal life skills training, consequently, enable them to develop empowerment capabilities to live a life they value in the city and better secure the city environment.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study is limited by the following factors. First, the participants are selected from two provinces in China and may not be representative of young Chinese migrant women in other provinces in China. Second, the small sample size does not allow the findings to be generalizable. However, small sample size and qualitative research design provides the opportunity for potentially rich data stemming from the sustained, in-depth interviews and allows researchers and readers to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Third, this study may be affected by the researcher’s subjectivity. One’s subjectivity has the capacity to enable the researcher to
tell the story, equipping him or her with the perspectives and insights that shape the research process from selection of topic to presentation of the research findings (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). However, it may also press the researcher to focus on something while ignore other things, or make less of than what could be made. For example, as the researcher, I share some common background with my participants. I was born and grew up in the rural area in China and migrated to the city at late teens too. The similarity may give me presumption that they have similar experiences as I do and prevent me from exploring their unique personal experiences. Thus, it is necessary for me as the researcher to monitor my subjectivity. Though it is not possible to completely detect my subjectivity, I can pursue it in order to “make use of this knowledge and to be responsible in reporting those selves to the readers of (my) work” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 106).

Key Terms

Rural migrant workers: NBSC (2015) defined rural migrant workers as those holding rural hukou but “employed outside their villages and towns” or “doing non-agricultural work in their villages and towns” (Endnote 4). Chan (2010) defined them as “industrial and service workers with rural hukou” (p. 359). This study agreed with NBSC' definition but specifically focused on migrant workers who were employed in cities. In addition, this study expanded Chan’s definition and claimed that low-level commerce workers (e.g. sales) and semi-professional workers (e.g. kindergarten teacher in private educational center) with rural hukou should also be regarded as rural migrant
workers. The reason is that rural migrant workers in above occupations experienced similar difficulty of changing their rural hukou to urban hukou.

**New generation migrant workers:** Rural migrant workers in China who were born between 1980 and the early 1990s (Tian, 2011; Chan, 2012).

**Life skills:** A core set of psychosocial skills “that are at the heart of skills-based initiatives for the promotion of the health and well-being of children and adolescents” (WHO, 1997, p. 1)

**Decision making:** A skill that “helps us to deal constructively with decisions about our lives. This can have consequences for [well-being] if young people actively make decisions about their actions in relation to health by assessing the different options, and what effects different decisions may have” (WHO, 1997, p. 2).

**Problem solving:** A skill that “enables us to deal constructively with problems in our lives. Significant problems that are left unresolved can cause mental stress and give rise to accompanying physical strain” (WHO, 1997, p. 2).

**Effective communication:** A skill that makes us “able to express ourselves, both verbally and non-verbally, in ways that are appropriate to our cultures and situations. This means being able to express opinions and desires, but also needs and fears. And it may mean being able to ask for advice and help in a time of need” (WHO, 1997, p. 2).

**Interpersonal relationship skill:** A skill that “helps us to relate in positive ways with the people we interact with. This may mean being able to make and keep friendly relationships, which can be of great importance to our mental and social well-being. It
may mean keeping good relations with family members, which are an important source of social support. It may also mean being able to end relationships constructively” (WHO, 1997, p. 2).

**Coping with emotions:** A skill that “involves recognizing emotions in ourselves and others, being aware of how emotions influence behavior, and being able to respond to emotions appropriately. Intense emotions, like anger or sorrow can have negative effects on our health if we do not react appropriately” (WHO, 1997, p. 2).

**Coping with stress:** A skill about “recognizing the sources of stress in our lives, recognizing how this affects us, and acting in ways that help to control our levels of stress. This may mean that we take action to reduce the sources of stress, for example, by making changes to our physical environment or lifestyle. Or it may mean learning how to relax, so that tensions created by unavoidable stress do not give rise to health problems” (WHO, 1997, p. 2).

**Vulnerability:** The inability to withstand the effects of a hostile environment (Wikipedia, “vulnerability”, 2015). In this study, the types of vulnerability depend on the local context. Examples of vulnerability are violence, unprotected sex, drug abuse and so on (UNICEF, 2012).

**Risk:** It is the potential of losing something of value due to a given action, activity or inaction (Wikipedia, “risk”, 2015). In this study, it specifically refers to the loss of physical health and emotional well-being (WHO, 1997).
**Informal learning:** It refers to “any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria.” (Livingstone, 2001, p. 4). It includes any kind of learning taking place outside the pre-established curricula of educative institutions, which indicates informal learning can take place in educative institutions as long as it is not within pre-established curricula. The feature of informal learning is that the individuals and groups who get engaged in the learning determine the basic terms of informal learning (e.g. objectives, content, means and processes of acquisition, duration, evaluation of outcomes, applications) (Livingstone, 2001).

**Empowering:** It is the “process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (Sen, 1999, p. 3). It is a stage of agency achievement generally for women in a case of fully realized rights, entitlements or capabilities (Robeyns, 2005; 2006).

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This chapter has provided an introduction to the study, the problem statement, need, purpose and rationalization for the study, as well as proposed method to implement the study and inherent limitations. Chapter 2 expands the first chapter’s introduction to elaborate the relevant literature pertaining to the definition and application of life skills, the socioeconomic context where migrants may conduct informal learning of life skills, and possible informal learning sources. It further explores the conceptual and empirical studies of capability approach and the ways of using it as theoretical frameworks for this study. Chapter 3, “Methodology”, presents the research design, participants and sample
collection, data collection and analysis process with sincere concern of trustworthiness issues. Chapter 4 shows the findings of this study resulting from an examination of data. Chapter 5 offers a discussion of findings in relation to relevant literature, as well as implications and limitations of this study.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, literature related to the theory of life skills and empirical studies regarding life skills of migrants in the cities, informal learning sources of life skills, and capability approach will be elaborated to provide theoretical frameworks for the dissertation study.

Life Skills Study

In the following section, relevant literature on Research Question 1 will be reviewed, including the definition of life skills, and life skills of Chinese migrant women in the context of migration and urbanization. I will review a broad scope of life skills and then focus exclusively on the six key life skills (key life skills) selected for this study.

Definition of Life Skills

To answer Research Question 1 (What kind of life skills have the migrant women learned informally in the city?), first, I need to clarify the definition of life skills. The term life skills was brought up and has been mostly used by large international organizations and small NGOs because these organizations highly strengthen non-formal education programs for vulnerable children and adolescents all over the world. The conceptual basis for life skills is provided by the World Health Organization’s (WHO, 1997; 2001), listed as follows:

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. In
particular, life skills are a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner. (WHO, 2001, p. 8)

WHO (1997) has highlighted 10 key life skills as important for the promotion of the health and well-being of children and adolescents. The 10 key life skills are decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions, coping with stress (WHO, 1997, p. 2). The detailed content of six key life skills selected for this study was also presented in chapter 1, key terms section.

The above definition and contents of key life skills serve as the conceptual basis for life skills study done by United Nations, its partners, other NGOs, and individual scholars. Different organizations and scholars may use a variety of terms which are highly similar to the above definition and content (UNICEF, 2012; Room to Read, 2011; FHI 360, 2007, AED, 2009; Mangrulkar et al., 2001). It is important to note that the conception of life skills draws on “research in the social sciences, psychology and the new sociology of childhood” (UNICEF, 2012, p. 7).

Mangrulkar et al (2001) excluded the following skills as life skills: technical/vocational skills (carpentry, sewing, computer programming), skills for helping a young person to get a job, such as interviewing skills, or skills for managing money,
such as balancing a checkbook or opening a bank account. In the meeting of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Life Skills in EFA hosted by UNESCO in 2004, scholars had also reached consensus that manual skills (i.e. first aid, using a condom, etc…) should not be considered life skills (UNESCO, 2004). This dissertation takes the life skills definition given by WHO (2001). I posit that the psychosocial skills addressed by WHO instead of other practical skills are core concepts of life skills and central elements of human development.

Regarding the ten key life skills highlighted by WHO (1997), I agree with WHO that these skills are interrelated, for example, creative and critical thinking are incorporated into decision making and problem solving, and coping with emotions and stress requires self-awareness and empathy. Instead of differentiating all these terms and researching all of the 10 life skills in details, I limit the scope of this research and only focus on six key life skills: decision making, problem solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, coping with emotions, coping with stress. Detailed research on creative thinking, critical thinking, self-awareness, and empathy may make this research a psychological study, which is not the goal of this dissertation. The detailed content of the six key life skills presented at the end of chapter 1 in key terms section are be used as theoretic framework to guide the data analysis related to Research Question 1, what key life skills have migrant women learned from urban life and work?
Key Life Skills of Chinese Migrants

In this section, I reviewed empirical findings in literature about what key life skills the Chinese migrants have applied in their urban lives and work. Most studies did not separate migrant women with migrant men or distinguish migrant women between 18 and 29 years old with others at different age level, thus in the following section, migrants refer to both male and female migrants with different age ranges unless I point out the demographic information of the participants in some studies.

Decision making and problem solving skills. It is reported that economic gains and other contributing factors such as the pursuit of cosmopolitanism, urban experience, modernity, and gaining new knowledge has motivated rural Chinese women to migrate (Chang 2009; Jacka 2006; Chiang, Hannum & Kao, 2015). After getting into the city, migrants rely heavily on kinship and hometown social networks to guide them through new places and into specific occupations (Wen & Hanley, 2015; Li, 2006). They are not floating blindly but tend to move to places they are more familiar with and where they find it easier to make a living (Li, 2006). Migrants choose to live in the dormitories provided by the employers or rent cheap apartments in inner city villages. Li’s (2006) research in Tianjing city revealed that after settling down, migrants still relied heavily on friends and relatives when they wanted to switch jobs, while paying little attention to the formal recruitment in the. Help from their kinship and hometown social network included both moral and material support, such as basic goods and temporary
accommodation, which came at minimum cost, and with little stigma and was particularly important for recent migrants (Wen & Hanley, 2015).

**Communication and interpersonal skills.** Regarding the migrants’ interpersonal skills in developing the social network by migrants, it was found that they did not want to spend money on socializing, nor did they have much time or energy for it because they were exhausted after work (Li, 2006; Fan, 2004). They maintained close contact with their family and extended family back in their villages. Other scholars found that migrants had strong bonding with urban relatives, or “laoxiang” (fellows from the same village, town, city or even province) in the city, but had very loose bonding with their urban neighbors or non-kin local urban residents (Wen & Hanley, 2015; Yue, Li, Jin & Feldman, 2013). Kinship-based networks are found to be the central and strongest networks that help the migrants greatly when they encounter crises or financial difficulties. Neighbors in the urban village are just passing acquaintances for them.

Yue et al. (2013) stated that migrant-resident social networks contributed much more to acculturation and psychological integration for the Chinese migrants. However, non-kin migrant-resident ties (ties between migrants and local urban residents) are very limited, and it is only positively correlated with male migrants, higher education, longer time spent in urban society and the occupations of self-employed and non-manual labor. Yue et al. elucidated that the institutional barriers such as **hukou** system confined migrants to the secondary labor market and had no direct and strict effects on acculturation and psychological integration.
Social networks also give clues as to where informal learning can take place, in other words, the sources of life skills learning, which will be reviewed further in the section on Research Question 2.

**Emotional and stress-coping skills.** Wang, Li, Stanton, & Fang (2010) and Lin et al (2011) found that the rural-to-urban migrants in Beijing had perceived social stigma and discriminatory experiences, which negatively influenced their psychological well-being and quality of life. Mao and Zhao (2012) also reported that migrant adolescents who studied in secondary schools in Shanghai had lower self-esteem and higher levels of depression than their native peers.

Mou, Griffiths, Fong, & Dawes’ (2013) research which reviewed all related literature on health of migrants and their family in mainland China from 2000 to 2012 also gave us a clearer picture. As Mou et al reviewed, the most common psychological problems experienced by migrants were major depression, depressive symptoms and insomnia. The factors that caused the psychological problems were “economic pressure, work load, family separation, expectation reality discrepancy and discrimination and difficulty in acculturation in their daily lives” (p. 25).

Little research has been conducted to explore how migrants cope with their emotion and stress. However, socializing with “laoxiang” (fellows from the same rural areas) allows migrants to discuss common experiences, express mutual affections, understand and trust (Wen & Hanley, 2015). Besides, migrants maintain close contact with their family and extended family back in their villages (Li, 2006). These two ways
possibly help migrants to cope with emotions and stress. Exploring their life after work may also help to find out their ways of coping with emotions and stress. But Li (2006) reported reading newspapers and second-hand books were popular activities among her participating migrants in Tianjing, who also occasionally met friends outside work, wandering in the street and chatting with friends. These reports guide me to ask the interview question “what do you do after work or during leisure time?” in order to understand the ways my participants cope with their emotions and stress.

There are also contradictory findings on the psychological well-being of migrants. Li et al (2007) did empirical research among low-income working individuals in a rich eastern coastal province. They reported that after adjustment for age, gender, marital status and income, there was no significant difference between the psychological well-being of migrants and urban non-migrants. However, Jiang, Zhang, & Wang (2007) and Qiu et al (2011) reported that the mental health level of migrant workers in Western China (Chongqing and Chengdu) was significantly worse than that of the Chinese norm. The contradictory findings from above scholars may be caused by different research samples. It raises the necessity to explore what kind of, if any, emotional and psychological stress the participants in this research have encountered, and how they cope with emotions and stress.

**Gender Vulnerabilities and Risks**

In the last two decades, Life skills programs have risen to the top of program priorities of international agencies such as WHO and UNICEF as well as numerous other
NGOs. In order to produce a meaningful effect on development or behavior, these programs teach the adolescents to practice and apply learned life skills to protect themselves against vulnerabilities and risks in daily life, such as reproductive health risk (SRH), sexual transmitted diseases (STDs) infection, violence against women, alcohol and drug abuse and so on (UNICEF, 2012; FHI 360, 2007; Ochieng, Katz, & Stockton, 2010). In the following, I reviewed the literature on vulnerabilities and risks faced by Chinese migrant women.

An increasing number of scholars believe that rural-urban migrants in China face sexual risks. Li et al (2004) and May (2011) found that migrants had higher level of sexual risk than the non-migrants did. A number of factors led to the increasing risk: “having multiple sex partners, knowing or being uncertain about whether their sexual partners also had sex with other people, knowing how to use a condom but rarely use it, and getting engaged in commercial sexual activities” (Li et al, 2004, p. 542). Zheng et al (2001) also stated that 21.4% of unmarried rural-to-urban female migrant workers in a sample of 146 migrant women reported sexual experiences, but condoms were not frequently used. Feng et al (2005) discovered that migrant females in Shanghai had limited knowledge of STDs (sexual transmitted deceases), which increased their sexual risk.

induced abortion as a solution to unprotected sex; few of them used contraception. Some chose to return to their home in the countryside to deliver babies, because they did not have medical insurance, neither could they afford medical care in the city. It increased the reproductive health risk greatly.

From previous data collected in a long-term study with Chinese migrant women, and as a cultural insider, I know that this topic is particularly difficult for young Chinese women especially from the villages. Thus, I reframed interview questions more sensitively than the NGO types of surveys.

**Summary**

Research Question 1 asks what key life skills migrant women have learned from urban life and work and how they apply these life skills. The literature review on the definition of life skills has guided me to focus on six key life skills (decision making, problem solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, coping with emotions, coping with stress), and the literature review on key life skills of Chinese migrant women has given me a general idea of what key life skills they may have learned in the city.

Based on the review, I conclude that migrants have informally learned and applied the six key life skills to a certain extent in the urban context. They decide to stay in the city instead of countryside due to higher urban income and colorful city life. They make the decisions of new migration places and jobs depending on their kinship or hometown social networks and tend to move to places that are familiar to them and easier
to make a living. The major problems they encounter and need to solve are finding jobs and residential places and making a living in the city, which are associated with decisions they have made above. They maintain close contact with family, and apply communication and interpersonal skills to build supportive network with urban relatives and fellow villagers but not non-kinship urban residents or neighbors in urban villages. There are contradictory findings in literature about psychological problems migrants may have. Some scholars found that migrants had depressive symptoms due to discrimination against their rural background in the city, heavy workload and far distance from family, while other scholars reported no difference on the psychological well-being of migrants and urban non-migrants. The emotion and stress coping strategies adopted by migrants are socializing with friends, contacting family, and doing relaxing activities such as reading newspapers and second-hand books.

Besides, Chinese migrant women also encountered some of the common vulnerabilities and risks that NGO life skills education programs targeted such as sexual risks and reproductive related health risks. Other vulnerabilities and risks may emerge in this study while interviewing the participants because vulnerabilities and risks are highly related to the context. Though the vulnerabilities and risks faced by migrant women are well studied by scholars, little research has been done on how migrant women apply life skills to deal with these vulnerabilities and risks. Thus, related literature could not be found.
The above literature review guided my research and gave me a hint on the possible result I may get from my participants. In my empirical research, I am aware that I may generate findings that are beyond what is written in the literature.

**Informal Learning of Life Skills**

In the following section, relevant literature on Research Question 2 (From migrants’ perspective, what are the informal learning sources for life skills?) is reviewed. I provide a brief definition of informal learning, and an overview of possible informal learning sources for life skills learning.

**Definition of Informal Learning**

This study takes the definition of informal learning by Livingstone (2001). He defined informal learning as “any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria” (p. 4). It includes any kind of learning taking place outside the pre-established curricula of educative institutions, which indicates informal learning can take place in educative institutions as long as it is not within pre-established curricula. The feature of informal learning is that the individuals and groups who are engaged in the learning determine the basic terms of informal learning (e.g. objectives, content, means and processes of acquisition, duration, evaluation of outcomes, applications) (Livingstone, 2001).

Livingstone (2001) divided informal learning into two types: Self-directed/collective informal learning; and informal education/training. The former one is
undertaken on our own while the latter one gets some form of institutionally recognized instructor involved. For example, informal education/training happens when mentors or instructors instruct the learners without continuous reference to an intentionally organized body of knowledge in more spontaneous learning situations such as job-seeking skills instruction or community events planning instruction. And self-directed or collective informal learning includes all other forms of intentional or tacit learning in which people participate individually or with groups without presence of instructors/mentors or organized curriculum.

Schugurensky (2000) developed taxonomy of informal learning based on two main categories (intentionality and consciousness), which generated three types of informal learning: self-directed learning, incidental learning and socialization. Schugurensky (2000) clarified,

Self-directed learning refers to 'learning projects' undertaken by individuals (alone or as part of a group) without the assistance of an 'educator' (teacher, instructor, facilitator), but it can include the presence of a 'resource person' who does not regard herself or himself as an educator. It is both intentional and conscious.

Incidental learning refers to learning experiences that occur when the learner did not have any previous intention of learning something out of that experience, but after the experience, she or he becomes aware that some learning has taken place. Thus, it is unintentional but conscious. Socialization (also referred to as tacit learning) refers to the internalization of values, attitudes, behaviors, skills, etc.
that occur during everyday life. Not only we have no a priori intention of acquiring them, but we are not aware that we learned something. (Schugurensky, 2000, pp. 3-4)

I raise some criticism for both Schugurensky and Livingstone’s interpretations. In Schugurensky’s typology, he did not include “informal training/education” (terms used by Livingstone), thus, the theory was incomplete. Livingstone’s typology was too broad and general without a clear distinction of intentionality and consciousness as does Schugurensky’ typology.

Therefore, combining Livingstone and Schugurensky’s theory, I divide “informal learning” into three categories: intentional self-directed/collective informal learning (type 1, Schugurensky’s self-directed learning), incidental or tacit informal learning (type 2, Schugurensky’s incidental learning and socialization) and informal education/training (type 3, Livingstone’s informal education/training). The migrant women may have joined in some informal education/training on key life skills. Thus, I included informal education/training in my typology.

This above typology guided me to inquire further about the sources of informal learning of life skills by the migrant women. The sources of intentional self-directed/collective informal learning for them may be books, online resources, or resource persons whom the women take action to reference for specific knowledge or skills learning. The sources of incidental or tacit informal learning may be events, activities that the participants joined without any previous intention of learning
something out of that experience. After the experience, the learner may be or may not be conscious of the learning outcome. The sources of informal education/training may be informal learning programs instructed by institutionally recognized instructors or mentors without continuous reference to an intentionally organized body of knowledge. My informal learning typology only functions as a framework to facilitate the investigation into the sources of informal learning. This study pays more attention to investigate the informal learning sources instead of categorizing the learning into the above informal learning types.

**Informal Learning Sources**

Schugurensky (2000) theorized that informal learning could happen in any place, for example, the workplace, the family, a religious institution, the community and the like. There are numerous possible sources to facilitate key life skills learning, such as books, newspapers, TV, the Internet, museums, schools, universities, friends, relatives, their own experience, etc.

Empirical studies on informal learning of life skills are very limited. This is one of the major contributions of my study. I review what I found. McLeana and Vermeylena (2014) researched 134 readers of self-help books relating to health, relationships and careers, most of the participants were Canadians. These books served as informal learning sources of life skills, as they provided “guidance in areas such as health and well-being, interpersonal relationships and career or financial success.” (p. 126). McLeana and Vermeylena (2014) stated that 53% of the research participants had
read a self-help book in direct response to a transition that was taking place in their lives. Seeberg and Luo’s (2012) research on the Chinese migrant women also reported that the women conducted informal learning through buying “books on how to develop sales skills” which may be relevant to developing communication and interpersonal skills (p. 365). A research network on New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL) conducted the first national survey in Canada targeting adults’ informal learning practices (Livingstone, 2001). They found quite a proportion of respondents indicated participating in the informal learning of key life skills and health, well-being, and social developmental tasks from work environment, community volunteer work activities or others.

Learning from friends, relatives, Laoxiang, and colleagues is another kind of informal learning source. Seeberg and Luo (2012) found the Chinese migrant women in Shannxi province got skill training information from colleagues, which facilitated their decision making of joining occupational skill training programs. Wen and Hanley's (2015) and Li’s (2006) and study showed that kinship or hometown social networks were great informal learning sources for migrants to develop life skills.

Combining the above theoretical and empirical studies, this study explores the following possible sources for informal learning: self-help books, religious books or other books; community, work-related activities or other activities; colleagues, bosses, friends, family, intimate partners, mentors or instructors in any informal/nonformal learning
environment; the Internet, smartphones, TV, radio; life experience and miscellaneous
unnamed sources.

Informal learning sources are opportunities for migrants to develop their life skill
capabilities (Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 1999). They are also social/political/economic
conditions that support the development of internal capabilities and realization of
combined capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011). Investigation of the informal learning sources
may contribute to the comprehension of how migrants develop their life skill capabilities.

**Capability Approach and Empowerment**

The third research question is what are the possible empowering properties of life
skills learning and its impacts on migrant women as they perceive them to be? To answer
this question, first, the term “empowerment” is defined below. Then the theoretical
framework underlying this analytical question and related empirical studies of capability
approach in education is discussed. This dissertation study does not intend to provide an
exhaustive overview of all the definitions of empowerment or research on the capability
approach. I have confined myself to defining and analyzing the process of empowerment
using capability approach within China’s context.

**Definition of Empowerment**

Stromquist (1995) pioneered a definition of empowerment from a holistic
perspective. She contends that the emancipatory meaning of empowerment is about
personal agency instead of dependence on intermediaries. It “links action to needs and
…results in making significant collective change” (p. 13). The word *empowerment* was originated in the American civil rights movement in the 1960s and was applied by the women’s movement in the mid-1970s. It “brings women into the political sphere, both private and public” (p. 13). Within this context, Stromquist (1995) defines empowerment as “a process to change the distribution of power, both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society.” (p. 13). Stromquist elaborates that empowerment has many facets which go beyond “formal political participation” and “consciousness raising”. Therefore, fuller definition of empowerment includes cognitive, psychological, political, and economic components (p. 14).

Capability approach scholars Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2011) look at empowerment through the actual capabilities and functionings individuals have gained. Sen uses empowerment interchangeably with well-being and agency, while Nussbaum refers to empowerment as a stage of agency achievement in a case of fully realized rights, entitlements or capabilities (Robeyns, 2005). This dissertation study looks at empowerment from the lens of capability approach and agrees that the empowerment process is the process in which individuals gain combined capabilities and exercise functionings. In other words, what individuals are able to be and to do reflect how much they are empowered? In the following, definition and related theories of capability approach are analyzed in detail in order to provide a better understanding of the process of empowerment and its connection with informal learning of life skills.
**Capability Approach**

The capability approach is mainly developed by Sen and Nussbaum and complemented by countless scholars in interdisciplinary fields. It is a normative framework for the evaluation of “individual well-being and social arrangements, the design of policies, and proposals about social change in society” (Robeyns, 2006, p. 78). Instead of explaining poverty, inequality or well-being directly, capability approach “provides a tool and framework within which to conceptualize and evaluate this phenomenon” (Robeyns, 2005, p. 94). To achieve the evaluative purpose, first, it concentrates on the information that we need to make judgments about individual well-being, social policies… second, it “identifies social constraints that influence and restrict both well-being and evaluative exercises” (Robeyns, 2005, p. 96). The key information capability approach scholars focus on is what individuals are effectively able to do and to be and what real opportunities are available to them (Sen, 1999, Nussbaum, 2000). As Robeyns (2005) rephrased, “the ends of well-being, justice and development should be conceptualized in terms of people’s capabilities to function (opportunities to undertake the actions and activities, be whom they want to be)” (p. 95). Once individuals have the freedom to live the kind of life that they have a reason to value, they are empowered. Therefore, empowerment is the “process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (Sen, 1999, p. 3).

Compared with the traditional way of evaluating individual’s income or property, exploring the real freedoms that people enjoy and value reflects a more comprehensive
view of development. Thus, this study employs capability approach as the theoretical framework. In the following, I explain the key terms in this theory in order to provide a thorough elaboration of capability approach.

**Capability/capabilities.** Sen (1999) defines capability as the combination of functionings that are feasible to achieve, thus capability itself is the *substantial freedom* that assists in gaining functioning combinations. Capabilities can be evaluated in the following dimensions: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security. These freedoms are linked with and can strengthen one another. The way to gain these substantial freedoms is to remove major sources of unfreedom such as poverty, tyranny, systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities and so on (Sen, 1999).

Nussbaum (2011) illustrates capabilities as not just “abilities residing inside a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social, and economic environment” (p. 20). Different from Sen who uses the term *substantial freedom*, Nussbaum (2011) refers to *combined capabilities* which refer to the combination of internal capabilities together with external provisions that effectively enable the person to exercise the capability. To achieve combined capabilities, there need be the social/political/economic conditions which support “the development of internal capabilities—through education, resources to enhance physical and emotional health, support for family care and love, a system of education, and much more” (p. 21).
This study mainly uses the plural form “capabilities” to encompass life skills learning and its application because of its widespread use in the literature by Sen’s commentators and other capability approach scholars.

**Functioning.** Nussbaum (2011) defines functioning as “an active realization of one or more capabilities” (p. 25). Sen also calls the “beings and doings” that people want to and actually get engaged in “functionings”. For example, enjoying good health and performing relationships is a functioning. “Working, resting, being literate…being respected” are also functionings (Robeyns, 2005, p. 95). Functionings are different from Capabilities in the sense that capabilities mean freedom to choose and enact, while functionings are beings and doings that are the realizations of capabilities. In other words, capabilities are freedoms or valuable options from which one can choose, while functionings are achievements (Robeyns, 2005). Capabilities are significant because combined with agency and opportunity may lead to functionings. Once people have the freedoms or valuable opportunities to enact (capabilities), they can choose the kind of lives they value most.

**Well-being and agency.** Sen has put well-being into two categories, personal well-being related to one’s own life and social-relational well-being related to others (Robeyns, 2005). He defines agency in terms of the agent. An agent is “someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well” (Sen, 1999, p. 19).
The above elaboration of key terms deepened the understanding of capability approach. These key terms are also helpful to comprehend the analytical framework of this study, Seeberg’s (2011) Capabilities and Empowerment Framework, which is elaborated below.

**Capabilities and Empowerment Framework**

A number of scholars have used capability approach and contributed to the theory, however, less has been done in the arena of education, and only a few studies have provided an analysis of the connection between functionings, empowerment and education. To address the gap, Seeberg (2011) built the Capabilities and Empowerment Framework based on Sen (1999); Kabeer (1999); Nussbaum (2000); and Unterhalter’s (2007) studies relating to empowerment and education. It serves as an analytical tool to capture the capabilities gained and valued by village girls and young women as they relate to school and education.

The Capabilities and Empowerment Framework contributed a rich description of girls’ subjective experience and identified constitutive and instrumental capabilities of empowerment. It described Sen’s dimensions of freedom in terms of topics and themes reflecting several authors’ and Sen’s explorations of notions of empowerment in education. The framework has been applied in several empirical studies on at least two cultures and demonstrated its analytical strength (Seeberg 2011, 2014, 2015; Seeberg & Luo, 2012; Khan, 2013).
The Capabilities and Empowerment Framework fits this study because it is based on theoretical studies on capability approach and has been supported by empirical studies in education field. It helps bring out the voices of the women: what kind of capabilities and functionings they have obtained due to life skills learning. This analysis is expected to lead to an understanding of the relationship between life skills learning and young migrant women’s empowerment.

Seeberg (2011) elaborated the constituent terms as follows,

(1) Well-being in relation to education is an intrinsic capability, such as affective and cognitive self-expression and reflection, which may include economic and political considerations. (2) Agency freedom is described by functionings of decision making, and again is an intrinsic capability that has cognitive, psychological, economic and political aspects and expression (Stromquist, 1993). (3) Achievement of valued functionings or outcomes…is composed of: (a) instrumental outcomes, a political state of being or condition –for example, standing in the family in regard to the distribution of resources; (b) a mixed intrinsic-instrumental topic, a subjective orientation or positionality such as a daughter taking on a son’s traditional role in the family; and (c) an instrumental outcome within an external structure, such as achievement and attainment in school. (pp. 46-7)

In a further developed publication, Seeberg and Luo (2012) explained more regarding how they operationalized freedoms and capabilities into specific functionings.
To operationalize the intrinsic capabilities of the first dimension of freedom, well-being, Seeberg adopted as functionings enjoyment and playfulness proposed by Nussbaum (2000, 2011) which Seeberg (2007) found to be effective in a previous study of the same population. Control of cognitive and psychological functionings is explained by Stromquist (1993) as “understanding of their conditions” and “feelings that women can act” (p. 14) as components of educational empowerment. To operationalize the intrinsic capabilities of the second dimension of freedom, agency, Seeberg drew on the work of Sen, Kabeer, Unterhalter, and Appadurai. Kabeer (1999), examining agency from a feminist perspective, focuses on the collective arena of the family and evaluates for decision making with negotiation power. Unterhalter (2007) offers the functioning self-expression (p. 106). From Appadurai (2004), Seeberg adopts the functioning capacity to aspire. (Seeberg & Luo, 2012, p. 350)

The Capabilities and Empowerment Framework is shown in Figure 1 below.
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<tr>
<th>Empowerment Dimensions</th>
<th>Descriptive Topics</th>
<th>Themes, Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedoms (Sen)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I Wellbeing</td>
<td>Affective and cognitive self-expression (Unterhalter) and reflection, Intrinsic Cognitive, psychological (Stromquist, 1995), economic, and political aspects.</td>
<td>Enjoyment of learning; playfulness Confidence; self-respect Can develop insight, patience Can reason things out Curious about the larger world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Agency Freedom</td>
<td>Decision Making(Underhalter) or Choosing a Functioning (Sen), as an expression of freedom (Sen), Capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004) Intrinsic Cognitive, psychological, economic, and political (Stromquist, 1995)</td>
<td>Making choices about education in difficult circumstances Speak up for self Making strategic life choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III Achievement of capabilities or aspirations that they have reason to value</td>
<td>(a) Political State/condition (Seeberg, Stromquist, ’93) Instrumental; Structures (Narayan-Parker 2005)</td>
<td>Participation in the distribution of resources in the Family, constraints &amp; supports for schooling; Community, constraints &amp; supports for schooling;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Subjective orientation/positionality, (Seeberg, Stromquist, 1995) Intrinsic-Instrumental Relational (Kabeer, 1999)</td>
<td>Ability to imagine social change for self &amp; others (Unterhalter). Take on re-gendered identity, role model; raised level of social consciousness: Object to male dominance/preference, Family role pressures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Objective State/condition Instrumental</td>
<td>Attainment, achievement, Valued awards; Late marriage; Desirable work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1. Capabilities and Empowerment Framework (Seeberg, 2011)*

*Note.* Capability to aspire was not included in the original Capabilities and Empowerment Framework of Seeberg’s (2011) publication, however, Seeberg and Luo
(2012) further developed the framework and added capabilities to aspire. Thus, this study included it in the framework.

Looking at life skills capabilities through the framework, I find life skills are correlated with capabilities/freedoms. To be specific, life skills can be categorized into Sen's dimensions of freedom. The details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*A View of Life Skill through the Lens of Capability Approach*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of freedoms/capabilities (Sen)</th>
<th>Life skills capabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Well-being</td>
<td>Coping with emotions, cope with stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency freedom</td>
<td>Decision making, problem solving, communication, interpersonal skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement of a valued lifestyle</td>
<td>Other functionings that may emerge from this study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Capabilities and Empowerment Framework provides a unique angle to view life skills as capabilities. Thus to answer Research Question 3, what are the empowering properties and impact of life skills learning, is to reorganize and analyze the findings of Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 using the framework, and enrich the framework with empirical findings of this study. The answers to Research Question 3 may contribute to the development of capability approach theory.
Summary

Capability approach pays attention to the conditions within economic, social, political, familial context while asserting the centrality of persons in the development process. Thus, migrant women’s empowerment should be evaluated in terms of the freedoms/capabilities they value or the choices/functionings they have exercised. It highlights education as an important capability that expands the development of other capabilities. As a normative framework for the evaluation of “individual well-being and social arrangements” (Robeyns, 2006, p. 78), the capability approach fits this study well by providing a framework to explain the migrant women’s well-being and empowerment as they live in the city and experience informal learning and application of life skills.

The vulnerabilities and risks are unfreedoms in Sen’s term that constrain women from being powerful agents. Applying life skills to protect against vulnerabilities and risks is to remove unfreedoms and gain substantial freedoms, thus get empowered. This dissertation will reveal what migrants are able to be (their status of health and well-being) and to do (life skills application). In situations of vulnerabilities and risks there may also be opportunities for gaining more life skills. These opportunities are often ignored by NGOs because they concentrate mainly on risks and problems. Opportunities are highly strengthened in capability approach because valuable opportunities have great influence on what an agent able to do or to be (Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 1999). Using Nussbaum’s (2011) terms, opportunities could be positive social/political/economic conditions that support the development of capabilities. Therefore, in this research, both urban risks and
opportunities are investigated to provide a holistic perspective on what real capabilities migrants have.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I provide a methodological map and illustrate the process that was used to conduct this study, including the methods taken during data collection and data analysis of my study and rich description of research setting and participants. This chapter identifies how my role as a researcher and how my cultural background helps me understand the research topic, design, participants' experiences, and interview questions. Consideration of trustworthiness for this research is also elaborated at the end of this chapter.

Research Design

For my study, I employ a basic interpretive qualitative research approach. It can be defined as an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world, because it allows qualitative researchers to study things in their natural settings, “attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). As Merriam (2002) explained, an interpretive qualitative research focuses on “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 38). It is appropriate for me to apply this kind of design because my research specifically digs into the structure and explanation of migrants’ informal learning experience. To understand the meaning of their life skills learning experience is my main interest. However, this meaning is not discovered but constructed by them as they live and work in the cities. A
basic interpretive qualitative design allows me to ask questions such as how complex and indivisible realities are socially constructed by individuals as they interact with their world and how the constructions and interpretations of reality change over time (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 2009). Besides, it enables me to use interviews and observations to investigate and give thick interpretation of the participants’ experiences that are constructed in their daily life as they interact with their colleagues, bosses, friends and other people.

Ethical issues related to the protection of the participants are of concern in qualitative study. Merriam (2009) argues that “the protection of subjects from harm, the right to privacy, the notion of informed consent, and the issue of deception” all need to be considered ahead of time and be resolved once they arise in the field (p. 230). In the informed consent form, I clearly explained the purpose of the study, procedures, and the use of the data so that the participants were informed of the details before agreeing to participate. The participants’ rights to stop participating in the research at any time were also discussed. Only pseudonyms were used in the research so their identity were not discovered. I maintained privacy and confidentiality of all participants and stored the research data in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies. In order to protect the participants from any harm in the research, sensitive issues were given careful consideration. For example, when I asked the participants about their economic condition, or emotional-coping and stress-coping experience, I explained that it was for research and not to pass judgment.
Setting

The contexts for this study are three cities, Qingshan Qu, Xi’an and Wuhan. Qingshan Qu and Xi’an are in Shaanxi province, Western China, and Wuhan is in Hubei province, Central China. Eighteen migrant women working in these cities were chosen. Xi’an and Wuhan are both provincial capital cities, and Qingshan Qu is a Prefecture-level city. According to 2010 national population census, Xi’an and Wuhan have over 5 million urban population, while Qingshan Qu has over 2 million urban population (China Population Census Office, 2012). These three cities attract hundreds and thousands of migrants from peripheral villages or suburbs to work in the service sectors or industrial factories. The young migrant female workers in these cities were chosen.

The Shaanxi participants were from one village, Anjinggou, located up the hill of a big mountain in western Shaanxi province. It was a Catholic community; all of the villagers were catholic. The village was three hours away from Qingshan Qu and another 2 hours away from the capital city Xi’an. The Hubei participants were from different villages in Hubei that were about 1-3 hours away from the capital city Wuhan.

Sampling

This study applied purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), which is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learn” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77).

3 This is pseudonym for a prefecture-level city in Shaanxi province. Pseudonym is used to protect participants’ information.
Patton (2002) states that “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (p. 230). To begin purposeful sampling, I have first determined the selection criteria that are essential in choosing my participants (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). The criteria are that, first, migrant women who were born and grew up in the rural villages and have rural hukou, but are working or looking for jobs in the city at research time. Second, their ages are between 18 and 29.

Among various types of purposeful sampling, this study adopted different sampling methods in different research sites. In city Xi'an and Qingshan Qu of Shaanxi province, convenience sampling was utilized. I selected a group of migrant women who were the scholarship recipients sponsored by Nongcun scholarship foundation\(^4\). They had heard of me as the foundation coordinator, some of them had participated in a long-term research project that I get involved for years. Since contacts have been kept with them and rapport has been established, they were invited to participate in this research. Thirteen of them finally agreed to participate. In city Wuhan of Hubei province, I adopted snowball sampling. I first identified two migrant women who meet the criteria in my social circle and invited them to join in the research. Then I asked them to refer more participants in their work place or social circle. By asking a number of people to introduce more participants to me, the snowball gets bigger and bigger as I accumulate new information-rich cases, which is consistent with Patton’s (2002) instruction.

\(^4\) This is pseudonym for a foundation in order to protect participants’ information.
Using a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling, the research strived to the maximum variation in social, economic, geographic, educational and other background factors. This rule is followed when the study seeks to find central themes that are shared by a variety of participants (Hatch, 2002).

As Merriam (2009) pointed out, the number of participants and research sites for qualitative research depends on the questions being asked, the data being gathered, the analysis in progress, and the resources one has to support the study (p. 80). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested sampling until a point of saturation or redundancy is reached. “In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational consideration. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202). In this study, I interviewed 18 migrant women. The number of participants provided rich information that reached a point of saturation, thus no new participants were interviewed.

**Participants**

The participants were Chinese rural to urban migrant women: age between 18 and 29. They are referred as Xiangcun Sisters (XS) in this study. Xiangcun is Chinese for countryside. There were 18 participants, 13 were from Shaanxi province and five were from Hubei province. At research time, seven Shaanxi XS were working or looking for jobs in city Xi’an, and six others were working in Qingshan Qu. The five Hubei XS were
working in the city of Wuhan. I have created an abbreviated portrait of the participants, shown in Table 2.

**Educational level.** Their educational background ranged from middle school education to college education. Eight dropped out from middle school, 3 graduated from middle school, 3 dropped out from vocational high school, 3 graduated from vocational high school, and 1 graduated from college.

**Work.** All of the Shaanxi XS except 3 vocational high school or college graduates were working or looking for jobs in service industry such as restaurants, supermarkets, stores or other places. Three vocational high school and college graduates were doing professional jobs in companies or schools. All the Hubei XS used to work in clothing industry, 4 of them worked in one clothing factory at research time and another one switched for a clerical position in a mechanic. The term of employment in cities for the participants ranged from one month to 15 years.

**Intra-provincial migration or inter-provincial migration.** Three Shaanxi XS and three Hubei XS had migrated to coastal cities to work as assembly line workers. The Shaanxi XS had shorter work length in coastal cities, ranging from a few months to 2 years, compared to over 5 years work length for the Hubei XS. They all returned to work in their home province within last 3 years. All other XS only worked in cities within their home province.

**Marriage and children.** Seven of them were married, four of whom had children, while other XS were not married or had any children.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Work Length</th>
<th>Current Location</th>
<th>Current/Last Position</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pang Jin¹</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>C³ graduate</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Xi'an</td>
<td>Teaching assistant</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pang Junjun</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>VH⁴ graduate</td>
<td>2.5 years or less</td>
<td>Xi'an</td>
<td>Projecting budgeting engineer</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pang Xuxu</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>VH graduate</td>
<td>2.5 years or less</td>
<td>Xi'an</td>
<td>Program coordinator</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pang Mingming</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>VH graduate</td>
<td>1 year or less</td>
<td>Qingshan Qu</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pang Linsha</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>M² Dropout</td>
<td>5.5 years or less</td>
<td>Xi'an</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pang Shishi</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>M Dropout</td>
<td>5.5 years or less</td>
<td>Qingshan Qu</td>
<td>Waitress</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liu Xinxin</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M graduate</td>
<td>2 years or less</td>
<td>Qingshan Qu</td>
<td>Waitress</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pang Ranran</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>VH dropout</td>
<td>5.5 years or less</td>
<td>Qingshan Qu</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pang Ranting</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>VH dropout</td>
<td>2 years or less</td>
<td>Qingshan Qu</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pang Ranfei</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M graduate</td>
<td>6 months or less</td>
<td>Qingshan Qu</td>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dang Mei</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M graduate</td>
<td>1 year or less</td>
<td>Xi'an</td>
<td>Community Security</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luo Mengmeng</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M dropout</td>
<td>5 months or less</td>
<td>Xi'an</td>
<td>stocker</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
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<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duan Ranqing</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>VH dropout</td>
<td>a few days</td>
<td>Xi'an</td>
<td>waitress</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lu Yiyi</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>M dropout</td>
<td>14 years or less</td>
<td>Wuhan</td>
<td>Assembly Line worker</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lu Xiaxia</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>M dropout</td>
<td>12 years or less</td>
<td>Wuhan</td>
<td>Assembly Line worker</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhu Ning</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M dropout</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Wuhan</td>
<td>Assembly Line worker</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Qianqian</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M dropout</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Wuhan</td>
<td>Assembly Line worker</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lin Xiaowei</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>M dropout</td>
<td>11 years or less</td>
<td>Wuhan</td>
<td>Mechanic shop clerk</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

1. Although based on Chan (2010) and NBSC’s (2015) definition of migrant worker, Pang Jin cannot be counted as a migrant worker since she is a college graduate, doing professional job, and having her hukou transferred to Xi’an temporarily during her study in a 3-year college in Xi’an. However, I included her as my participants because she was from the same village and had same rural background as other Shaanxi participants. In addition, she had rural hukou upon research time. Including her in my sample added to the diversity of my participants.

2. Last position was only listed when the participants were unemployed at research time.

3. C: College

4. VH: Vocational High School

5. M: Middle School

**Researcher Roles and Bracketing**

Glesne (1992) argues that it is necessary for a researcher to define his or her research roles clearly. Though researcher roles are depending on the context, situations, participants and the researchers’ personality and values, Glesne believes there are
predispositions that all qualitative researchers should carry with them into research situations. First, the researcher’s role functions as a researcher, which requires the consciousness of one’s behavior and its impact when interacting with the participants in research sites. Second, the research role is the researcher as a learner, which leads the researcher to reflect on all aspects of research procedures and findings. A researcher is like a curious student who comes to learn from and with research participants instead of coming as an expert or authority (Glesne 1992, p. 36). For novice researchers, Glesne suggests to begin with a nonadvocacy, non-prescriptive role and develop a relationship with participants marked by reciprocity, trust, mutual respect, and learning but not by advocacy and action. All these theories serve as guide for me as a novice researcher to conduct this study.

I am conscious of my behavior and its possible impact to the participants. I also bracket my presuppositions, experience, and act as a learner who tries to focus on the participants’ experiences. I share some similar experiences with the participants. I was born and grew up in the rural area in China. The difference is that I migrated to the city for college education at the late teen’s age while most of my participants migrate to the city to work. Neither do I have working experience in the city. My life skills learning experience may be different from theirs because colleges and work environment are different contexts. Awareness of the similarity and difference between my participants and me help me to develop good relationship with my participants. I am able to establish the rapport with the participants. On the other hand, I strive to remember my differences
from their experiences and not project any assumptions on to them. Thus, I have established a reciprocal, trusting, and respectful relationship with my participants without advocacy interference.

Prior to interview or observation, the researcher usually “explores his or her own experiences, in part to examine dimensions of the experience and in part to become aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions” (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). This process is called bracketing, also called *epoche*, a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment. Glesne (1992) points out the importance of bracketing in field observation by stating that even though the researcher was once “there”, he or she cannot safely assume knowing what the people are like in the research site. Instead, assume that one has to learn about the particular site and its people. Thus, the function of bracketing is to set aside prejudices and assumptions before data collection so that the researcher can focus on information got from the participants. Bracketing is a process from phenomenological research but has become a common practice for most qualitative researchers. In this study, I have examined my own biases and assumptions about my informal learning of life skills in the city before embarking on this research.

**Data Collection and Procedure**

The study was conducted in the summer of 2015. Two potential participants whom I had established the rapport with before was approached by me in Wuhan City. I introduced my research purpose to them and let them know their participation to the research was beneficial to me and to themselves through their self-reflection. After they
agreed to be my participants, I asked them to recommend their friends or colleagues to me as potential participants. One of them was working in a clothing factory and introduced to me her sister and two of her colleagues. They agreed to be my participants too. Regarding the potential participants in Shaanxi Province who were recipients of Nongcun Scholarship, I had maintained occasional contact with them over the course of several years in a long-term Project using cell phone or social media, thus I had already developed some rapport as well (Seeberg & Luo, 2012). I approached them again with the help of a local field agent Mr. Pan through social media. Mr. Pan assisted managing the Nongcun Scholarship Foundation before and kept contact with me over several years. Besides, he was originally from the same village as the girls did and was working in city Xi'an at research time. He knew this group of girls very well and kept close contact with them. He helped me recruit participants from this group of girls in Xi'an and Qingshan Qu. I explained my research to them and invited their participation. Then Mr. Pan helped me to arrange the interview time and place with them considering their convenience. For all the participants in the three research sites, after they accepted the invitation to join in the research, they were requested an oral consent before the research that included the purpose, process of the study, voluntary participation and confidentiality.

Observation of participants was conducted by the researcher before and during the interview process. For the Hubei participants in the clothing factory, the researcher had chance to stay in their dorm for two nights, and stayed in their work place for 1.5 days
while they were working. Thus the researcher had chance to observe their living and work places and one day of their regular lives. For the Shaanxi participants, one of them and the field agent served as the local guides for the researcher for one week. The researcher had chance to observe their behaviors, and ask them questions informally in many situations. In addition, the researcher visited homes in inner city villages in Xi'an, which were living communities for migrant workers, and some restaurants and shops which were possible working places for migrants. The researcher conducted observations about these places and kept observation notes.

During the interview, the participants were asked about their experiences pertaining to life skills learning and practice, and questions regarding their well-being, such as how satisfied they were about their lives and jobs (see Interview Questions in the Appendix 1). These questions were asked in order to answer the research questions. Interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese by the researcher.

**Interview**

According to Merriam (2002), there are three major sources of data for a basic interpretive qualitative research study—interviews, observations, and documents. This research applied the first two strategies because each had different advantages and helped yield rich data. Interview was the primary method with support from observations. Interview is significant to the understanding of participants’ experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences (Merriam, 2002). Semi-structured interview were utilized for the participants in hope of getting the most information from participants. It
is more appropriate to conduct semi-structured interview rather than highly structured interview for this study, as the latter simply “get reactions to the investigator’s preconceived notions of the world” (Merriam, 2002, p. 74). Therefore, neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions was determined ahead of time. Only a list of questions or issues were used to guide the interview (see Interview Questions in the Appendix 1).

During the interview, one important strategy I used continuously was silence, which opened up space between questions for interviewees to formulate responses (Seeberg & Luo, 2012; Merriam, 2002). It is necessary because participants need time to recall about their informal learning experiences. At least one interview was conducted per participant, which lasted 45 to 60 minutes. After the initial interviews, due to availability and convenience, I asked some of the participants some follow-up questions to clarify their answers. For example, one Shaanxi XS, Pang Xuxu, served as my local guide during my research trip in Xi’an and Qingshan Qu, so I had chance to contact her more frequently and asked follow-up questions regarding her experiences as well as contextual information. I also stayed in the clothing factory and the dorm with four Hubei XS for almost two days and asked follow-up questions several times. In Shaanxi province, the places for interview were in hotel rooms that were near the places where participants lived or worked. The places were quiet and comfortable for the participants to share personal stories. In Hubei provinces, the places for interview were private rooms, the clothing factory, and the dorm in the factory.
In most cases, the interviews were audio taped with a record of the day, time, and location of the interview. A few interviews in the clothing factory were not recorded, but notes were taken and organized during and right after the interview. Both the recordings and transcripts were kept in a secure location and only the researcher had access to the data. Information regarding the participants’ name and identity was kept confidential within the limits of the law. Research participants were not being identified in this dissertation study; any publication or presentation of research results; only aggregate data was used.

Observation and Field Notes

Besides interview, observation was conducted in the places where the interviews were undertaken. Since I had chance to visit the clothing factory workers' work place and dorms, I conducted observations about those places. I also visited homes, restaurants and stores in inner city villages in city Xi'an and Qingshan Qu. These places gave me a basic idea of the living and work environment of the Shaanxi participants. “Observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account obtained in an interview” (Merriam, 2002, p. 13). This is very useful to collect data because the researcher can directly see the living and working environment for the participants and how the environment may affect the participants’ life skills learning and practice.

When beginning the role as a participant observer, the researcher should try to observe everything that is happening, such as the setting, the participants, events, acts and
people’s gestures (Glesne, 1992). The following questions were kept in mind on what I shall observe: how does the setting smell and sound? In what ways does a setting change from place to place throughout the research site? How do they talk to each other? How do they show their anger, dissatisfaction, interests or happiness? Glesne cited Glaser and Strauss by suggesting focusing on behavior in a group rather than on individuals for most qualitative studies. The reasons are “this will assist you in abstracting to similarities and differences across individuals and events” (Glesne, 1992, p. 45).

When beginning the role as a participant observer, Glesne (1992) suggested making notes and jotting down thoughts without narrow, specific regard for the research problem (p. 44). This guidance was followed when I conducted the observation. The notes were expanded later, during the same evening, which prevented wrong information due to the loss of memory. The researcher wrote down all reflective thoughts and ideas about the interview and observation, and developed the notes into a journal. The journal gives the space for reflectivity by “develop[ing] self-awareness – that is, examining what I know and how I know it” (Schram, 2006, p. 9).

Since I have been associated with a long term China Project on rural Chinese girls and young women over the past five years, I have been involved with observational research on the Shaanxi participants. Such research served as background to the current research observations. I am familiar with the Shaanxi participants’ home village and its social arrangements as well as many of their life stories. Though the same background is not available for the Hubei participants, I am a native of that region. My personal history
in a village a few hours outside of Wuhan as well as my four years’ residence in Wuhan did provide me an emic understanding of the conditions of the Wuhan participants’ lives.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis was conducted using at least three procedural strategies. As is common with qualitative interpretive studies, these steps are best understood as a recursive process that continues throughout the collection, presentation and analysis of the data.

**Preliminary Analysis**

According to Merriam (2002), “in qualitative research, data analysis is simultaneous with data collection. That is, one begins analyzing data with the first interview, the first observation, the first document accessed in the study” (Merriam, 2002, p. 14). The reason is that “simultaneous data collection and analysis allows the researcher to make adjustments along the way, even to the point of redirecting data collection, and to ‘test’ emerging concepts, themes, and categories against subsequent data” (Merriam, 2002, p. 14). It may lead to “tentative hypotheses [which] direct the next phase of data collection, which in turn leads to the refinement or reformulation of questions, and so on” (Merriam, 2009, p. 165). It is inappropriate to wait until all data are collected because by that time the researcher may face hundreds of pages of transcripts or field notes without a clue where to begin. Ongoing data analysis makes the data collection more focused and avoids too much repetition or overwhelming materials.
“Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating” (Merriam, 2009, p. 171).

How does the data analysis process go? Merriam suggested to start with the first interview transcript or field note from first observation, review the purpose of the study, read and reread the data, make notes and comments on the data, write a separate memo capturing the reflections, tentative themes, hunches, ideas and things to pursue derived from the first set of data. “The process of making notations next to bits of data that strike you as potentially relevant for answering your research questions is called coding” (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). I had taken notes while listening to the participants or doing observations on nonverbal cues. I reviewed the interview notes at the end of each research day and added things I wanted to ask, observe, or look for in the next data collection. Along the way I compared and contrasted notes on interviews and observations in the field note book, which had informed the next data collected. This process conformed to the methods suggested by Merriam (2009) but was adjusted to the shorter time for data collection. Merriam (2009) claimed that, when the data collection process ended, the researcher had already had a set of tentative categories or themes that were answers to the research questions. The researcher at this point started organizing and refining instead of beginning data analysis. Similarly, I had preliminary analysis resulting from my reflections on the interviews and field notes, which guided me for deep analysis.
Deep Analysis

After finishing all the interviews and the early stages of analysis, all interviews were transcribed from sound file into written English and were coded. Glesne (1992) posited, “Coding is a progressive progress of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data that are applicable to our research purpose. By putting like-minded pieces together into data clumps, we create an organizational framework” (p. 133). I coded the data using strategies suggested by Glesne: major code clumps were first developed, and then the contents of each major code clump were broken down into numerous sub codes. Finally, various data clumps were placed in a meaningful sequence that contributes to the dissertation.

The large code clumps included but were not restricted to the key terms of capability approach as used in the Seeberg’s Capabilities and Empowerment Framework and key life skills. Unexpected themes emerged from preliminary analysis. For example, though the literature on life skills revealed many vulnerabilities and risks, certain location-dependent social constraints and vulnerabilities also became apparent as emergent themes.

Writing memos, developing analytic files, applying rudimentary coding schemes, and writing accompanying reports are also suggested by Glesne (1992) to assist data analysis. I wrote memos to develop new thoughts and perspectives and record thoughts. The analytical process included at least four steps. First, I organized data by generic categories such as interview questions, people, and places because it assisted in keeping
track of useful information and thoughts. Second, as the data and my analytical experience increased, I sorted and subdivided the data into the analytic coding scheme (tree nodes in NVIVO) suggested by the analytic framework and emergent themes. Third, I reassigned the codes and subdivided and as they related to the research questions. Fourth, I created relevant specific files on several process categories such as subjectivity, titles, thoughts for introductory and concluding chapters, and quotations from the literature.

Using Data Analysis Software

NVIVO qualitative research software was used to analyze the data. I imported all the interview transcripts, observation field notes, and memo into NVIVO. Nodes, which were categories or themes, were developed in NVIVO as I read and coded the data. There were two types of nodes in NVIVO, free notes and tree notes. Free nodes are independent notes, while tree nodes demonstrate hierarchy relationships among nodes. I mainly created tree nodes because the theoretical framework in this study revealed hierarchy relationships. As more and more nodes were created, I revised the category system when necessary and recoded certain segments from time to time until finally satisfied with it.

Trustworthiness

Like other qualitative research, trustworthiness is a big issue that needs to be addressed in detail. Merriam (2009) argues that “rigor in a qualitative research derives from the researcher’s presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and
participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description” (Merriam, 2009, p. 166). One well-known strategy to shore up the internal validity of a study is triangulation. Merriam (2009) cited Denzin’s best-known discussion of triangulation: the use of multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple theories to confirm emerging findings (p. 215). The first three forms are more common than the use of multiple theories in qualitative research because most qualitative researches do not begin with several hypotheses in mind but build theories in the research itself. This study mainly applied the use of multiple methods and multiple sources of data. A variety of data collection methods-- interviews, observations, and field study were used to collect the main data. Multiple sources of data were explored. I compared data collected through observations at different times and in different places, and crosschecked interview data collected from people with different perspectives and from follow-up interviews with the same people, which were suggested by (Merriam, 2009).

Merriam also put forward other strategies to ensure internal validity such as adequate engagement in data collection, purposefully exploration of variation in the understanding of the phenomenon, researcher’s reflexivity and member checking. All these strategies were given full consideration while undertaking the research.

To evaluate the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested four criteria “credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability”. Credibility addresses the questions about correct representations of
participants’ thoughts, feelings and views, time spent and relationships with the participants, and member checking for feedback of completeness and the study’s conclusions and recommendations. So in this research, some of the participants were asked in follow-up to review some critical issues emerged in the field notes, journals, or preliminary analysis and to give feedback on whether the writings represent their true thoughts/ideas or not. A professor who had numerous years of research experiences was asked to do peer-review informally in the deep data analysis stage. Their reviews on the completeness, conclusion and recommendation of the study contributed a lot on ensuring the credibility of the research.

The second criteria dependability refers to the data collecting, interpreting and analysis process. “There can be no credibility without dependability, a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p 316). The researcher kept the following questions in mind: can the research be repeated? If somebody else does the research again, will the result be the same? It is a hard question to answer. Peer reviewer was asked to evaluate the process of data collection, interpretation and coding process for the research and see if it kept internal consistency with the findings and recommendations. The feedback helped to make any remedies, such as re-interpreting the data or coding the data.

The third criteria transferability relates to the generalizability of the data to other groups. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, “The researcher cannot specify transferability of findings, but can provide sufficient information that the reader determines can apply to
new contexts or other populations.” (p. 205). In this study, the researcher gave rich
descriptions and details about the context and participants, the result should be applicable
to other similar contexts. While analyzing the data, focus was given on the
commonalities within and across the participants’ experiences to make the result more
transferable. Finally, the last criteria confirmability relates to Lincoln and Guba (1985)’s
concept of action and collaboration. I always tried to be objective and make sure the
findings emerge from the data instead of researcher’s predisposition. When doing
observation or field study, I reminded myself not to interrupt and not to stimulate
changes. While doing the interview, I also talked less, listened more, avoided leading
questions, and inspired the participants to express themselves freely. In this case, more
reliable data was collected.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

This chapter examines the lived experiences of all participants in this study. The overview focuses on the participants' life skills learning and application in the urban context, the informal learning sources, and possible empowering properties and impact as they perceive them to be. I used a basic interpretive approach for data analysis and present the findings to all three research questions in this chapter.

There is a tendency to treat migrant women as a homogeneous group in the literature; however, migrant women may have different experiences of the practice of life skills depending on their geographic location, occupation, educational level, religion and other factors (Gabriel, 2004). In this chapter, I make clear clarification when any of the factors appear as a differentiating factor.

Life Skills of Migrant Women

Research Question 1 asked: What kind of life skills have the migrant women learned informally in the city?

a. What kind of challenges and risks do young migrant women face in the city and how do they apply life skills to cope with these?

I use the definition of life skills given by WHO to scrutinize the participants' voices and analyze the data. The capability approach also guides me to focus on the beings and doings that migrant women enacted within specific context. WHO (1999) has labeled the six key life skills into three categories. I intended to present the findings of life skills by
categories. However, since decision making and problem solving skills include extensive findings, I report them separately below. The other two categories, communication/interpersonal skills, and emotional, stress-coping skills are reported together.

As I analyzed the data, I found that challenges and risks were inseparable from the learning and application of life skills, because challenges and risks were the contextual factors and stimulators that urged migrant women to learn and apply life skills. Therefore, in the following, I present the findings on challenges and risks together with the learning and application of the key life skills.

It is important to clarify that the key life skills migrant women informally learned in the city were enhanced life skills related to the context of migration and urbanization. Before migrating to the city, they developed certain life skills in the rural context when they made decisions, solved problems, communicated with people, built social network, coped with emotions and stress. However, after coming to the city, due to a change of context, they developed and expanded life skills in a variety of new scenarios including constraints and opportunities. Education and cognitive development also contribute to the learning of new key life skills.

**Decision Making Skill**

Decision making skill as defined by the World Health Organization (1997) is the skill that “helps us to deal constructively with decisions about our lives” (p. 1). The following are the findings about migrant women's decision making regarding choosing
migrating destinations, satisfactory jobs, further learning and entrepreneurship. The decisions migrant women made reflected their cognitive thinking process, the beliefs and norms they valued most and their aspirations.

**Choose migration destinations.** Almost all the Xiangcun Sisters (XS, referred to the participants in this study) decided to stay in a city instead of going back to the village. Nine out of the 13 Shaanxi XS had made the decision to stay in capital city Xi'an, or Qingshan Qu for the long term, the other 4 expressed no preference of cities, and all the 5 Hubei XS decided to stay in capital city Wuhan in the long run. The reasons included “there are more job opportunities in the cities”, “I could start my small business in the city”, “I like the colorful city life”, “It is so convenient to live in cities, and there are a lot of public transportation and all kinds of stores near us”. Going back means farming, very limited non-agricultural opportunities and inconvenient transportation, which constrained their choices. The consideration of advantages and disadvantages of different decisions, their aspirations and preference was reflected in their decision making.

Over half of the XS aspired to go to big cities in other provinces and went or would go only if “there were good opportunities”. Their aspirations to “explore the outside world” were the motive. Nine out of the 18 XS had such opportunities to visit or work in cities in other provinces and went through with their decisions. Among these 9 XS, had migrated to coastal cities for work because of job opportunities introduced by family, friends or schools and another 3 took a couple of pilgrimage trips to Shanghai, Hangzhou, Hongkong and Macao, organized by their church. The availability of job or
traveling opportunities facilitated the decision making of inter-provincial migration. When making such decisions, they gave careful deliberation to personal connections and available opportunities due to safety and economic concerns. Pang Xuxu said, “Though I would like to go to other provinces and challenge myself, I dare not go just by myself because I am not sure whether I can survive there.” Pang Ranran mentioned, “My mom does not allow me to go to other cities by myself now, not even Xi'an, because she worried about my safety.”

All the 6 XS who had worked in coastal cities in other provinces for 1 to 10 years made the decision to return to home provinces for different reasons. Those who worked less than 2 years in the coastal areas returned because of the termination of their jobs. But others who worked over 5 years in coastal areas returned because of marriage, family and economic concerns. Lin Xiaowei and Pang Shishi returned for marriage. Lin Xiaowei shared,

In the year 2004, I left the clothing factories after working there for 6 years, and I could not find other jobs. Therefore, I decided to find a husband because I was 24. I texted my aunt in Wuhan and asked her to introduce some men to me.

Lu Yiyi and Lu Xiaxia returned for their children and for financial concern. Lu Yiyi shared,

I worked in Hangzhou for 6 years. I liked the environment, the wage was good too, but I never planned to buy a house there because it was so far from home and the housing was so expensive. Since my kids stayed in my hometown, I returned
to work in Wuhan last year. Now I plan to buy a house in Wuhan, because it is closer to home and more affordable.

Lu Yiyi’s children were left in her home village and raised by her parents during those years when she worked in coastal provinces. Finally, she decided to move closer to her children and aspired to settle down in the city.

To sum, when making decisions about migration destinations, the XS considered their aspirations, the benefit and the cost associated with different decisions, and the needs of their family. They decided to stay in cities due to a larger income and the urban life they favored; they made careful decisions when considering migrating to far away coastal cities. The availability of good opportunities and resources facilitated such decision making. Having worked in distanced coastal cities for a certain period, all the XS returned to big cities within home province for the sake of marriage, children, and family plans of setting down.

Choose satisfactory jobs. Since economic reason was the primary motive for migration decisions, the XS aspired to get satisfactory jobs with good pay. To fulfill the aspiration, they had to make job decisions frequently in the city, weighing which job was more desirable. These cognitive thinking processes build up their decision making skills. The following are the findings about how they made job-related decisions. Since the Shaanxi and Hubei participants had different occupation path and made different decisions, which are illustrated separately below.
The Shaanxi XS of different education levels had different job opportunities available for them and thus made different decisions on what jobs to take. Among the 4 XS with vocational high school education and above, 3 found professional jobs related to their major and chose to stay in the field, 2 were teachers, and another 1 was a construction project accountant. This decision was made due to the benefit associated with professional jobs: higher income, better benefits such as more holidays and free housing, more stability and career advancement. However, when professional job opportunity was not accessible for them, they had to take nonprofessional ones. This happened to one of the vocational high school graduate who failed to get professional jobs due to insufficient professional skills in her field (computer science). She found only a cashier position in a supermarket and took the job. All other Shaanxi XS who did not complete high school had only low-skill, low-pay jobs available for them in manufacture or service sectors (factories, restaurants, stores, supermarkets). Some XS preferred to work in restaurants because they enjoyed free housing and comparatively higher wage despite long daily work hours (10-12 hours daily), others chose to work in beauty salons because “it sounded more interesting job” despite low wage. Most of these Shaanxi XS switched jobs every six months or every year, in hope of finding satisfactory jobs but with little success.

The Hubei XS had different occupational routes. All of them were factory workers in the clothing industry and 4 out of 5 decided to stay in this industry because of the relatively high earnings for experienced factory workers. They received about 5000
RMB monthly, which was twice more than the earnings of the Shaanxi XS. Not all of them were happy about their jobs because they had extremely long works hours (around 90 hours weekly). However, considering the high pay in this industry with low-pay job opportunities in other industry, they endured the unfavorable part of their jobs and chose to stay in this industry. All the Hubei XS had worked in clothing factories for 6 to 15 years. Lu Yiyi said, “If I switch to work in other industry, for example, electronic companies, I would have to learn new skills from scratch and endure low pay for years. I did not want to do that.” Li Qianqian also shared,

I have always dreamed about changing occupations but have not taken action because I earn more money in this job. I am 24 now, too late to learn any skills. If I switch to another occupation, the money I can earn is very little. I do not want to do that. In the future after I get married and have kids, I will have to stay in clothing industry too because I need money to raise the family.

To sum, based on different education level and job choices, the XS could be divided into three types. Type one were those with vocational high school education or above and with solid professional skills. They were able to find professional jobs and chose to stay in those job fields due to the economic benefits and career advancement opportunities. Type two was those with less than vocational high school education or without solid occupational skills. They tended to navigate through low-skill, low-pay jobs in manufactory or service sectors in the hope of finding a comparatively desirable job. Type three was factory workers in textile industry. Most of them decided to stay in
the industry because of the high pay associated with long work hours. For all the XS, their decision making process mostly involved consideration of job availabilities, the pay and benefit of the job, and the degree to which they liked the job. Career advancement opportunities were taken into consideration by XS in type one, yet were not applicable for XS in type two and three because of the nature of their jobs.

**Choose further learning and entrepreneurship.** Stuck in low-skill, low-pay jobs, four of the Shaanxi XS with low education level aspired to learn some occupational skills. Pang Ranran said, “I want to get a tourist guide certificate and be a tourist guide. A tourist guide goes everywhere. I do not like to stay in one place… My friend said a tourist guide got good pay.” However, there are constraints. She continued,

However, even though I have set a goal, I do not know how to fulfill the goal. I used to ask myself what I really want to do, even though I found it, I did not know what to do with it. As time goes, I just pick the job I can get and start working.

Years ago before Pang Ranran aspired to be a tourist guide; she dropped out from a vocational high school because of the low education quality. So did another XS Duan Duan Ranqing, who shared, “my major is computer technology. I feel I couldn’t learn anything useful there, so I quit.” Pang Mingming graduated from a different vocational high school studying the same major, said, “I did not learn solid foundation of computer science, it was hard to find a professional job after graduation… Later I became a cashier in a supermarket.”
Duan Duan Ranqing shared, “I planned to learn other occupational skills before I get married. But after I get married, I couldn't do that because my husband and parents-in-law don’t have much money.”

Pang Ranran, Duan Ranqing and Pang Mingming chose to go for vocational high schools yet could not learn solid occupational skills due to low education quality. Pang Xuxu and Pang Junjun Luckily chose the right program; Pang Xuxu learned early childhood education in the same vocational school near Qingshan Qu as Pang Mingming did and found professional teaching position after graduation; Pang Junjun studied civil engineer project budgeting in a vocational school in Xi'an and was able to do professional jobs after graduation. Based on contextual information revealed by the field work assistant Mr. Pan and some XS, there were a large variety of vocational high schools and non-formal occupational skill training programs targeting migrant women in Qingshan Qu and Xi'an, however, the education quality varied; the XS lacked knowledge regarding the education quality and found it hard to choose suitable and effective vocational programs. Besides, most of these programs were very costly and not affordable for the migrant women.

Cosmetician skill training in beauty salons was the major informal occupational training opportunity known by most Shaanxi XS and attracted three XS. Pang Ranfei said,

I like hair styling. Therefore, when I saw one beauty salon advertised for hair-styling instruction, I went to talk to them. Later I paid the salon 1200 RMB to
learn hair styling from them. I have to be in the salon from 8:30 am to 10 pm, sometimes 11 pm. I can only learn through observation... Meanwhile, I need to do the cleaning and everything the boss asks me to do. I am not paid. I have been here for 5 months and learned to do hair styling and nail polishing... I need to work on cosmetic skills more. My plan is to stay there for another six months and then apply for jobs in other stores where they have shorter work hours.

Luo Mengmeng and Pang Shishi planned to have such kind of apprenticeship too.

Pang Shishi also shared,

    I want to be a cosmetician because it seems to be light and fun work. A professional cosmetician earns a lot during peak season... I talked to the owner of beauty store and my boss in a restaurant to negotiate a work and study schedule. ... I want to work half day in the restaurant and another half-day as a cosmetician apprentice in the beauty salon.

However, would cosmetician skill training in local beauty salons lead to a promising and bright future as Pang Shishi said “light, fun work with good pay”? The answer was questionable. Another XS Pang Linsha shared,

    I worked in beauty salon for 6 months. At the beginning, I felt good, but later I was not satisfied with the earnings. I got paid about 800 RMB per month, which was not enough to support myself. I learned from my colleagues that we could only earn more money by opening a small beauty salon/store. However, at least we need 100,000RMB to start one, which is too much for me...So I quit the job.
Over half of the Shaanxi XS with low education attainment realized that good occupational skill training was a possible way out for a better future, thus they aspired to and some were very determined to learn certain occupational skill. However, despite the availability of a great many vocational high schools and non-formal/informal occupational training programs in Xi'an and Qingshan Qu, there was a lack of suitable, high-quality and affordable occupational skill training programs accessible for the Shaanxi XS, their aspirations of learning solid occupational skills couldn't be fulfilled. Their freedom was constrained.

Two Shaanxi XS who were vocational high school graduates had better options. Since they had high school education diploma, they had the option and chose to advance their occupational skills through formal adult education programs in the college. Pang Junjun shared, “I decided to sign up for the adult education program because I need a higher degree to get promoted in my job.” Pang Xuxu also shared, “I want to learn some skills very much. If I don’t learn, I cannot survive [in the city].” Later when she was told she could sign up for adult education program in a college, she did because “in the kindergarten, all the teachers have associate degree (dazhuan diploma) expect four of us (interns). I want to advance my education and get an associate degree.”

They informally learned the information of adult education programs from schools, realized the importance of an advanced degree for their profession, and thus made the decisions of registering for such programs.
None of the Hubei XS aspired to learn new occupational skills because they were skilled clothing factories workers who had stayed in the industry for 6 to 10 years and settled with their profession.

Besides aspiration and decisions of learning occupational skills, some of the Shaanxi XS with low education level and Hubei XS aspired to start small business. Li Qianqian said, “I want to do some small business such as selling food or clothes because these businesses can earn big money. However, I don’t have start-up money.” Zhu Ning also shared,

In the future, I plan to open my own clothes factory. I already know what equipment is needed and what things are needed to concern in order to open a clothes factory. Recently, one of my friends asked me and another friend to take over one factory with her. Each of us needs to invest 100,000 RMB. I am considering about this. I really want to start the business with them, but I do not have enough money. I have to borrow a significant amount for the investment.

Another XS, Lu Yiyi mentioned,

I want to open a small clothing factory but I do not think I can fulfill this dream in a near future. I have to move forward step by step, and wait for good opportunities. To open a new factory, I need to have lots of customers and orders, money to buy the facilities such as sewing machine and ironing machine, and rent a place. ... I want to wait for the right time, for example, when I connect with an important customer, maybe by then I can open a factory.
The three Hubei XS articulated entrepreneurial ambitions; however, due to a lack of capital and business management concerns, they could not fulfill entrepreneurial aspirations.

Two of Shaanxi XS had implemented the decisions of starting entrepreneurship. Pang Linsha learned to run online retail business from one friend and started her own online business. She shared,

The money earned from my online business was a few hundred RMB monthly, which was just pocket money. However, I know many people are doing great in online business and earn thousands of dollars; I want to focus more on my business and hope it can increase my income.

Pang Ranting and her husband also opened a food stand in Qingshan Qu. They investigated several food stores in the city, finding that one store sold delicious pancake and attracted many customers. They approached the boss and explained their willingness of paying him to learn the recipe of the pancake. Later they learned the recipe and opened their pancake food stand.

However, despite big aspirations, Pang Linsha and Pang Ranting did not make large profit from their small business. They talked about their strategies and challenges to improve their business. Pang Linsha said,

I learned to do weishang (online sale platform business) mostly by myself, and whenever I have problems, I ask my friend who is doing the same business… I
need to do more advertisement, send more promotion pictures on social media… I really want to boost up my business, but I do not know what else I can do.

Pang Ranting also shared, “I want to make our business better. Now we do not have large sales, we want to sell more in the future.” She did not mention any plans or strategies to increase the sales. Lacking business management skills, their ability to improve their business was constrained.

To sum, the XS with different education level and profession made different decisions on further learning and entrepreneurship. The XS with vocational high school education and professional jobs tended to improve their occupational skills through formal adult education. Moreover, the Shaanxi XS with less than high school education decided to learn some new occupational skills through non-formal or informal training. Some Shaanxi and Hubei XS aspired to and a few did start small business in order to increase their income.

**Problem Solving Skill**

Problem solving skill, defined by the World Health Organization (1997), is the skill that “enables us to deal constructively with problems in our lives” (p. 2). Due to the difference between rural and urban contexts, I assume that the XS may encounter a variety of new problems in work and life and need to apply problem solving skill. The following are about problems and problem solving strategies applied by the XS, which emerged from the interviews.
**Obtain and adapt to jobs.** During the initial migration, most of the XS who came to the city for work had real or potential job offers arranged by their social network (family, relatives, friends, former classmates, fellow villagers). “My relative found the job in hot pot restaurant for me.” (Liu Xinxin). “My sister found me a job in a supermarket.” (Luo Mengmeng). A few looked for jobs alone by inquiring positions in different shops or restaurants. Pang Ranran shared, “I paid attention to the hiring posters outside the restaurants, stores or directly asked the shop or restaurant owners for those positions”. Most of them did not mention having any problems to find their first jobs.

However, the XS doing low-skill, low-pay jobs in Shaanxi switched jobs frequently. “I have changed 5 jobs in the last 5 years… I lose my passion on one job quickly. After I quit, I did not ever want to go back to the same jobs because I tried them.” (Pang Ranran).

Pang Linsha shared,

I mostly worked in supermarket as a cashier. Then I left because I felt there was no promising future. I switched to work in beauty salon for 6 months. At the beginning, I felt good, but later I was not satisfied with the earnings.

Their stories revealed their aspiration of having a job they were passionate about, a job with promising future and satisfactory pay.

The XS in textile industry in Hubei, though choosing to stay in the industry, also changed clothing factories every 6 months or every year. Zhu Ning said, “I change clothing factory almost every year, trying to find a satisfactory working place.” The
reasons for switching factories included “the production line stopped in some small clothing factories”, “the pay was not good”, “the working hours was too long and there was no days off within a month”, or “the food or dorm was bad” (Zhu Ning, Lu Yiyi, Li Qianqian). They aspired to find a clothing factory with minimum problems mentioned above. Yet, they were aware of the dilemma that the factories that had persistent production orders and paid well were mostly factories that required them to work over 13 hours daily and no weekend break. The factory that provided good food and dorm usually charged them higher fee.

Finding a desirable job became a problem. Some of them expanded their hometown social network by making new friends with other migrants in the city and made good use of the social network in job searching. Zhu Ning shared, “I have worked in many factories and have lots of friends and colleagues. When I want to switch to another clothing factory, I contact my old colleagues and friends to see which factory is better.” Others looked for jobs online. Pang Linsha said, “I send out resume and find jobs online by myself.” The XS who stayed in the city longer had more connections and knew more ways of job searching, thus they were more able to find new jobs.

For the XS with vocational high school education and above, one of the biggest problems faced by them was to obtain professional jobs. Pang Mingming learned computer science in vocational high school but when she looked for professional job as a graphic designer, she found that she did not learn sufficient graphic designing skills and was not qualified for the job. She ended up being a cashier in a supermarket and was
satisfied that she finally got one job. Pang Junjun mentioned how she found a summer intern in an architectural firm through networking, “I made friends with elder women in the church and told her I was looking for internship in architecture firm. Later she introduced to me a position in her husband's company.” She received an internship position that later turned to be a full-time job from this company. To get a professional job after college graduation, Pang Jin shared, “I mainly looked for jobs through job-hunting websites. I went to job fairs in colleges a couple of times too, but there were so many college students applying, so I did not get the job.” Finally, she got a job from online job-seeking websites.

The problem solving skill that the XS applied in job searching consisted of identifying the problem, taking initiative and carrying out multiple plans to solve the problem.

New job adaptation became another big problem mainly confronted by the XS in professional jobs and in the textile industry during the initial stage. The Shaanxi XS doing professional jobs described big challenges below. Pang Xuxu (kindergarten teacher) mentioned,

It took me 1 year to be a professional kindergarten teacher and talk confidently in class. At the beginning, I knew nothing about how to teach or communicate with the kids. I felt wronged or unhappy frequently in work. After a few months, I was assigned to a middle class and asked to learn how to teach from an excellent teacher. I was so speechless while facing the kids. She taught me how to prepare
for and deliver the class. She insisted that I delivered the class by myself; she sat in the class and gave me guidance when necessary. Gradually I learned how to teach.

Pang Junjun (project budgeting engineer) also said,

I had a summer intern position in an architectural firm. The first day I began my work, they assigned an experienced person to teach me. But I wanted to give up because it was so hard. I hang in there for ...about 10 days. Gradually, I asked experienced female coworkers how to do the work. ...I told myself that I need to learn it, probe into it. So probably 10 days later, I adapted to the work.

The XS in clothing factories also shared that although they got 3-month training in sewing from tailoring training center before working in the industry, they got problems at work at the beginning because of limited sewing skills. Lu Yiyi said,

Before they hired me, they asked if I could make a whole piece of clothes. I lied and said yes, but actually, I did not know. I had to learn how to do it by myself in work... When I did not know how to do the work, I went to stand near the experienced workers and chatted with them. Meanwhile, I observed how they did the job and learned from them. Later one colleague noticed my plans and volunteered to teach me.

Other XS in clothing factories mentioned similar experiences.
Most of other XS doing low pay, low-skill jobs did not articulate major difficulties in job adaptation. It was mainly because of the nature of their jobs, which required limited skills. For example, Luo Mengmeng started her first job five months ago as a customer assistant in a supermarket. As she said, “picky customers just complain and bring me trouble. Sometimes, I apologize. Other times I need to find a solution. I know how to handle it by myself now.”

There were also two XS mentioning that they could not adjust to their first job. “I cannot work in Beijing because they speak too fast. I cannot understand their language. So I quit the waitressing job and came back home two weeks later.” (Pang Mingming).

Duan Ranqing shared,

My first job was in a restaurant. I worked for 2-3 days and then gave up. I had stayed in the village for a long time and had little contact with others. Suddenly I came to the city and had to face so many people in the work place, I cannot adjust to it.

Therefore, the ability to adapt to low-skill, low-pay jobs varied among the XS due to the nature of the jobs and individual differences.

The problem solving skill reflected in their job adaption included self-learning skills and the ability to ask for help. Perseverance and confidence was also found to contribute to the problem solving process. It seemed that those with higher education level and doing professional jobs faced greater challenges to adapt to their jobs and thus
applied higher-level problem solving skills. Individual factors and the nature of the job also made a difference.

**Cope with gender vulnerabilities.** Young migrant women in China and worldwide are often the most vulnerable groups due to their age, gender and isolation from family (WuDunn, Kristof, & Knopf, 2010; He et al, 2012; Guo, Pang, Zhang, & Zheng, 2015). In this study, the following types of risks emerged as strong themes from their voices: urban street risks, sex worker risks, and premarital pregnancy and abortion risks. They are illustrated in details flowingly.

**Urban street risks.** The XS encountered urban streets risks sometimes, mostly at night on the streets if they were alone and in other possible situations such as in taxi. Five of XS recounted that they had been verbally harassed or stalked by local ruffians [liu mang] particularly when they walked home at night; another one reported meeting a peculiar taxi driver in a taxi, and another 1 reported being stalked by a disturbing colleague several times. Pang Ranfei, worked in Qingshan Qu, described the situation, I get off work around 10 or 11pm and then walk home alone every night. Once when I passed Zhongcheng Road, some local ruffians stood there and yelled at me. I did not respond and walked away. Another time I took a small road because it’s closer, a man stopped me. Luckily, my friend was calling me on phone at that time. I picked up the phone and he walked away.

Most of the XS tried to prevent troubles by not going out alone at night, or not going to unfamiliar areas or empty streets. When they encountered ruffians, they would
not respond and simply ran away or called for help if needed. This strategy worked and stopped most ruffians from taking further actions. Pang Junjun was stalked by her colleague. She reported to the police several times until the stalker received serious warning and stopped the action. She constructively solved the problem and demonstrated strong problem solving skills.

The field research assistant Mr. Pan also mentioned, “China has comparatively safe urban environment. There are people walking on the streets at 11pm at inner city villages, so the girls are safe even if they walk home late.” He mainly talked about the general situation from a man's perspective. Some of the XS' voice revealed that urban street risks existed though they were not physically harmed. Being aware of the risks and coping strategies helped the XS to have better protection.

**Sex worker risks.** Sex work industry re-emerged in China after China's open-door policy in 1978, particularly with large-scale urbanization, despite the fact that prostitution is illegal in China (Yi et al, 2010). In the massive internal migration in China, disadvantages in economic sectors drive migrant women to get involved in sex work (Yi et al, 2010). There were some entertainment establishments such as massage parlors, hair salons, Karaoke clubs and small hotels which traded in sex illegally, located in urban villages where some XS lived and throughout the city, reported in Chinese news (Cunguan, 2014; Liu, 2007; Xu, 2011). Most of the XS had little awareness of this unless they were working in these places. Luckily, most of them had little chance to work in these places because they were protected by parents or relatives in the city who knew the
seedy business. However, one Shaanxi XS, Pang Linsha, desperately needed jobs and worked in a massage parlor as a cashier. She said,

Recently, they assigned me to be a receptionist...I quit...you know, it’s very “tricky” to be a receptionist in foot massage center, at first I do not know, then... I know that receptionists introduce “the service” to customers (prostitution service). It is not appropriate...as a Catholic. So I quit.

She encountered conflict and dilemma because she was a Catholic and should not deal with prostitution. She solved the dilemma by quitting the job. Therefore, despite little awareness of this risk, the kinship social network and religion of the Shaanxi XS served as protective factors and prohibited their involvement in prostitution. For the Hubei XS, their occupational skills and stable jobs in clothing factories prevented them from considering jobs in entertainment establishment and thus were less likely to get involved in prostitution.

Premarital pregnancy and abortion risks. Scholars reported that the Chinese migrant women were one of the most vulnerable groups concerning sexual and reproductive health and faced high risks of having unwanted pregnancy and abortion (He et al, 2012; Guo et al, 2015; Zeng, Zou, Song, & Ling, 2015). This study confirmed the findings in literature. Most XS mentioned that they lived by themselves or with friends in the city and only visited relatives or family during weekends or break. They were away from the prying eyes of the villagers and family. Premarital pregnancy
phenomenon had become “widespread phenomenon” among the XS’ friends and colleagues, mentioned by them.

This study found that the XS were lacking reproductive health-related knowledge, reflected in their response that over half of the XS had vague or wrong understanding of contraceptive methods, saying that they did not know it or thought “taking contraceptive pills or using condoms were bad for their health”. However, this study found that most of the Shaanxi XS had conservative attitudes towards premarital sex due to their religion, as Pang Ranran said, “I will not have premarital sex because it's not allowed by our Catholic religion”. Liu Xinxin said, “I am a Catholic, I am very conservative in this aspect.” Pang Ranting said, “I don’t think girls could have sex with different men.” Pang Xuxu, though less conservative, mentioned, “I am not sure if I will have sex before marriage...but I will not have sex with anybody but only with my boyfriend who I have dated for years and plan to marry to.” Besides, most of the Shaanxi XS disapproved abortion and suggested to get married and deliver the baby if premarital pregnancy occurred. Both Pang Ranting and Dang Mei said, “I don’t think premarital pregnancy is a solution, it kills one life.” Pang Ranran said, “If young woman gets pregnant before marriage, the woman and man should be responsible and deliver the baby. It’s not right to have abortion.”

Premarital pregnancy occurred to one Shaanxi XS, who got married and delivered the baby. Among the five Hubei XS who did not belief in any religion, three of them revealed more tolerant attitude towards premarital sexual behavior and abortion. Lu Yiyi, Li Qianqian and Lin Xiaowei reported living with their boyfriends before marriage and later broke up with
them. Lu Yiyi went through abortion once. Therefore, for the Shaanxi XS in my study, their Catholic religion seemed to have influence on them in this area of their lives, encouraging them to avoid premarital sex and abortion, and further decreasing sexual behavior risks. Yet, the protective role of religion was not applicable to the Hubei XS who did not believe in any religion.

**Cope with discrimination.** Coping with discrimination was a theme I expected to find among the XS because scholars reported that rural-to-urban migrants experienced discrimination against their rural background (Wang et al, 2010; Lin et al, 2011). Yet, in this study, discrimination experience was only reported by two Hubei XS, Lu Yiyi and Lu Xiaxia, and one Shaanxi XS, Pang Linsha. Pang Linsha said, “At the beginning when I moved to the city from the village, I was probably discriminated because I dressed poorly and out of date.” Lu Yiyi also shared, “My Cantonese colleagues from the local areas treated us coldly at the beginning because I was new and came from a different province.”

To deal with the discrimination, Pang Linsha started “dressing up” and disclosed her rural background to close friends only. “As I stayed longer in the city, I dressed up, and others cannot tell (I am from the village). So there is not much discrimination.” Lu Yiyi started making friends with colleagues who were also rural migrants and helped each other. When the local Cantonese picked on her by criticizing her work, she “did better work next time and gave them no chance to judge”. When they bullied her by
taking away her share of work and giving her harder tasks, she reported to the manager and fought for her rights. As Lu Yiyi said,

For any kinds of discrimination or exclusion, I bear it in the beginning because I was new and inexperienced. However, I remembered it in my heart and tried my best to learn and do better jobs. Later when I became experienced worker, I fought back if they tried to take advantage of me.

The problem solving skills the XS applied was disguising the rural background or fighting against discrimination and possible unjust treatment.

Most of the XS in this study did not report any discrimination experience in answer to a direct question. As Pang Junjun said, “I have never sensed the discrimination against my rural background. I work hard, and they always credit my achievement to hard work. They wouldn't look down upon me.” Diligent work ethic helped them to win the respect from boss and colleagues.

**Solve problems in life.** When asked whether and what kind of problems they encountered in urban life, most of the XS responded having no problems adapting to urban life. Pang Ranran said, “I had no problems to adapt to the city life since the beginning of migration. I was very curious and wanted to explore everywhere. I was not scared at all.” Digging deeper into the reasons, I found that the XS had strong family support, friends or siblings to migrate together, or hometown social network in the migration destination. These helped them to adapt to the city life. During initial migration, Lu Xiaxia, Lu Yiyi and Pang Mingming migrated to the coastal cities where
their elder sisters were working. Lin Xiaowei migrated with her father and later her sisters joined. Family members arranged housing, showed them around the city and found them jobs. Lu Yiyi shared, “I learned from my sisters and friends to buy clothes, and take buses to visit the city. My sister told me where to shop and how to bargain.” Pang Xuxu also shared,

I turned to family for financial help when needed, asked relatives for temporary housing in the transition of switching jobs, and hung out with old friends from my hometown and colleagues to get familiar with the city and city life.

Supportive social network in the city that included family, relatives and friends from the same village and colleagues provided the women with financial, residential, occupational help, which contributed to their urban life adjustment.

Some XS socialized with colleagues who were mostly rural migrants from different places and learned “new things” from them. For example, Lin Xiaowei shared,

I learned how to surf the Internet, use cellphones and QQ (online chatting software) from my colleagues. We hung out after work, such as dining out, going skating or watching TV in small stores, or going to the Internet cafe. We had lots of fun.

When exploring “colorful urban life” with new friends, they learned new ways of living which was part of the urban adaptation process.

Three XS, Lu Yiyi, Lu Xiaxia and Pang Mingming, mentioned they did not understand the dialects spoken by colleagues. However, Lu Yiyi, Lu Xiaxia shared they
communicated with their Cantonese-spoken colleagues with mandarin. Language was not found a big problem for most of them. Yet, language was a big challenge for Pang Mingming, and she finally quit the job.

When the XS talked about having no problem to adapt to urban life, they meant they had no problem to survive in the city at the basic level, such as finding residential places, getting familiar with the city, knowing the transportation system and entertaining places. Urban life adaptation at a deeper level, such as learning the difference in values, beliefs, and social behavior between rural migrants and urbanites, did not emerge in the interviews.

**Communication and Interpersonal Relationship Skill**

Defined by WHO (1997), communication skill is a skill that makes us able to “express ourselves, both verbally and non-verbally, in ways that are appropriate to our cultures and situations”, “express opinions and desires, but also needs and fears” and “ask for advice and help in a time of need” (p. 2). And interpersonal relationship skill is a skill that helps us to “relate in positive ways with the people we interact with”, “make and keep friendly relationships”, “keep good relations with family members”, and “end relationships constructively” (p. 2). I assume that the XS might develop their communication and interpersonal relationship skills as they communicated and interacted with a more diverse population with different background in the urban context.

Quite a few of the XS realized their weakness in communication as they interacted with people in the city, such as being “too shy”, “only feeling comfortable to
talk to people they know”, “too blunt”, “hurting others' feelings” or “not knowing how to communicate with customers from urban middle class”. Pang Linsha said, “I am good at chatting with friends casually, but in formal situation, I do not know what to talk.” Luo Mengmeng said, “I do not know how to talk to my colleagues. Sometimes if I say something wrong, they may get pissed... I am very blunt, so I may hurt people unintentionally.” Duan Ranqing shared similar concerns,

Every time I hang out with friends, they are so talkative but I am so quiet.

Sometimes my cousin asks me why I do not talk; I tell her that I do not know what to talk about. You know, sometimes if we say something wrong, we may piss somebody off... I do not know how to communicate or socialize with people...

Luo Mengmeng and Duan Ranqing were concerned that poor communication might negatively affect their interpersonal relationship and thus did not know how to communicate.

Pang Xuxu, who worked at an after-school talent training school, shared,

“Most students who continuously signed up for courses in the school were from urban middle class… not migrant families. Their parents were very insightful and smart ... like ‘old foxes in the society’ (means very cunning). When they talked to me, I was so stressed. I need to have good relationship with them and keep them as long-term customers. I was just 20, and they were in their 40s-50s. How could I handle this? It was very hard. We were in different level, besides, they
were well educated, insightful and opinionated. They talked about news, brands, luxuries which people from the lower class like me knew little about.”

In Pang Xuxu’s narration, she shared the difficulties and importance of communicating with urban middle class customers in work situation.

The XS’ problems of communication revealed that they lacked the ability to “express themselves in ways that were appropriate to the urban cultures and situations”. Thus, some of them were afraid to communicate. Poor communication skills negatively affected their interpersonal skills because they had difficulties to “relate in positive ways with the people they interact with” (WHO, 1997, p. 2). After realizing their weakness, most of them aspired to improve communication and interpersonal relationship skills. Three XS carried out learning plans. Duan Ranqing said, “I bought 3 books on communication skill from the bookstore last year...These books are helpful.” Pang Shishi also shared, “I read electronic books on my cellphone during free time. These books are about life, health, communication skills and relationship management. I haven’t come across any issues covered in those books, but I have other issues on interpersonal relationship.” In her case, books did not provide her solutions. Pang Xuxu also shared, In order to communicate with the customers who were urban middle class, I learned to follow fashion, read news, and watch international games. When I discussed these with them, we had something in common. And we had better relationship. .. My communication and interpersonal skills were improved greatly.
Most other XS did not mention taking actions to improve their communication skills. Luo Mengmeng shared, “I want to improve communication skills, but I do not know how.”

Different work environment made a difference in contributing to or hindering the XS from learning communication skills. Pang Shishi shared, “When I was working in the restaurant, I learned something from the boss, such as … how to talk to different people, and I did not know this before.” However, XS working in the clothing factories shared something different. Li Qianqian said, “I used to be a very talkative person. Now I am so quiet. I become so dumb due to the extremely long work hours daily. Most of my colleagues keep quiet and focused while working; only I chat with Zhu Ning occasionally.” Lu Yiyi also shared, “I do not talk much in work. Mostly I just talk to colleagues who sit next to me.” It seems that the XS doing customer service and managing customer relationship are more likely to learn communication skills in work than those working in factories.

Some of the XS were able to speak up on their behalf in work but others were not. Pang Junjun and Pang Xuxu bravely talked to the boss when they wanted to have a raise in earnings. Pang Junjun said, “The boss gave me overloaded work too but did not increase my earnings. I could not bear this. I talked to him and asked for a raise.” Pang Xuxu shared, “I told the boss I would quit the job because the earnings were too low. He did not want me quit, nor did he want to increase my earnings. I waited to see if he would increase my earnings for the second month.” In Pang Junjun’s case, her boss did
not raise her earnings, thus she quit the job. In addition, in Pang Xuxu’s case, she
mentioned, “at the end of third months, I quit the job and started moving my stuff. By
then the boss agreed to increase my earnings to 1800 RMB, but I was so decisive to leave
and did.”

However, Luo Mengmeng, though bravely talking to the boss and requested full
pay, could not be determined enough and failed to get her earnings back.

Last month I did not get the full pay. They just gave me my basic earnings, not
the promotion part. I called the manager. She said it had been deposit to my bank
account. I told her I did not get the money in my account and asked why, she did
not say anything. After that, I called her but she did not answer the phone, nor did
she reply my text message. I did not want to complain to her anymore, I quit.

Communication skill also included being able to ask for advice and help in a time
of need (WHO, 1997). Most of the XS demonstrated this skill very well by asking
family, relatives and friends for advice and help in a time of need, and asking colleagues
for help to adjust to their jobs. These were illustrated in details under the previous
section “problem solving skill”.

Regarding interpersonal skill, most of the XS developed rural migrant social
networks that primarily consisted of family members, old friends and classmates from the
same or neighbor villages and towns, and new friends they made in work who were also
migrants from different regions. They considered old friends and classmates as their best
friends. Pang Ranran said,
I had 2-3 close friends who I grew up with in the same or nearby village. For other friends such as old colleagues, I gradually lost contact with them. When I need help, I go to my close friends; they are the friends I have kept contact always.

Pang Xuxu said,

My best friends are those growing up with me in the same village. These years though I have made new friends in the city, none of them is as close to me as my childhood friends. The friendship with new friends is based on mutual benefits, thus we do not try to understand each other deeply.

Pang Junjun shared,

I have many friends in Xi’an. A few of them were my classmates from the vocational high school I went to in Xi’an. Most of them were my classmate in Qingshan Qu High School [she dropped out of this school at the second semester].

I made friends with a few colleagues in my previous job, later we lost contact.

Now in my second job, I become friends with some colleagues too, but the relationship is superficial.”

However, most of the XS hung out with old friends and classmates only occasionally because of busy work schedule and maintained the relationship using cellphones or social media. Dang Mei shared, “we call each other occasionally and hang out once a month.” Pang Junjun shared, “sometimes I invite them to some events, such as going to the zoo, or go climbing. We chat happily.” Luo Mengmeng said, “I have kept
contact with one girl from my village by QQ or Wechat (online chatting software), or call her.” Li Qianqian shared, “I am close to Zhu Ning, so we have always worked in the same factory for many years. I do not hang out with other friends much. We are all very busy and have no time. We keep the contact online. “

Most of the XS mentioned keeping good relations with family members. Some of them lived with family or visited family frequently if they were in the same city. For example, Luo Mengmeng shared, “my father and two brothers are working in Xi’an too. My father stays in another inner city village. I see him every 2 or 3 days. My brothers love me a lot because I am the youngest. I go to their place once a week or every other week.” Others who lived far from their family contacted them through phones frequently. Some XS gained financial support from family. Pang Xuxu shared, “I turned to family for financial help when needed.” Pang Shishi shared, “when I had (financial) problems, I turned to my brother for help.” Some continuously supported their family with their income. Lin Xiaowei shared, “I gave all my earnings to my family between 2004 and 2010. After 2011, I started saving money for myself. ... Even now, I am married and still helping my birth family occasionally.” Lu Yiyi also mentioned giving most of her earnings to her parents before she was married. The XS had strong bonding with family and supported each other financially.

Half of the XS shared developing new friendship with other migrants in work environment due to the need of having friends around. Luo Mengmeng shared, “I had a new friend at work. We walked home together with after work around 9 pm. I felt safer
to go home with her.” Pang Xuxu said, “Occasionally I hung out with colleagues after work to relax, such as dinning out or going to KTV.” Lu Yiyi, and Lin Xiaowei also talked about hanging out with colleagues during break and enjoyed fun life.

Thus, they were able to make friendly relationship with the colleagues. Pang Ranran said, “Usually after I got familiar with my colleagues, I had good relationship with them.” Pang Junjun mentioned, “My relationship with colleagues was good. They all respected me. Sometimes they joked around and make fun of each other, but they never made fun of me.” Lin Xiaowei mentioned, “I hung out with colleagues after work, ate and had fun.”

However, under occasional situations, it might be hard to develop new friendship. Lu Yiyi mentioned that the population of colleagues in factories made some differences,

I went to work in Guangdong province when I was 14 years old …Some of my colleagues were from my province, and I called them Laoxiang. I had very few good friends there. My colleagues from Guangdong province treated us coldly at the beginning because I was new and I came from other provinces. …but in year 2003, I remembered I had made many good friends in the factory. There were many young people at my age in that factory, who were also migrants, I was lucky. My colleagues liked me because I was quiet and always worked quietly.

Most of them mentioned that they did not have friends who were urbanites because they had little opportunities to socialize with them in work or life. Pang Xuxu mentioned, “I have made other friends while working in Xi’an. They are migrants from
other regions. I almost do not know anybody who is local citizen in Xi’an.” The factory worker Lu Yiyi mentioned,

When I worked in Hangzhou, all my coworkers, even the managers, were migrants. The only local resident who we interacted with was our landlord. ...

When I worked in Guangdong, only the boss or some supervisors in the factory were local people. We had little contact with them.

Pang Jin shared,

I almost have friends who are local resident in Xi’an. I had a college roommate who moved from Qingshan Qu to Xi’an since very young. It seems that her Hukou have not been transferred to Xi’an, which means she does not count as Xi’an Citizen. However, she has stayed in Xi’an since young.

Coping with Emotions and Stress

Coping with emotions involves “recognizing emotions in ourselves and others”, “being aware of how emotions influence behavior”, and “being able to respond to emotions appropriately”. Coping with stress includes “recognizing the sources of stress in our lives”, “recognizing how this affects us”, and “acting in ways that help to control our levels of stress” (WHO, 1997, p. 2). Mou and his colleagues (2013) found that the rural-to-urban Chinese migrants encountered psychological problems such as major depression, depressive symptoms and insomnia due to “economic pressure, work load, family separation, expectation reality discrepancy and discrimination and difficulty in acculturation in their daily lives” (p. 25). Thus, I assumed that my participants might
confront similar problems and learn to cope with their emotions and stress in the urban setting. I found several factors related to work and life caused negative emotions and stress among migrant women. The factors are described in details as follows.

**Extremely long work hours.** This was a leading factor of negative emotions and stress for all the five Wuhan XS in clothing factories and two Shaanxi XS. The Wuhan XS Li Qianqian shared,

Factories that have producing work always require us to work very long hours, about 13 hours daily, from 8am to 9pm. We always rush to finish our meals and then get back to work. Moreover, usually we stay until 9:30pm... I am always wondering what the point of working from morning till night is in order to get that little extra money.

She hated her job in the clothing factory. However, she still chose to stay in this job because she could earn more money in this occupation.

Her colleagues Zhu Ning shared, “I want to stay in clothing industry and work in clothing factories because I really like it.” However, she described her daily life as “boring and tedious”. Lu Yiyi also shared her working experience in clothing factories in other provinces,

In Hangzhou, we do not work on Sunday, but work from 8am-10pm from Monday to Saturday. The earnings is 4000-5000 RMB. We seldom leave early before 10pm. Sometimes the work is not very urgent and could be postponed until next day, but bosses insist we work during night hours. This usually
happens in small factories. I do not like working at night. Large factories have their production plan. If the work is not urgent, bosses do not ask us to work at night.

While doing the research, I observed the Hubei XS working in the clothing factory for 1.5 days and lived at their dorm for 2 nights. I noticed that these XS were exhausted in the afternoon and evenings and were not happy about the long work hours. They complained about having continuously worked for one full month without taking a single day off and looked forward to the one-day break for the coming month. The long work hours significantly affected their well-being.

However, none of them would like to ask for a sick leave before next break, though they had the option. On one hand, they told me, “if we take sick leaves, we cannot get the bonus of full attendance, which is 80 RMB per month” (Lu Yiyi). On the other hand, they do not feel the need to take a sick leave when they are not sick. Lu Yiyi shared,

We can ask for one day off per week. However, we do not do that because we want to make money. When there is no work to do in the factory, we will have long break. Last year I luckily found a factory that had lots of work, thus I made some money.

They confronted this dilemma. Although they felt exhausted for working long hours, and complained about it all the time, they tended to endure the discomfort in order
to earn more money. They prioritized the economic needs and ignored their emotional and physical needs for rest.

The way they coped with unhappiness or exhaustion was to relax during their limited free time after work. Zhu Ning said, “Every day after work I either go out and eat, or relax in the dorm and play with cellphone”. Lu Yiyi shared, “at night I couldn’t sleep unless I read something because I am exhausted. I used to read books, such as fiction, magazines, or short stories. They helped me to relax. Now I have a smart phone and play with it.”

Since the Shaanxi XS mostly worked in service sectors instead of textile industry, they had different work schedule. Most of them worked 8 hours per day though some of them had to work 7 days a week. These XS did not articulate dissatisfaction or complaints of their work schedule. However, two XS who worked 11 hours daily as a cashier and a cosmetician apprentices respectively also complained about the extremely long hours. They chose to keep the jobs and tolerate the stress as well.

Extremely long work hours did not just affect the XS’ psychological well-being but also health. Lu Yiyi shared, “I have old issue with my neck, the cervical problem. It is because I always sit and work in the factory.” Her colleagues in the clothing factories reported similar health problems.

**Financial pressure.** Regarding financial pressure, 4 Shaanxi XS and 3 Hubei XS who were married or had worked over 3 years articulated having severe economic pressure. Pang Linsha shared,
I feel stressed mostly because it is difficult to find a job here. Even if I find a job, the payment is very low… I expect to have the pay of 2500-3000 RMB every month so I do not have economic stress. But I can only find a job paying me 2000 RMB. … There is lots of economic stress to live in this city. It is expensive to buy a house here. My husband and I try to save money, that is why we do not visit our parents back home frequently.

Pang Shishi shared, “I have financial burden. My wage is 1600 RMB monthly. I want to learn some occupational skills. My mom is in hospital, I gave her 2000 RMB for her medical bill.” Lin Xiaowei shared, “I felt very stressful and burdensome to support my parents and siblings during my first 6 years working in the city.”

They did not articulate specific ways to cope with economic pressure except trying to save money, working hard and earning more income. That is why they keep switching jobs or factories in order to get better pay, or plan to learn new vocational skills or start small business in order to increase their income (referring to decision making and problem solving skills). A few of them dealt with the stress by thinking positively relying on religion. For example, Pang Junjun shared,

When I was in school, and even now, I download many psychological books…Sometimes, I analyze myself and try to understand my psychological problems. I know that the problem I am having now is not a big deal. I can go through this tough period.
Pang Ranting also shared, “it’s really not easy to live in the society...really. But for me, I just work in the day and go to church in the evening. I am not ambitious; I do not need a lot of money.”

Comparatively, young XS who did not get married or worked for less than 3 years did not report economic pressure. Pang Xuxu said, “I just need about 1000 RMB monthly to support myself, my parents could support themselves and did not expect me to give them money now since I just start working.” Pang Jin shared, “I do not need much help in life. My boyfriend helps me financially if I need.” Zhu Ning said, “I have been working so many years and saved most of the money for myself.”

**Family separation.** Homesickness or loneliness was expressed by 2 Hubei XS who had inter-provincial migration and 3 Shaanxi XS who had intra-provincial migration to capital city Xi’an due to family separation. It is most likely happened to XS who had long-distance migration at young age without parents' company. Lu Yiyi shared,

I missed home a lot. I called my parents once a week and went home once a year during spring festival. We had to take trains and then buses to get home, which was very complicated. I wrote letters to my parents and mailed them pictures.

Duan Ranqing shared, “I miss my mom. She stays at home with my brother, my father is working elsewhere. I contact my family frequently; probably call them every other day, sometimes several times per day.” Luo Mengmeng, who just migrated to city Xi’an for a few months, shared, “I feel lonely, because I have no friends here to share feelings or experience, so I write diaries, tear it apart, and throw it away”. The way they
dealt with homesickness and loneliness was to call family frequently, wrote them letters, or wrote diaries.

**Unreasonable scold or unfair treatment in work.** This was another factor causing some XS negative emotions, such as being “unhappy”, “wronged”, “upset”, or “angry”. Pang Linsha said, “I felt unhappy in work when the bosses scolded me for no reason. Some bosses have bad temper; they talk meanly sometimes... But I tried to switch attention and do other things, such as watching TV or talking to my friends, I also tried to think positively.” Pang Xuxu also recalled,

Once I was misunderstood and scolded by a student's parent in the kindergarten I was working, I felt wronged. I liked his child a lot and paid extra attention to him. But he did not listen and insisted that I did something wrong and requested to transfer their son to another class. I felt so bad because he misunderstood me and treated me unfairly. I cried for one month about this case...later I quit the job because I couldn't let go the grievance.

The XS tended to cope with the negative emotions at first, and if they constantly experienced negative at work, they would quit the job.

**Taking a challenging job or position.** It produced some stress for two XS doing professional jobs and 1 XS who took a leadership role in the clothing factory. When Pang Xuxu was the coordinator of the training school, she said, “I was very busy. The parents (customers) kept bothering me, I couldn’t handle it anymore.” Pang Jin, just beginning her job as a teaching assistant in a private training school, shared, “I feel
stressed in work because I am new and want to do well in work. I do not want to fall behind others.” Lu Yiyi shared,

When I just became a group leader of 8 assembly line workers in the clothing factory, I felt much stressed, because I wanted to make sure all group members had high work efficiency as a group and could earn more money.

To cope with the stress, they tried hard to get used to the job. Lu Yiyi learned to be a group leader and felt less stressed. Pang Xuxu tried to manage the job but quit three month later because “it was stressful and the wage was low”. Pang Jin shared, “I do not know how to deal with the stress. I always have headache. I know it’s because of stress.” It took time for the XS to learn to cope with the stress in work, and often the stress was decreased when they adapted to the work. However, if it was too overwhelming, the XS might choose to quit the job.

For most of the XS doing low-skill jobs and the XS who were skilled workers in clothing factories, they mentioned having little pressure from work itself after getting used to the job. Luo Mengmeng shared, “I have some stress at work (cashier in supermarket) in the beginning, but it’s gone now because I know how to do the work. I can finish my task very quickly.” It seemed that the jobs were not challenging for them.

**Intimate relationship conflict.** Another factor that produced negative emotions and stress was the conflict with their boyfriends, husbands, parents, or parents-in-law, explained by some XS. Pang Jin said, “I feel unhappy or angry for small things, such as arguing with my boyfriends. I have no conflict with friends most of the time...but I have
good relationship with him.” Pang Linsha also shared, “With my husband, there are happy and unhappy times. But our relationship is good.” Pang Ranran was 24 years old and single. Her parents were worried about her marriage and tried to match her up with Catholic people in their neighborhood village. She shared, “I am not worried about marriage at all. But my parents talk too much, which annoys me. I just let them talk and do not pay attention. Gradually they talk little and do not bother me.” For most of them, the relationship conflict was manageable.

However, two XS could not solve the relationship conflict and experienced great stress. Pang Shishi talked about her feelings with her arranged marriage, “my marriage makes me unhappy for years. I do not like the relationship; we have conflicts so many times.” She finally left her husband who was in Xi’an and moved to Qingshan Qu. She did not need to have a legal divorce because she did not legally get married despite wedding ceremony in their village. However, she shared,

Later they (husband and parents-in-law) asked me to go back to their house, and said I belonged to their family no matter I was alive or dead. If I tried to remarry, they cursed me. I did not know what to do... but I do not want to go back to the relationship… my parents wanted me to go back. They said they lived so close to my parents-in-law (from the same village). It is embarrassing for them to see each other if I do not resume the relationship. They just think about themselves...My brother did not give me any suggestion and asked me to make decisions by myself.
She was struggling between meeting the expectation of others (her parents and her husband’s family) and her own willingness and kept saying, “I do not know what to do”. The unsolved problem gave her lots of stress and pain, reflected in her body language and voice in the interview. Yet, she did not mention any specific way to cope with the stress except sharing it with one close friend and “pray sometimes when I want to share my feeling with God”.

Zhu Ning also shared her story,

I have big problem in my life. There is domestic violence in my home. When I was a child, my father beat my sister and me often when losing his temper. That is why I left home at very young age (age 15) and tried to be independent. …Now I have a boyfriend who is a few years older than me, my father forbids me from dating him and says that he wouldn’t recognize me as his daughter if I do not stop hanging out with him….I have very bad relationship with my father now.

She did not know how to solve the problem, but to cope with emotions, she said, “When I am down, I try to comfort myself, and do some self-adjustment. Otherwise, I will share with my best friends. But normally I do not share too much.”

In general, the XS had their specific ways of coping with all the negative emotions and stress produced by the above factors depending on their personality. The extrovert XS shared negative emotions and stress with close friends or family, hung out with friends, and expressed themselves on social media. For example, Pang Ranran
shared, “Once I post one complain on social media, my friends asked me what’s going on. I said nothing. They said they had ears for me if I wanted to share. In that case, I would share with them sometimes.” Smart phones and social media made it easy for them to share feelings online and get attention from friends. The introvert XS prayed and relied on faith, did positive thinking, listened to music, read books, wrote diaries, and played with smart phones. Pang Xuxu shared, “sometimes I felt so upset, burdensome, or irritated, I want to go to church.” Luo Mengmeng also shared,

After reading Bible, I will think. It teaches me a lot. For example, if somebody hurts me with words, I feel bad, or hate them. After reading Bible, I think it is meaningless to feel that way. … Sometimes it is good to forget and forgive. I learn to be tolerant and understanding.

Dang Mei said, “My mood is controlled by myself… Sometimes when I change my perspective, I think and feel differently. ... Therefore, I should be happy.”

Beyond taking the initiative to cope with emotions and stress, the XS sometimes got encouragement from colleagues without asking for it. Lu Xiaxia shared, “there was only one year when I had to work in Hangzhou by myself. ... I felt so bad. I cried when I was working. My colleagues came to talk to me and comfort me.” Pang Xuxu also recalled,

One head-teacher understood the whole thing and knew that I suffered from grievance. She said this case would just be a small thing in the future when I
looked back. She asked me to let it go and gave me her good wish. Her words touched me.

Most of the XS did not articulate any severe psychological problems such as depression or intention of committing suicide. Li Qianqian shared,

I do not have depression or too much stress. Occasionally, I lose my temper and get angry with people around me. Nevertheless, I calm down later and feel ok. I am unhappy sometimes and complain to my friend, such as Zhu Ning. As long as I share the unhappiness, this is no big deal. I have never thought about committing suicide.

Lily said, “I feel very lonely, especially this year, because it’s so hard for me to find a job. But I do not feel frustrated, I am very positive (Smiling).”

However, Zhu Ning and Pang Shishi who suffered interpersonal relation conflict seemed to need extra help. Zhu Ning who suffered from child abuse shared,

“I think psychological health means thinking normally, and psychologically unhealthy means thinking abnormally. I am psychologically unhealthy because I have gone through too much since childhood. ...Now I grow up, understand more, and think more positively. I have never thought about committing suicide. “

Although she tried to be positive, she still considered herself as “psychologically unhealthy”.

Another XS, Sally, who suffered from broken marriage and lacked family and friends' support, looked extremely stressed. She shared,
“I do not have any plans (to solve the marriage issue). I will wait and see. I have nobody to discuss with, nobody to convey my true feelings. Most of my friends are from my village. Whatever I share with them, they will share with their moms when they go home, and their moms will share in the village. People are gossiping in the mountain. Thus, I am always alone.”

Summary

Migrating from the rural area to the city, the XS confronted a variety of challenges and risks. The challenges included obtaining a satisfactory occupation that enabled them to live a valued life, advancing communication and interpersonal skills in order to socialize with a large and diverse urban population, and coping with negative emotions and stress in the urban work and life. The risks contained three types of vulnerabilities associated with their gender: urban street risks, sex worker risks, and premarital pregnancy and abortion risks. Driven by the aspirations of staying in the city for a longer time, the XS had learned and applied all the six key life skills to some extent in order to deal with the challenges, risks, and live self-valued lives.

They learned to make new decisions in a variety of scenarios in the urban context: choosing migrating destinations, satisfactory jobs, further learning and entrepreneurship. They responded to a great number of variables, assessed different options, considered their aspiration and preferences, cost and benefits, family and social relations, and made constructive decisions about their lives. Instead of floating blindly, they gave thoughtful
deliberation of migration destinations and preferred to migrate to cities where they had social network. To cope with the biggest challenge, obtaining a satisfactory occupation with sufficient pay, they relied heavily on the social network to guide them into specific occupations. Other than that, an increasing number of them seek for other ways of job hunting such as applying jobs online.

Regarding whether the XS obtained satisfactory occupations with sufficient pay, the result varied depending on their education level and occupational skills. Most of those with vocational high school or college degree found satisfactory professional work with potential wage increases and career advancement. The majority XS with solid occupational skills such as sewing were also satisfied with the pay as factory workers and chose to stay in this industry. However, those with less than high school education or without solid occupational skills faced extreme difficulty to obtain well pay, satisfactory jobs. They kept looking and shifting from one low-pay job to another, yet could only survive and hardly improved their financial situation.

Besides the effort of obtaining satisfactory jobs, half of the Shaanxi XS with low education attainment aspired to learn solid occupational skills which would lead to a more desirable occupation, yet almost none of their aspirations were met due to a lack of high-quality and affordable occupational training services accessible for migrant women in city Xi'an and Qingshan Qu. The Hubei XS had no such aspirations because they settled with clothing manufactory work. About one third of the XS aspired to have or had started entrepreneurial activities in hopes of increasing their income. Yet, some of
their entrepreneurial dream could not be fulfilled due to a lack of capital and business management concerns. Moreover, others who started small business faced challenges to improve their business. Two Shaanxi XS who had vocational high school education and were doing professional jobs chose to advance their diploma through formal adult education in colleagues.

Most of the XS were able to and did make independent decisions. This was due to migration and long distance from families pushed the XS to make independent decisions at a young age. They were used to making independent decisions by themselves.

They learned to solve a variety of problems in the urban context, especially protecting them against gender vulnerabilities. I found premarital pregnancy and abortion were prevalent among the XS' social circle, yet not among the Shaanxi XS who were all Catholic. One reason for high premarital pregnancy and abortion risks found in this study were limited reproductive health-related knowledge. However, religion protected the Shaanxi XS, most of who chose to avoid premarital sex and abortion and had lower sexual or reproductive health risks. Among the Hubei XS who were non-Catholic, some of them had a more tolerant attitude towards premarital sexual behavior and abortion, while others refused to talk about it. Urban streets risks and sex worker risks were found mild in my study. Most of the XS had good awareness of urban streets risks and certain knowledge of risk prevention. Though both Shaanxi and Hubei XS had little awareness of the secret sex trading-in business within urban entertainment
establishment, the Shaanxi XS got protection from their social network and religious belief, while the Hubei XS got protection from stable factory jobs.

Most of the XS mentioned having no problem to adapt to urban life. Their voice reflected that their understanding of adaptation was at the survival level such as finding residential places and jobs and being able to survive the city. Urban life adaptation at a deeper level, such as adopting urban life styles and networking with local urbanites were not mentioned by them.

Migrating from a closed small rural community to dynamic large cities with diverse population, the XS realized their drawback in expressing themselves in ways that were appropriate to the cultures and situations. They were concerned with the negative influence of poor communication on their interpersonal relationship. They aspired to, and some even made an effort to improve their communication skills by reading books or learning in work. Gradually, some improved their communication skills while others did not. Some XS were better at expressing their desires and need in work, while others were not able to do so. Most of them learned to ask family, relatives and friends for advice and help in a time of need and maintained close relationship with the rural social network using technology. Most of them were also able to make friendly, yet not close, relationship with their colleagues who were mostly migrants from different regions. Yet, very few of them established new friendship with local urbanites because they lacked the opportunities to socialize with them in their lives.
The XS also learned to cope with emotions and stress in the urban context. I found the major sources that produced negative emotions and stress for the XS were extremely long work hours, financial pressure, family separation, unreasonable scold or unfair treatment in work, challenging jobs or positions and intimate relationship conflict. Stress from long work hours, financial pressure and family separation was experienced by more participants compared to the other sources and thus was most prevalent and influential. Long daily work hours (11-13 hours from my study) constantly created negative emotions on my participants and negatively affected their mental and physical health; however, since it was a typical phenomenon related to the textile industry, they tried to prioritize their economic needs over emotional, physical needs and chose to endure the stress. Financial pressure was experienced by married or older XS who had worked in the city for several years because of increasing individual or family expenses. Family separation caused the most negative influences on the XS during the first few years of migration. Unreasonable scold or unfair treatment in work, challenging jobs or positions and intimate relationship conflict also negatively influenced the XS’ wellbeing. For example, severe intimate relationship conflict had significant negative influence on two XS who had unhappy marriage and unsupportive father-daughter relationship respectively. Both of them lacked the ability to solve such conflict, got limited support from family and friends, and could only cope with the negative emotions and stress to a certain extent. Their experience reflected that they need extra help and support to deal with such extreme cases.
The XS mainly coped with negative emotions and stress by sharing with friends and family, trying different kinds of relaxing activities, or relying on religion. When the negative emotions and stress related to work was unbearable, they tended to quit the jobs and looked for new ones. Moreover, when they failed to solve intimate relationship conflict, they chose to get out of the relationship temporarily by migrating to other places. Migration provided them with the freedom to escape from the unsolved problems and live lives in the way they valued.

Acculturation stress specifically related to adopting urban life style was not found among the XS, this was possibly because of their minimum interaction with local urban residents. They were stratified to the lower social class together with other rural to urban migrants, having limited opportunities to acculturate.

I found that the XS adopted several key life skills together in certain situations because the key life skills were intertwined and connected. When the XS needed to solve some problems in life and work, they did cognitive thinking of possible solutions and made decisions. When the solutions involved getting resources or help from others, they applied communication and interpersonal skills. Unsolved problems tended to generate stress and negatively affected their emotions, thus they applied emotional and stress-coping skills. The XS with stronger communication and interpersonal relationship skills were more able to establish supportive and expanded social network, which contributed to better decision making and problem solving as they asked for extra resources, advices and support.
The main difference regarding life skills learning experiences between the Hubei and Shaanxi participants in my study was caused by their different religious belief. All the Shaanxi participants were Catholic, most of who adhered to Catholic catechism and refused to be engaged with premarital sexual behavior or prostitution. However, none of the Hubei participants believed in any religion and faced greater premarital pregnancy and abortion risk. Since the Hubei XS were all clothing factory workers and decided to stay in this industry, their possibility of becoming sex workers was also low. Moreover, the Shaanxi participants also relied on faith as one way of coping with emotions and stress while the Hubei participants did not. Beyond above disparities, little differences were found in other aspects of their life skills learning experiences.

**Informal Learning Sources**

Research Question 2 asked, “What are the possible informal learning sources in the city where the XS could learn key life skills?” Based on the informal learning literature that I summarized in chapter 2, I explored all the possible informal learning sources which may lead to the learning of key life skills. I interviewed the XS related questions such as how they improved their communication and interpersonal skills, what helped them to make decisions or solve problems, what kind of books they read and activities they participated, and what they learned from these books or activities. The XS' response helped to generate the following informal learning sources: social network, work environment, church/religious practices, the Internet and books.
Because learning sources were integrated in their experiences of learning and applying life skills, which was described in the findings to Research Question 1, in this section I present a summary of the informal learning sources and only include new quotes that are uncovered in previous section.

The XS developed and maintained a supportive social network in the city, which included family and relatives, old friends and classmates from the village, and new friends they made in the city who were mostly migrants. They learned to make better decisions from consulting the social network. Pang Ranting said, “When I feel puzzled and need suggestions, I will talk to my close friends.” Pang Shishi shared, “sometimes I consult others' opinion before making decisions. For example, I asked for my brother's opinion on whether I should learn cosmetic skills. I cannot make the decision. He has clear minds, he is smarter.” Pang Jin also shared,

I will consult my boyfriend, parents or friends opinions before making decisions. For example, before I took this job and turned down other offers, I had consulted my best friend who was in education field too. She supported me... I did not consult my boyfriend because he knew little in this aspect.

Besides decision making, they also learned to solve problems with the rich information and resources they got from this network, communicated and built relationship with people in the social network and shared emotional concerns or stress. Social network is the most significant learning space where they learned all the key life skills.
Since most of the XS worked for extremely long hours and had no regular weekends, they preferred to contact people using smart phones and social media more frequently. Due to the falling price of smart phones and faster, more affordable data plans (Farrar, 2012), most of the XS had smart phones and could get access to the social media easily. Smart phones contributed to the establishment and enhancement of migrants’ social network for the XS.

Work environment is another important space where the XS spent most of their time and learned mostly work-related problem solving skills from colleagues. In addition, customer-service related work environment such as restaurants, beauty salons and private training schools provided some of the XS opportunities to learn communication and interpersonal skills from interaction with a larger population in the city beyond their migrant social network. These XS improved communication skills and sometimes gained confidence. For example, Pang Shishi shared, “When I was working in the restaurant, I learned something from the boss, such as … how to talk to different people.” Pang Xuxu also mentioned, “Communicating with college students is a piece of cake for me because I have learned to deal with tougher customers in work.”

Church and religious practices such as reading Bible and praying were another type of informal learning space where the Shaanxi XS learned emotional and stress-coping skills. All of the Shaanxi XS went to the urban churches frequently (once or a few times per week) or occasionally (every other week). They mentioned that the teachings in church and verses of Bible taught them to be “more considerate and tolerant”
towards relationship issues and less materialistic when considering financial issues, which helped them to better cope with their emotions and stress. However, this learning space did not apply to the Hubei XS because none of them believe in any religion.

The Internet has become another learning source which about half of the XS referred to when they need to look for solutions for certain problems, such as looking for jobs, solutions to certain problems and further learning opportunities online. Pang Ranting said, “I searched online regarding contraceptive measures and found that some contraceptive measures had potential harm to our body. Finally I learned to pay attention to my ovulation time to have birth control.” Pang Shishi said, “I want to learn hair-styling and cosmetic skills, so I searched lots of videos and websites regarding this on the Internet.” Luo Mengmeng said, “If you do not understand anything, you can search it online.” Pang Jin shared, “I used baidu search (similar to google search) a lot.” Their awareness of using it as problem solving tools and self-directed learning sources revealed their technology literacy, which was achieved through learning from daily use of smart phones and peers in the urban contexts. However, another half of the XS mentioned they did not surf the the Internet much. Pang Mingming and Pang Xuxu mentioned, “I only chat with friends on QQ, wechat (social media) or see their posts using the Internet.” Pang Ranran shared, “I have not searched online regarding specific trainings or courses I need to take in order to be a tourist guide.”

Books are one type of informal learning sources. About one third of the XS mentioned they read paper books or electronic articles on relationship management and
communication skills, and one XS mentioned reading psychological books. These XS learned communication/interpersonal skills and emotional/stress-coping skills to a certain extent through reading. Other XS did not refer to books to advance their key life skills, as Dang Mei shared, “I used to read books a lot when I was in school. But after I left school, I did not read much, just occasionally.”

To sum, the sources and spaces where the XS informally learned life skills were their social networks, work environments, church/religious practices, books and the Internet. The social network and the Internet were intangible learning spaces; work environment, church/religious activities and books were tangible learning space or sources. Social networks were the most significant learning space where the XS learned and practiced all the key life skills. Work environments also played an important role because the XS spent most of their time at work and learned work-related problem solving skills. Customer service type of work assisted the XS to learn communication/interpersonal skills. Church/religious practices, the Internet, and books contributed to the learning of emotion/stress-coping skills, problem solving skills, and communication/interpersonal skills respectively.

**Empowering Properties and Impact**

The third research question inquired into the possible empowering properties of life skills and their impact on migrant women as they perceive them. I did not ask direct interview questions regarding the relationship between life skills learning and empowerment because such questions would be too direct and hard for participants to
answer. Instead, I analyzed the empowering properties and impact based on the participants' experiences regarding life skills learning and application, their aspirations and feelings. Seeberg’s Capabilities and Empowerment Framework (CEF) was used to provide the structure for the analysis and capture the empowering properties and impact. Looking through the Capability Approach lens, I posit that empowering properties and impact are *functionings*, the “beings and doings” that individuals want to and actually get engaged (Sen, 1999), and “an active realization of one or more capabilities” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 25). The CEF helped to identify the empowering functionings that the XS experienced and valued. In the following, I explore the empowering functionings within each dimension of the CEF: well-being, agency, and achievement.

**Well-being**

First of all, in CEF, well-being is defined as *affective, cognitive self-expression and reflection, enjoyment and playfulness, confidence, affective and cognitive control*. Emotion/stress-coping skills are directly related to well-being. The XS applied emotion/stress-coping skills to have good *affective and cognitive control* and maintained psychological health. They positively dealt with negative emotions with the help of sharing, digesting, or relying on faith. They coped with the stress from work by adjusting to or leaving the job, and dealt with financial stress through the effort of changing jobs in hopes of getting higher income. They articulated positive attitudes towards life and future. Few of them reported severe psychological problems such as depression or
intention of committing suicide. Emotional, stress-coping skills contribute to the achievement of well-being to the largest extent.

Decision making/problem solving skills are related with well-being indirectly to a large extent. Whether these skills contribute to well-being or not depends on the specific decisions the XS made and problems they solved. Their decisions of staying in the city lead to enjoyment in general, because they “liked the city and planned to settle down. It is prosperous.” (Pang Shishi), “had the normal life in the city and were satisfied with it” (Pang Ranran), or “enjoyed city life because it was very simple and comfortable” (Pang Xuxu), or “convenient” (Lu Yiyi). However, decisions of choosing satisfactory jobs and the actual problem solving process of obtaining such jobs were found less likely leading to enjoyment because of the difficulties to reach such goals. Most of the XS said their jobs were “ok” and did not articulate whether they liked it or not, reflecting that they made a compromise. A few said they liked their jobs, or disliked them but chose to stay. Li Qianqian hated her job in the clothing factory and described her daily life using phrases like “we eat like pigs and work hard like water buffalo”. However, she stayed because of the relatively high pay. Zhu Ning said, “I liked working in the clothing factory compared to working in a restaurant, but my daily life in the clothing factory was tedious and boring.” Therefore, enjoying the work was not a strong theme shared by most of the XS.

On the other hand, the process of decision making and problem solving required the women to have cognitive thinking or to ask others for suggestions or help. Therefore,
practicing decision making and problem solving skills included affective and cognitive self-expression and reflection part of well-being and thus contributed to well-being directly.

Communication and interpersonal skills relate to well-being both directly and indirectly. On one hand, lacking or obtaining such skills directly lead to the losing or gaining of confidence for the XS. The XS who realized their weakness in these skills lacked confidence in communication and interacting with people. In addition, the XS who improved these skills gained confidence. Pang Xuxu shared, “communicating with college students is a piece of cake for me because I have learned to deal with tougher customers in work.” Moreover, communication and interpersonal skills contributed to well-being indirectly because the XS applied these skills to build supportive social network and gained enjoyment and playfulness. They hang out with friends and explored the city during their limited free time, such as going shopping, going skating, watching movies, and walking around the city. They had some fun in their lives. Like Pang Ranting said, “when I have days off, I do not like to stay at home. I will go out and have fun with my friends.”

Agency

Agency capabilities were defined as choose learning something specific/make strategic life choices/capacity to aspire, speak up on own behalf/self-expression, and participation in resource distribution in the family/participation in structures by Seeberg in CEF (Seeberg & Luo, 2012, p. 351). I found decision making/problem solving skills
and communication/interpersonal skills were directly related to agency. They had the capacity to aspire for a better occupation and a better life. They made strategic life choices regarding migration destinations and satisfactory jobs, and chose learning specific occupational or entrepreneurial skills. Some of them applied communication skills to express themselves in life and work and speak up on their own behalf when encountering discrimination or unfair treatment. Some of them participated in resource distribution in work by means of negotiating and requesting fair amount of wage. Therefore, when the XS applied decision making/problem solving skills and communication/interpersonal skills, they acted as an active agent “who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives” (Sen, 1999, p. 19).

**Achievement of Valued Outcomes**

In CEF, Seeberg (2011) defined achievement as instrumental outcome, “a political state of being or condition” or “the outcome within an external structure”, or a mixed intrinsic-instrumental outcome, “a subjective orientation or positionality” (p. 46-7). It can be observed and evaluated when a girl has achieved valued outcomes, such as “educational achievement or attainment (Kabeer, 1999), or, as Sen suggests, it might rest on achievement of well-being through a new capability or set of capabilities and therefore more choices of functionings”(Seeberg, 2011, p. 46).

I found, on one hand, the obtaining of the six key life skills itself was instrumental outcome because life skills were a set of capabilities that contributed to the
XS' achievement of well-being and exercise of agency. On the other hand, the XS obtained more *instrumental outcomes or mixed intrinsic-instrumental outcome* from the practice of certain key life skills. First, due to decision making/problem solving skills, most of the XS earned economic independence from jobs. They managed to maintain basic living standard and enjoyed financial autonomy. Some were even able to contribute to the family resources through buying gifts or giving some money to their parents and other family members. Their economic independence and financial contribution to family resources are *mixed intrinsic-instrumental outcomes*. Second, they achieved “relational achievement” (Kabeer, 1999), an *instrumental outcome* they obtained as they built up supportive social network in the city with the help of communication/interpersonal skills. Third, due to emotion/stress-coping skills, they maintained good mental health and had no severe depression or other psychological problems, which was an *instrumental outcome*.

**Social-economic Constraints**

After a nuanced analysis of the empowering properties and impact of key life skills, I also acknowledged the undeniable negative impact of the social-economic constraints on women empowerment. Despite decision making and problem solving skills, the XS were constrained to make compromised decisions and solve problems to a limited level due to social, economic, educational and informational constrictions. First of all, due to financial pressure, most of them couldn't finish high school education. With limited years of education, they did not have a great variety of “satisfactory” work
options and had to make compromise regarding assessable low-skill, low-pay job opportunities. Second, in spite of their aspiration of learning some solid occupational skills, they lack the information regarding a variety of available and affordable training opportunities for new occupational skills and thus could not pursue the training. Third, lacking capital, technique and skill support to run small business, their entrepreneurial activities were also confined to running small business such as food stands or online retail business, which brought limited economic gains. Fourth, there was labor segregation and social exclusion between migrants and urbanites, which constrained migrant women from adapting to urban life at deeper social and cultural level. The social-economic constraints hindered migrant women from achieving more empowering capabilities, such as larger economic freedom, enjoyment of work, and a higher level of well-being. It limited the empowering impact of life skills.

Hukou system, labor segregation and social exclusion between migrants and urbanites were the biggest social-economic constraints. However, it is surprising to find that most of my participants were unconscious of the constraint related to hukou, such as being unfamiliar with the social welfare associated with urban hukou. Pang Xuxu said, “I do not know what kind of social welfare urban residents have. I just heard that some companies bought health insurance and other types of insurances for certain employees, but I do not know about the details.” The only participant, Pang Jin, knew more about the benefits associated with hukou and had higher chance of getting an urban hukou because she received higher education. Yet, she mentioned,
I planned to transfer my hukou to Xi’an but rethought about it. My uncles suggested me not to do so because if I leave Xi’an in the future, I need to transfer my hukou again and make things complicated. Besides, there are some benefits related to rural hukou. My grandma said people with rural hukou would be assigned some land by the government. I do not know exactly.

My participants were aware of the labor and social segregation between them and the urbanites. However, most of them did not aspire to socialize with the urbanites or build supportive network with them. They were satisfied with the rural migrant network because it was very accessible and beneficial for them.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reported major findings for this study. The main goal of this study is to investigate the life skills of young Chinese rural to urban migrant women, the informal learning sources and the empowering properties and impact. I found that my participants had informally learned and applied all the key life skills to a certain extent, strived to adapt to the urban life at the survival level and aimed towards living the lives they valued. They were able to make strategic decisions and solve basic problems.

Among my participants, Catholic migrant women were better at protecting themselves against premarital pregnancy and abortion risks than non-religious migrant women because of conservative attitude toward premarital sexual behavior and abortion. Most of my participants were good at maintaining migrant social network through cell phone or social media and asked help from this network for better decision making and problem
solving. Most of them were also capable of coping with negative emotions and stress through faith, sharing with friends, or psychological adjustment. However, a significant amount of my participants reported that they lacked communication skills and aspired to improve it, yet some could not fulfill the aspiration through self-learning. In addition, a small percentage of them were not able to solve problems or cope with stress caused by family relationship conflict. Their mental well-being was negatively influenced by such conflict.

My study unexpectedly found that migrant women were constrained by social-economic barriers regarding the learning and practice of life skills. A significant percentage of migrant women without vocational high school education or solid occupational skills were unable to find stable jobs with sufficient pay, despite their effort of job hunting or networking. Most of them aspired to or made decisions of pursuing occupational skill training or entrepreneurial activities in order to improve their financial condition, however, they had limited access to a variety of affordable, high-quality occupational skill training choices and lack of financial support to run small businesses. Most importantly, they lacked the opportunity to socialize with local urbanites and could not benefit from migrant-residents tie for a deeper social, cultural integration. They were at the bottom of social class in the city and adapted to urban life at basic survival level.

Regarding the informal learning sources of life skills, I discovered that migrant social network was the leading informal learning source that contributed to the learning of all key life skills. Other learning sources, including work environment,
church/religious practices, the Internet and books, also contributed to the learning of related key life skills to a certain extent.

I claim that informal learning of key life skills in the city contributed to an enhanced freedom and capabilities of migrant women. They exercised agency while applying life skills, obtained a sense of well-being including confidence, enjoyment and emotional stability, and achieved valued outcomes such as life skills set and economic independence. Migration and the city contexts served as incubators of the above freedoms that couldn't be obtained in their rural villages or rural schools. However, I admit that the empowering properties and impact of life skills should not be exaggerated because of the existence of social-economic constraints, which restrained migrant women from obtaining greater freedom.

The relationship between life skills, informal learning sources, social-economic constraints, and empowering properties and impact could be elaborated using Robeyns’ (2005) theory of conversion factors. As she described, three groups of conversion factors would affect the process of converting a good into the functionings to achieve certain beings and doings. They are “the personal conversion factors (e.g. metabolism, physical condition, sex, reading skills, intelligence)”, “social conversion factors (e.g. public policies, social norms, discriminating practices, gender roles, societal hierarchies, power relations)” and, “environmental conversion factors (e.g. climate, geographical location)” (p. 99). In my study, life skills are “the personal conversion factors”, the informal learning sources and social-economic constraints are the “social or environmental
conversion factors”. Personal conversion factors need to work with social and environmental conversion factors so as to achieve more functionings.
CHAPTER V
LIFE SKILLS LEARNING AND EMPOWERMENT

In this chapter, I first discuss findings on the research questions in relation to relevant literature. The broad question that this study attempted to research is: how do migrant women informally learn and apply life skills in their urban life and work and what are the empowering capabilities they have achieved in that process? This chapter begins with the discussions to all the research questions. At the end of this chapter, I highlight important conclusions, elaborate the significance of this study and inherent limitations, draw some implications that policy-makers and social agencies, and offer recommendations for future study.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

This section consists of the discussion of answers to the research questions in light of the literature review in Chapter II and additional literature that was explored after data analysis.

Research Question 1: Life Skills Learning and Application in the City

My investigation of life skills learning and application on the part of young migrant women as they transitioned from their rural village to an urban context is significant in that it centers on the women themselves. In the literature, urban challenges, risks, and hardships faced by Chinese migrant workers are the dominating themes. My study regards young migrant women as possible active agents who might take initiative to cope with urban challenges and risks using their cognitive, social and psychological resources to obtain well-being and other valued achievement. My Research Question 1 asked what kind
of life skills migrant women have learned informally in the city? The findings provided an unusual and much needed perspective on migration that is important for policy-making and program-designing.

I found migrant women did encounter a variety of urban challenges and risks, yet they had developed and applied all the key life skills consciously or unconsciously to some extent to cope with challenges and risks. They strived to adapt to the city life at the survival level and built strong social network with other migrants despite isolation from local urban residents. They aimed towards living the lives they had reason to value. In the following, I first addressed the challenges and risks in light of the literature and then analyzed how migrant women informally learned and applied life skills to cope with these challenges and risks.

That said, the urban challenges and risks I found were consistent with much of the literature. Migrant women experienced gender related vulnerabilities and risks in the city. I found premarital pregnancy and abortion were prevalent among the participating women’s friends and colleagues who were also migrant women and might cause serious problems related to sexual and reproductive health. It was because of a lack of correct information related to reproductive, sexual health reported by most participating women based on their own experiences, and the tolerant attitudes migrant women had toward unprotected sexual conduct that was reported by a few Shaanxi participants and some of the Hubei participants. These findings concurred with studies done by He et al. (2012), Guo et al. (2015), and Zeng et al. (2015). I also confirmed the prevalence of entertainment establishments and the likelihood of migrant women involved in
prostitution, which was reported in Liu's (2012) study. Another risk, urban street risk, though rarely reported in the literature, was encountered by some of my Shaanxi participants. Most of the migrant women were aware of the urban street risk and developed capabilities to deal with the risks such as choosing not to walk alone at night.

Though premarital pregnancy and abortion risks were similarly dangerous, most of my Shaanxi participants did not engage with premarital sexual relationship or abortion. They explained they had been raised and practiced their Catholic religion. Religion served as a protective factor for my Shaanxi participants who internalized the Catholic doctrine on virginity and chastity and were opposed to premarital sexual relations, abortion and prostitution. Moreover, protective kinship social networks and stable occupations were also found preventing the participating women from engaging in prostitution. I agree with Liu (2012) that the presence of friends and/ or coworkers had great influence on women’s involvement in prostitution. My study revealed the positive influence of friends, family or relatives who protected the migrant women from being sex workers. To sum, religion, positive social influence and a stable occupation enabled migrant women to make better decisions and have better self-protection in urban migrant environments.

In addition, migrant women encountered several urban challenges. First of all, the biggest challenge the participating women faced was to obtain satisfactory work with sufficient pay, which concurred with Wong and Song's (2008) finding in Shanghai that financial and employment difficulties stood out as the most stressful issues for migrants. Second, communicating with a large and diverse urban population and being able to
speak up on one’s own behalf was another challenge, which confirmed Jacka’s (2006) finding that migrant women in Beijing lacked confidence in communication. Moreover, the stressors faced by the participants in this study were also reported in the literature, including extremely long work hours (Tan, 2000), financial pressure (Wong & Song, 2008), unreasonable scolding or unfair treatment in work (Tian, 2011), family separation (Mou et al., 2013) and intimate relationship conflicts (Santos, Bohon, & Sanchez-Sosa, 1998; Wong & Song, 2008).

In the following, I will provide a nuanced analysis of the application of life skills by migrant women in light of the literature.

**Decision making and problem solving.** The migrant women demonstrated their decision making skills by considering and assessing benefits and costs, different options and consequences in lots of different situations to order to make informed decisions. First of all, my finding revealed that they chose to migrate not only for economic reasons but also for noneconomic reasons such as attraction to city life and personal development. This finding was consistent with Li’ (2006), Chiang and her colleagues’ (2015) empirical studies on migrant women in Tianjing city and migrant women from Gansu province respectively. Second, the participants in this study were not floating blindly but tended to move to places they were more familiar with and where they found it easier to make a living, which was consistent with Li’ (2006) report. Since most of the participants in this study were more familiar with cities within their home provinces and had social networks in these cities, they were more likely to migrate to these cities and found it easier to find jobs there. More importantly, the participating women in this study, as did participants in
Wen and Hanley’s (2015) and Li’s (2006) studies, relied heavily on their social network to guide them into specific occupations. As my participating women remained longer in the city and due to technological advances, some also started using a variety of job-search means such as on-line job hunting in order to obtain satisfactory work with sufficient pay.

My findings agreed with the literature that migrant workers experienced high job mobility partly due to the strong competition in the unskilled labor market, and partly due to their lack of adequate information on the nature of their jobs (Shi, 2008; Knight & Yueh, 2006; Hu, 2012). The main reasons my participants in both research sites mentioned for switching jobs were low wage and uninteresting work; they aspired to obtain more rewarding jobs with good pay. The difficulties in fulfilling such aspirations by most of my participants were foreseeable, as Tunon (2006) explained. Migrants were consigned to low wages and poor working conditions mainly due to their human capital deficit, e.g., limited education and low skill levels in comparison to the urban resident population.

A great many of the participants in this study, especially those who had worked for more than 3 years, were aware of their human capital deficit. They made the decisions to counter the deficit through further learning, especially learning certain occupational skills. Similarly, Hu (2012) found new-generation migrants often saved money from previous jobs for additional training and aspired to build careers. However, it was important to note that my Shaanxi participants lacked knowledge about available occupation training opportunities and lacked access to such opportunities, thus some did not fulfill their aspirations. Comparatively, in the second research site in Hubei province,
since all the participants had enrolled in three-month training courses in sewing prior to migration and often stayed in the textile industry, few of them articulated aspirations for further learning other occupational skills.

Besides occupational training, about a third of the participants in this study also aspired to, two even had started running small enterprises in hopes of improving their financial status. However, they were hampered by their lack of capital, relevant skills and other resources. Some of them could not fulfill their aspirations. Entrepreneurial ambition or actions of migrant workers were documented in the literature (Roulleau-Berger & Lu, 2005). Some migrant workers chose to implement their entrepreneurial plans after returning to their rural hometown from the city. Yet similarly, they faced a lack of local government support, capital, and skills, reported by Tunon (2006), Demurger and Xu (2011). Thus Tunon, Demurger and Xu suggested that local government should promote small business start-ups through various strategies and incentives for migrants.

It is expected that migrant women may encounter difficulties regarding life adjustment due to the difference of rural and urban context. However, the participants in this study claimed to have no major problems to adapt to the urban life and accredited it to the support from their migrant social network. Yet, a closer scrutiny of their voices revealed that their understanding of adaptation problems mainly referred to problems at the basic survival level, such as finding work, getting familiar with urban surroundings, taking buses, finding residential areas and surviving financially. When they had little difficulties solving these problems, they felt they had no problems for urban life
adjustment. Zhu's (2002) study supported my interpretation. Zhu reported that there were three levels of adaptation: economic, social and psychological. The economic adaptation involved a stable job, income and domicile; social adaptation referred to their having learned new lifestyles and ways of social networking; and psychological adaptation reflected the extent to which migrants accepted urban lifestyles (cited in Yue, Li, & Feldman, 2015). Zhu claimed that Chinese internal migrants typically only adapted at the economic level, which the participants in this study apparently confirmed, whereas social or psychological adaptation to the urban lifestyles and urban social networking was rarely mentioned in my participants' responses.

Migrant women were also expected to face discrimination due to their rural background and identity of being migrants in the city, which raised the need of coping with discrimination (Wang et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2011; Seeberg & Luo, 2012). Lin and his colleagues (2011) who researched migrants in Beijing related the experience of discrimination to the male gender, being married at least once, poorer health status, shorter duration of migration, and middle range of personal income. However, most of the participants in this study did not feel they were being discriminated against on the basis of their rural identity. This was possibly due to their female gender, single status, good health, and individual personal differences. Another possible reason was that they mostly interacted with migrants in work and life and were given credit for working diligently. Several of the participating women did note that they learned to dress well early on to avoid the backward image of rural residents. Tan (2011) reported that it was
hard to distinguish young rural migrants from their urban counterparts from their external appearance.

**Communication and interpersonal skills.** After migrating from the rural areas to the city, migrants have a significant need to express themselves in ways that are appropriate to the urban cultures and situations in which they find themselves. Most of the participating women felt little confidence and recognized their weakness in communication. Jacka (2006) stated that migrant women in Beijing had a sense of inferiority in communication because in the context of Chinese culture, communication skill was a marker of high status resulting from formal education and public interactions which most migrant women lacked. This assertion was confirmed by my findings. Due to weakness and inferiority in communication, the participating women had strong aspirations to improve communication skills. Yet only some of them did improve the skills while others did not know how to do so. Their deficits raised the need to provide migrant women training or assistance regarding the improvement of communication skills.

Migrant women are expected to speak up for themselves when their legitimate rights or interests of migrants are violated by employers, for example, when they experience long working hours (Tan, 2000; Tian, 2011), physical assault and personal humiliation from supervisors (Wong & Lee, 2003; Tian, 2011), unequal pay (Tian, 2011), and overdue wage payments (Liu, 2004, Tian, 2011). Though a small percentage of the participants in this study had confronted these situations, only some of them spoke of being able to speak up on their own behalf in work, especially after they had worked for
several years. Other women, especially those who just began working, were less able to express their needs and protect their rights in work.

Most of the participants in this study were doing well in interpersonal skills because they were confined to and good at maintaining their rural migrant social network. They had little chance to socialize with non-kin urban residents or to build social ties because of labor and residential segregation and hierarchical constraints in network-building. This is consistent with the literature (Yue et al., 2013; Li, 2006; Fan, 2004). Yue et al.’s (2013) research found that social networks with urban residents contributed greatly to the acculturation and psychological integration of migrants. They reported that “migrants with more non-kin resident ties tend to have higher modernity…and sense of belonging” (p. 1716). This may explain why the participants in this study only adapted to urban life at the basic survival level with limited evidence of acculturation and psychological integration.

In my study, smart phones enhanced the maintenance of migrant social network by presenting multiple ways of communication such as through phone calls, texts, video chat and social media, which was consistent with Sun (2014) and Wallis’ (2013) report. Yet, I further agree with Wallis (2013) that, as much as mobile phones can be applied to “maintain community and a sense of belonging”, they can also be implicated “in the further marginalization” of migrant workers as a group (p. 5).

Coping with emotions and stress. Emotional and stress-coping skills are closely related to individual mental health and well-being. Among my study participants, the major risk factors that produced negative emotions and stress were extremely long work
hours, financial pressure, family separation, unreasonable scold or unfair treatment in work, challenging jobs or positions, and intimate relationship conflicts. Stress from long work hours and financial pressure was most severe and experienced by a larger participant population compared to other stressors. I discussed about the stressor, long work hours, in the following paragraph and another stressor, financial pressure, at the end of this chapter under “Gender, life skills and capabilities” section. Most of the migrant women were capable to cope with negative emotions appropriately and control levels of stress. But two participants who went through extreme family relations conflict raised the need for extra help and support.

Excessive working hours had a negative impact on the participating women who were assembly line workers, resulting in physical and psychological stress. However, without long working hours, they would not make sufficient money for themselves or their family. Thus, they chose to endure the excessive working hours and the stress instead of requesting shorter hours or taking days off. This finding was consistent with the findings reported by Kan (2013); Robson and Ward (2012); and the Fair Labor Association (2011). Ozimek (2012) and the Fair Labor Association (2011) stressed that some migrant workers choose to work long hours in order to receive sufficient pay. Therefore, solely decreasing working hours will not improve the labor conditions, nor would migrants prefer such solutions.

Keeping close contact with family, relatives and friends from the same rural regions is an important way for the participants in this study to cope with homesickness, loneliness or other negative emotions. This is consistent with Li’s (2006) and Jacka’s
(2006) findings that migrants maintained close contact with their family and extended family back in their villages to avoid loneliness in the city. On the other hand, communicating with friends within their migrant network allowed the participating women to discuss common experiences, expressing mutual affections, understanding and trust, which concurred with Wen and Hanley’s (2015) findings on migrants in Shanghai.

In addition, to cope with negative emotions or stress, the participating women sometimes chose to stay alone, watch television, listen to music, do positive thinking and psychological reasoning, write diaries, pray, read the Bible or play with smart phones. Smart phones contributed to their emotional and stress coping by providing them multiple means of communication, virtual pleasure and emotional release, which confirmed Lin and Tong's (2008) finding regarding migrants in southern China.

In the literature, there were contradictory findings on the psychological well-being of migrants. Li et al (2007) and Chen (2011) reported no significant difference between the psychological well-being of rural-to-urban migrants and urban non-migrants in a rich eastern coastal province and in Beijing respectively. However, Jiang et al (2007) and Qiu et al (2011) reported that the mental health level of migrant workers in Western China (Chongqing and Chengdu) was significantly worse than that of the Chinese norm. In my study, since most of the participants did not report severe depressive symptoms or mental health problems and were capable of coping with negative emotions and stress, I claimed that they had maintained good psychological well-being. Yet, it did not mean that the risk factors that caused negative emotions and stress can be ignored. My findings highlighted the importance of applying emotional and
stress-coping skills to counter the risk factors. As far as the two participating women who faced extreme family relationship conflict and felt extremely stressed, there was a need for extra help in the form of counseling service and mentoring support.

**Research Question 2: Informal Learning Sources**

Research Question 2 asked, from the young migrant women’s perspective, what are the informal learning sources for life skills? I found my participants’ informal learning sources for life skills included: their migrant social network, work environment, church/religious practice, the Internet and books, among which, the migrant social networks was the leading learning source.

Literature on international migration and rural-to-urban migration in China reported that social networks could be vital informal learning sources for migrants through whom they can gain information, access resources, and make decisions about migration and further learning (Jackson, 2010; Monkman, 1999; Wen & Hanley, 2015; Li, 2006; Jacka, 2006). Jackson (2010) specifically pointed out migrant women more than migrant men who were international migrants depended on and benefited from the informal learning that emerged from social spaces because women more often lacked formal education opportunities. My study was consistent with the above literature. The social networks my participants had, which I call “migrant social networks”, did serve as the most important and most-widely used informal sources of life skills learning. Through the network, my participants gained information about jobs, migration destinations and resources for city adaptation that facilitated their decision making and problem solving. They also learned communication and interpersonal skills, such as how
to maintain relationships through cell phones and social media. The migrant social networks also aided the sharing of common experiences and feelings and development of emotional and stress-coping skills.

Smart phones facilitated migrants’ communication with their social network and contributed to learning online communication skills. Some of these skills can be quite sophisticated. Lin and Tong (2008) reported that migrant workers in Southern China acquired creative writing and communicative tactics in fashioning an attractive self on the net.

Learning from books was also consistent with Seeberg and Luo’s (2012) previous research discovered that the Chinese migrant women bought “books on how to develop sales skills” to cultivate their communication and sales skills (p. 365).

In chapter 2, the literature review, I combined Livingstone (2001) and Schugurensky’s (2000) theory regarding the categories of informal learning and divided “informal learning” into three newly constituted categories: intentional self-directed/collective informal learning, incidental or tacit informal learning, and informal education/training. This framework guided me to think deeply regarding the nature and categories of the informal learning sources revealed in this study. I found that learning from social networks, work environment and religious activities were mostly incidental or tacit informal learning unless the participants intentionally queried people within their social network or work environment regarding information or problem solving strategies. Learning from the Internet and books were mostly intentional, self-directed, informal learning because the migrants referred to these sources for a purpose. My participants
rarely engaged in informal education/training of life skills because of a lack of knowledge and accessibility regarding such opportunities.

My participants had more incidental or tacit informal learning than intentional self-directed informal learning. Since incidental or tacit learning depended heavily on the learning context, those who had no access to the learning context might not have the learning opportunity. For example, learning from the work environment and religious activities only occurred for those who worked in certain types of environments or participated in religious activities, and thus it only applied to some of my participants. Tacit learning may yield more haphazard coverage of the needs for the new context. Self-directed learning depends less on the learning context because any individual who sets learning goals and has access to the resources can meet their needs. Thus, self-directed learning is more likely to meet the real learning needs. However, in my study, self-directly learning was found among less than half of my participants. Despite the availability of books, smart phones and the Internet, most of my participants did not make full use of the available resources. A possible explanation was that they lacked the mindset of self-directed learning and the understanding of how to apply these learning resources.

My participants rarely engaged in informal education/training of life skills for two possible reasons. First, there was a lack of life skills training programs accessible to them. Although they aspired to learn communication and interpersonal skills, they were not aware of any training programs to fulfill the aspirations. Second, despite aspirations of learning certain occupational skills or life skills, migrants tended to give priority to
finding jobs and earning income and were less likely to pursue further learning opportunities, which was consistent with Monkman's (1999) findings on migrants from Mexico to California.

**Research Question 3: Empowering Properties and Impact**

The third research question was the most indirect; it examined possible empowering properties and impact of life skills as migrant women perceived them. Seeberg’s Capabilities and Empowerment Framework (CEF) proved useful in capturing the empowering properties and impact. Much of the literature on migrant women depicted them as exploited and vulnerable figures that had low overall satisfaction with their status and poor mental health (Tian, 2011; Mou et al., 2013; Lin et al, 2011). However, in exploring migrants' own voices on aspirations, their beings and doings, allows us to understand what they are capable of achieving in what has been labeled exploited social contexts.

This study found that informal learning and practice of key life skills in the city contributed to their enhanced freedom and capabilities. The empowering functionings were developed into a new framework, *Life Skill Capability Framework (LSCF)*, which presented life skill functionings in the context of migration and urbanization (see *Figure 2* below). The *LSCF* kept the first and second column of Seeberg’s *CEF* but filled in newly found functionings generated from this study in the third column. These functionings were exerted by the participating women as they informally learned and practiced life skills in the urban environment. Most of these functionings were found in the voices of most participating women, but the functionings underlined were only
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empowerment Dimensions/conditions</th>
<th>Descriptive Topics</th>
<th>Themes, Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I Well-being</strong></td>
<td><strong>Capabilities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Functionings from life skills learning &amp; practice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedoms (Sen)</td>
<td>Affective and cognitive self-expression (Unterhalter) and reflection, Intrinsic Cognitive, psychological (Stromquist, 1995), economic, and political aspects</td>
<td>Enjoyment &amp; playfulness of city/social life; Confidence; Affective and cognitive self-expression and reflection, Affective and cognitive control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II Agency</strong></td>
<td>Decision Making(Unterhalter) or Choosing a Functioning (Sen), as an expression of freedom (Sen), Capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004) Intrinsic Cognitive, psychological, economic, and political (Stromquist, 1995),</td>
<td>Making strategic choices about migration destination &amp; jobs; Choosing learning specific occupational/entrepreneurial skills; Coping with gender vulnerabilities; Expressing themselves &amp; speak up for self in work &amp; negotiating about wage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III Achievement</strong></td>
<td>(a) Political State/condition (Seeberg, Stromquist, 1995) Instrumental; Structures (Narayan-Parker 2005) b) Subjective rientation/positionality, (Seeberg, Stromquist, 1995) Intrinsic-Instrumental Relational (Kabeer, 1999) (c) Objective State/condition Instrumental</td>
<td>Economic independence; Financial contribution to family resources; Supportive migrant social network; Emotional stability; The possession of key life skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions to achieve freedoms</td>
<td>Supportive social/political/economic conditions (Nussbaum, 2011); Demonstrated conditions and sites for social change (Stromquist, 2015)</td>
<td>Social-economic constraints: Limited formal education; Lack of occupational training/entrepreneurial support; Labor segregation/social exclusion between migrants and urbanites</td>
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*Figure 2. Life Skill Capability Framework*
applicable to a small percentage of participating women. I claim that these underlined functionings should be enhanced for most participating women. In the framework, I also added a new row at the bottom, conditions to achieve freedoms, which was not included in Seeberg’s original CEF. Lacking supportive social/economic conditions and sites for social change was great constraints to the participating women and had limited the empowering impact of life skills, thus I included this finding in the LSCF.

The process of gaining the capabilities of different dimensions was cyclical. For example, the process of learning and applying key life skills was taking agency while the skills migrant women developed were achievement. Agency and achievement built on each other and contributed to an enhanced well-being. Seeberg’s framework enabled me to identify the cyclical process, scrutinize different dimensions of empowerment, and develop a new framework to theorize empowerment in the context of migration and urbanization.

Yu (2007) reported that migration “had significant implications on the molding of women's 'selfness' and internal sense of power” and provided women with “confidence, skill-set, steady cash, control of their earnings” (p. 14). This study confirmed Yu’s report in the way that most of the participating women obtained life skill set, economic independence and control of their earnings and some achieved confidence as they improved their life skills.

With respect to the description of migrants as exploited and vulnerable figures in the literature (Tian, 2011; Mou et al., 2013; Lin et al, 2011; Hu, 2012), I reported similar results in some aspects of their lives. For example, Hu (2012) reported that “having
migrated after limited years of schooling, migrants face high pressure from work, low satisfaction in terms of their wages” (para. 7), which applied to most of my participants. However, Hu (2012) asserted that migrants experienced “an overall lack of happiness” (para. 7). Though I did not investigate the participating women's happiness level, I claim that most of them achieved well-being, such as enjoyment of living in the city, having fun socializing with friends, gaining emotional stability as they improved their life skills and adapted to city life. These well-being functionings implied that they were not only a vulnerable, exploited population in the urban context but that they also experienced enjoyment and benefited from the opportunities provided by the context. This result sheds new light on the overall well-being migrant women have achieved.

In research alongside with Seeberg (Seeberg & Luo, 2012) and in Seeberg's (2014, 2015) other research regarding the empowerment by means of schooling of rural Chinese girls, we found that schools served as “incubators of some freedoms that were otherwise absent from their village lives within a harsh context of unfreedoms” (Seeberg, 2014, p. 691). Similarly, in this dissertation, migration and the city context also served as incubators of some freedoms that could not be obtained in their rural villages or even in rural schools. Informal learning in the urban context created a fertile social space for empowerment that was valued by migrant women.

However, I concede that the empowering properties and impact of life skills should not be exaggerated. We must openly consider their many social-economic constraints. Nussbaum (2011) stated the need for social/political/economic conditions which support “the development of internal capabilities—through education, resources to
enhance physical and emotional health, support for family care and love, a system of education, and much more” in order to achieve combined capabilities (p. 21). Similarly, Nelly Stromquist (2015) posited that education had been over-estimated as a pillar of social change although it did have empowering impact. She asserted the importance of “demonstrated conditions and sites for social change ...on the macro-and micro-dynamics that enable women's individual and collective agency” (Stromquist, 2015, p. 308). The social segregation and a lack of occupational training opportunities were aspects of the conditions and sites deemed significant to women’s empowerment by Nussbaum and Stromquist. Lacking many supportive social-economic conditions and sites for social change, the migrant women were disempowered and to a certain extent hindered from achieving combined capabilities. Therefore, I strongly recommend considering these social-economic constraints and implementing policies or strategies to counter these unfreedoms.

Although labor segregation and social exclusion was the biggest constraint, the migrant women had no aspirations of challenging or removing the constraint. Instead, they accepted and adapted to the segregated system. The reason can be explained using Khader’s (2011) adaptive preferences theory. Khader claimed that deprived individuals became accustomed to their circumstances and even came to prefer them. Their preferences were formed in response to their restricted options. The young migrant women were born with rural hukou, so were their parents and grandparents' generations. Most of the young ones had never imagined to change their rural hukou or challenge the deep-rooted hukou system. They did not have aspirations of having urban hukou and
adjusted to the segregated situation. Aspirations of having deeper sense of social and psychological integration were also not found in their voices.

Inappropriate adaptive preferences increased the difficulty to overcome oppression because the oppressed individuals accepted or preferred their conditions (Khader, 2011). Thus, Khader proposed that public institutions should intervene in the lives of oppressed women who had inappropriately adaptive preferences. I believe that similar intervention from public institutions should be conducted for the migrant women regarding their preferences for social, economic segregation.

**Gender, Life Skills, Capabilities**

In this study, gender emerged as an important feature in migrant women's lives when expressing gender related vulnerabilities, life skills application, and agency. Gender is intrinsically woven within those experiences. It is important to note that gender cannot be extrapolated for study independently or be viewed separate from the participants' age, marriage status, years of migration, education and other features of the women. In the following, I explain how gender interwove with other factors as the women applied life skills, conformed or challenged traditional gender norms.

First of all, the urban street risks, sex worker risks, premarital pregnancy and abortion risks were exclusively related to gender identity of the participating women. Most of the Shaanxi women in this study complied with the traditional gender norms and expectations for Catholic women. They rejected premarital sex, abortion, and sex work and were empowered as they developed capabilities to avoid the risks. Most of my Hubei participants, though quite different from Shaanxi participants, did not challenge the
current gender norms faced by them. Their open-minded attitudes for premarital sexual behavior or abortion were in alignment with current belief held by non-religious public. Zheng et al’s (2001) study on 146 non-religious young migrant women in 5 large Chinese cities reported that some of the young female migrant workers were sexually active and living with their boyfriends, most of whom expected to marry each other, and induced abortion was often the outcome because few of these women used contraception.

Second, as Liang and Chen (2004) claimed, traditionally Chinese women “have always migrated, not to find jobs, but to migrate to their husbands' homes or to live with family members” (p. 438). This tradition has changed since 1990s after China’s open door policy and globalization; the majority of migrant women migrated to do business or factory work instead of for marriage. My study confirmed the change. Almost all the participating women, during the first few years of migration, migrated mainly for economic reasons and partially for other reasons such as personal development. But as they reached marriage age or got married, they considered about the needs of family and marriage greatly when making decisions regarding relocation and changing jobs, which was in accordance with gender expectations. For example, four out of five engaged or married participating women were more likely to engage in family-centered job mobility, while most of the other single women were more likely to engage in work-centered job mobility. The engaged or married participating women made decisions based on what they valued most and critically thought of the cost and benefit. Most of them were happy about the decisions. Li and Liang’s (2016) large-scale survey conducted in Pearl River Delta Region of China found that migrant women were less likely to change jobs for
work-related reasons and more likely to engage in family-centered job mobility. They asserted that “marriage did not disadvantage migrant women more than men in either work centered or family centered job mobility, and that there was a declining trend of female disadvantage in family-centered job mobility, which all pointed to the transformative role migration plays for rural migrants” (abstract).

Third, under certain situations, the older and/or married migrant women took re-gendered identity. In my study, young single migrant women did not encounter overwhelming financial stress. However, the older and/or married migrant women experienced great financial pressure due to their increasing individual or family expenses such as the expenses in learning new skills, supporting their elders, buying houses and affording their children’s education. Wong and Song (2008) asserted that financial difficulties stood out as one of the most stressful issues for migrants in Shanghai, and male migrants experienced greater stress. They reasoned that men were expected to be the financial supporters of their family. However, in my study, the participating women, though not traditionally viewed as the breadwinner of the family, shouldered the economic responsibility and stress with their husbands or parents and challenged traditional gender roles.

Finally, two special cases of my participants challenged traditional gender norms that females should be submissive to parents before marriage and to husbands after marriage. Zhu Ning shared, “When I was a child, my father beat me and my sister often when losing his temper. That’s why I left home at very young age (age 15) and tried to be independent.” Pang Shishi was abused by her husband and parents-in-law. Finally,
she left her husband's house and migrated to another city. These two women took re-
gendered identity and confirmed Jacka's (2006) statement that migration provided women
a liberating sense of autonomy from parental and spousal authority.

As far as how gender made a difference in learning and applying communication,
interpersonal skills, and emotional, stress-coping skills, this study did not reveal clear
themes. Future study is needed to investigate the experiences of migrant men regarding
how they learn and apply such skills in order to make comparison with the experience of
migrant women and to identify the role of gender in this aspect. As far as the unfreedoms
that migrant women experienced, namely the social-economic constraints that prohibited
women from having greater freedoms, this study agreed with the literature (Yue et al.,
2013; Li, 2006; Fan, 2004; Yue, Li, & Feldman, 2015) that it was applicable to both male
and female migrant workers.

**Conclusion**

The significance of this study is threefold. First, this study makes an original
contribution by focusing on two understudied population of new generation migrant
women in China: one, women from poor, rural areas of western China who migrated
within their home province of Shaanxi and who also comprised a religious minority; and
two, women from comparatively better off rural areas of central China who migrated
within their home province of Hubei or returned to home province of Hubei after inter-
provincial migration. Most studies to date have focused only on migrant women in
China's eastern cities, a majority of whom were inter-provincial migrants, originating in
western or central China. Few studies have looked at intra-provincial female migrants.
The Catholic background of the majority participants in this study is also rather unique among migrants in China. Therefore, this study has diversified and extended existing knowledge about China's migrant women.

Second, this study makes a significant contribution to the literature on gender-and-migration in China, specifically the theorization of empowerment in the context of migration and transformation of gender norms or roles in China. The interplay of complex social, cultural and biological factors was also examined to uncover empowerment process of migrant women.

Third, this study covered the gaps in life skill literature by investigating informal learning of key life skills in the context of urban China. Compared to formal and non-formal learning of life skills that is mostly studied by non-profit organizations, informal learning of life skills is much underexplored though it takes place frequently in our daily lives. In addition, this study elaborated the applied meaning of key life skills in real life from women’s perspectives and thus enriched the original abstract definition of key life skills provided by WHO (1997).

Lastly, this study connected life skill concept with capability approach theory. It provided theoretical and empirical support to back NGO's claim regarding the significance of life skills. It also contributed to the development of capability approach theory with empirical research.

My study revealed that migrant women had informally learned and applied all key life skills and were able to protect themselves against gender vulnerabilities to a certain extent. Many of them felt the need for extra education on communication skills and a few
felt the need for extra instruction on emotional, stress coping skills or desired counseling help. Migrant women strived to adapt to urban life at the survival level and aimed toward living the lives they valued. Informal learning created a fertile space for empowerment, where they enhanced their agency, capabilities and material and inner well-being. The sources of learning were confined to rural migrant social network from home, at work and church, the occasional self-help book, and growing phone and Internet use.

This study also uncovered social-economic barriers that prevented migrant women from fully practicing life skills and obtaining greater freedoms. The removal of social-economic barriers is extremely difficult because they are systematic and structural barriers that would require fundamental changes in policy design and implementation. However, the existence of such barriers prohibited migrant women from reaching their potential, which resulted in waste of talents and inscribed further social inequity and injustice in the national urbanization narrative.

**Implications and Recommendations**

This dissertation study may draw Chinese government's attention for the following reasons. First, Chinese government has been trying to promote harmonious society since 2005. This new socio-economic vision was initiated by previous Chinese president Hu Jintao in response to the increasing social injustice, inequality and conflict because of economic growth. Second, Chinese government has also given more concern to its international image and the Human Development Index rankings of United Nations Development Programme. Chinese government would endeavor to improve the quality of its people’ lives in order to get higher ranking. Last and most importantly,
development literature has provided convincing evidence on the transgenerational benefits of educating and empowering women, which has encouraged Chinese government to support women's education and empowerment. For these reasons, the findings of this study may have addressed Chinese government's concerns and provided them valuable suggestions on promoting migrant women's well-being and empowerment.

I strongly suggest the Chinese government plan and execute policies in the following aspects. First, provide more affordable occupational skills training and career counseling service for migrant population. Second, offer more financial and other kinds of support to migrants’ entrepreneurial activities. The support could include micro-loans, business consulting services, and training for entrepreneurial and business management skills. Third, address labor and social segregation between migrants and local urbanites; promote equality and social-cultural integration for migrant population.

The findings of this study suggest that there is a significant need to provide life skill programs for migrant women in China. The purpose of such programs would be to improve migrant women's levels of life skills and thus their capabilities to live better, more self-valued lives in the city. Based on my findings, I raise the following suggestions for the Chinese government and NGOs who may initiate life skills programs for Chinese migrant women. First, such programs should focus more on the learning and practice of communication skills and emotional, stress-coping skills in order to meet the needs of migrants. Second, such programs should provide information and resources related to occupational training and entrepreneurial support. Third, these programs should plan some social events for migrants and urbanites to communicate and network.
Fourth, these programs should aim at building the self-directed learning capacity of migrant women and encourage them to make best use of informal learning sources accessible to them. The core concept of capability approach is to empower individuals’ capability of pursuing what they aspire and value. Thus, it is significant to develop their self-directed learning capacity. The *life skill capability framework* generated from this study can be applied as an instruction for the development of such capacity.

Moreover, life skill programs should also pay attention to the sexual and reproductive health of migrant women. Most of the participating women were religious minority and performed well in coping with premarital pregnancy, abortion, and sex work risks. However, for a larger non-religious female migrant population, I claim that premarital pregnancy, abortion risks and sex worker risks should be given sufficient concern by the Chinese government, NGOs and the public. I support AED (2009) and WHO’s (1997) suggestion that, in life skills education programs, the distribution of correct information related to sexually transmitted infections, birth control and sexual health should be combined with life skills (i.e. using assertiveness to resist pressure for unprotected sex).

Regarding possible and potential organizations that are suitable to develop life skill programs, this study suggests that local religious community could be one of them besides Chinese government and NGOs. Religious communities, though varied in beliefs and missions, are normally concerned with community development and fellowship for their own members (e.g. Catholic, Christian), and/or charity services for deprived, vulnerable population (e.g. Buddhist community). Thus, religious communities are
highly suggested to organize life skill programs for migrant women because such programs are in alignment with their missions and interests.

**Limitations**

Although this study revealed information about how a small portion of rural-to-urban young migrant women perceived their informal learning and application of life skills in the urban context, the limitations of the research were recognized. Despite the fact that my participants covered a variety of occupations such as factories, service sectors and semi-professional occupation, the findings were not generalizable to all young migrant women in the city due to small number of participants. Additionally, since the age of my participants ranged from 18 to 29, their experiences may not be applicable to migrant women at a different age range. To address the limitations, the sample size could be increased; migrant women of a different age range could be included, as could migrants in other regions of the country and those of minority ethnicity.

One possible limitation of this research is that some incidental learning or socialization might have happened in the XS' work and life context, which might not be identified due to the limited research time for interview and fieldwork observation. However, due to the long-term research relationship between the researcher and the majority of the participants and the use of multiple data collection method, I believe that this research has captured most of the key informal learning sources for life skill learning. For future research on this topic, I suggest the researcher spend more time with the
participants and be immersed in the work and life context in order to better understand their informal learning experiences.

In spite of these limitations, this research contributed not only to the knowledge of Chinese internal migrant women's experiences of learning and applying life skills in urban context, but also added to the elaboration of the human development capability approach. It advocates for the importance of providing life skills training programs and other similar social and educational assistance for migrant women. It also provides practical suggestions on the design of these programs.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study provides some important recommendations for future research. First, scholars could conduct a comparison study of life skills learning experiences of male and female migrants. Male and female migrants work in segregated labor sectors, thus male migrants are much likely to encounter different vulnerabilities and challenges specifically related to their gender and occupation. It is necessary to explore male migrants’ unique needs and provide them effective life skills programs. Second, there is a need to study a group of migrant women who have participated in certain life skill programs in China. Their life skill learning experiences can be compared the findings of this research in order to uncover the difference between informal learning and non-formal learning of life skills and the empowering impact. Third, future research could aim at investigating the generalizability of this study in different context. For example, researchers could examine a group of migrant women of from different geographic locations, occupations
(e.g. domestic servants, electronic factory workers), and even different countries (e.g. South Asian countries) to make comparison with this study.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Appendix A

Interview Questions

Demographic information Questions

1. How old are you? How old were you when you first came to city and stayed over 6 months?

2. What’s the reason you first came to city and stayed over 6 months, for high school/vocational high school or for work?

3. What’s you education level?

4. Where are you from? How far is it from its nearest city? How far is it from a big city nearby?

5. How many years have you been in the city?

6. What have you been doing during these years?

Decision making/problem solving in work and life

7. Why did you decide to come to the city?

8. When you first came to the city, how did you find a job? Where did you stay?

9. How did you feel at that time?

10. What kind of difficulties did you have at that time?

11. How did you cope with these difficulties?

12. What do you think of the city, city people and their life?

13. Do you think you live healthily in the city?
14. What kind of big decisions have you made recently? How did you make that decision?

15. What kind of problems or concerns do you have recently? How do you deal with it?

16. What are your plans for the near future? (Do you want to stay in the city or you want to go home? Plans for schooling? For moving to other places?)

**Violence prevention in life**


18. Do you have to go home at late night? Can the door be locked well? Do you live alone or have roommates?

19. Did you encounter any violence against you in/near the place you live?

20. Did you encounter any violence against you in the city?

**Communication/Interpersonal skills in work environment**

21. Did you like your job? And do you like your job?

22. How was/is your relationship with your colleagues and boss?

23. Do you have friends in the work place? Do you hang out?

24. Does the manager/boss treat you nice? Have you been scolded unreasonably or treated unequally (i.e. late payment, fine because of your fault)? Tell me the situation…

25. How is your work environment? Do you like it? (Any health-related risks?)
26. Was/Is the work environment risky/ may do harm to your physical health?

Communication/Interpersonal skills in life

27. What do you do after work or during weekends?

28. Do you have friends? (a lot or some?) Are they from the village or from the city? How do you become good friends?

29. Do you have good relationship with families? How often do you contact/meet them?

30. Did/do you have a boyfriend? How is the relationship?

31. What do you think of your communication skills? (Are you able to express yourselves, both verbally and non-verbally, tell others your opinions in work/life?)

32. Do you ask help in life or in work? What kind of help? From whom do you ask for help?

33. Have you ever have conflict with your friends? How do you deal with it?

34. Do you turn to somebody for advice sometimes? What kind of advice? From whom do you turn to?

Cope with emotion and stress in life and work

35. Have you ever felt very sad or angry or frustrated in work? i.e. about the colleague, boss, or work task. Tell me the situation…

36. Have you ever felt very stressful in work? Where does the stress come from? How do you deal with it?
37. Have you ever felt very stressful living in the city? Where does the stress come from? How do you deal with it?

38. How do you feel everyday (most of the days)? Use some words to describe your feelings for most of your days (eg. Happy, stressful, peaceful, lonely, negative, positive)

39. In what situations will you have bad emotions (i.e. sad, frustrated, angry, lonely, homesick, and stressful)? How do you deal with it? 40. In what situations will you have good emotions (happy, satisfied, positive, safe, and hopeful)?

41. Have you lost your temper? To whom?

Mental health

42. Do you think people from the rural areas are discriminated in the city? In what situations will they feel discriminated?

43. Have you experienced discrimination in the city? How does that happen? How do you deal with it?

44. What do you think psychological health mean?

45. Have you felt very down/frustrated/depressed ever? Tell me the situation… does it happen often? How do you cope with these emotions?

46. Have you thought about committing suicide?

47. Do you think you are mentally healthy? How do you deal with the issue?

Informal learning sources
48. What kind of media did you use? (books [self-help books, Bible, sales books, other books], magazine [sexual health magazine, other health magazine], TV [all kinds of TV programs such as life and health programs, communication programs], Computer, cellphone [all kinds of social media], people [colleagues, friends, relatives], community, work-related activities [work related training, religious activities, community voluntary work] or other activities [hang out with friends])

   **Decision making regarding sex safety and birth control (for participants who have boyfriends/husbands).**

49. What do you think safe sex mean?

50. Do you know how to have birth control? Where does the knowledge come from?

51. Do you have friends or colleagues who become pregnant unexpectedly? What do they do? What advice will you give them?

52. Will you have birth control, or insist using condoms to have safe sex?

53. Have you encountered sexual harassment in work situation (boss, manager, colleagues, and customers) or in life? What did you do with it?
APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
Appendix B

IRB Approval Letter

From: Richmond, Aileene On Behalf Of RAGS Research Compliance

Sent: Thursday, July 10, 2014 2:21 PM

To: Seeberg, Vilma vseeberg@kent.edu

Cc: Luo, Shujuan sluo1@kent.edu

Subject: IRB Level I, category 2 approval for Protocol application #14-354 -
please retain this email for your records.

RE: Protocol #14-354 - entitled “The advancement of life skills in the process of
rural-urban transition and how does it contribute to girls wellbeing and empowerment?
Case study of rural Western Chinese girls”

We have assigned your application the following IRB number: 14-354. Please
reference this number when corresponding with our office regarding your application.
The Kent State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved your
Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants as Level I/Exempt from
Annual review research. Your research project involves minimal risk to human subjects
and meets the criteria for the following category of exemption under federal regulations:
Exemption 2: Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, and Public Behavior Observation

This application was approved on July 10, 2014. ***Submission of annual review
reports is not required for Level I/Exempt projects.
If any modifications are made in research design, methodology, or procedures that increase the risks to subjects or includes activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, those modifications must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation.

Please contact an IRB discipline specific reviewer or the Office of Research Compliance to discuss the changes and whether a new application must be submitted.

http://www.kent.edu/research/researchsafetyandcompliance/irb/index.cfm

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); FWA Number 00001853.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at Researchcomplainece@kent.edu or by phone at 330-672-2704 or 330.672.8058.

Respectfully,

Kent State University Office of Research Compliance

224 Cartwright Hall | fax 330.672.2658

Kevin McCreary | Research Compliance Coordinator | 330.672.8058 |

kmccrea1@kent.edu

Paulette Washko | Manager, Research Compliance |330.672.2704|

Pwashko@kent.edu
From: Holbrook, Victoria On Behalf Of RAGS Research Compliance  
Sent: Wednesday, July 08, 2015 12:17 PM  
To: SEEBERG, VILMA  
Cc: Luo, Shujuan  
Subject: IRB approval for MODIFICATION(S) (protocol #14-354) - retain this email for your records  

RE: IRB # 14-354 entitled “The advancement of life skills in the process of…”  

Hello,  

The Kent State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your protocol amendment/change request. It is understood that the research is continuing with modifications including to interview face-to-face, to add a second recruitment site, and to use verbal consent for the Chinese participants. The modification to this protocol was approved on July 8, 2015.  

*If applicable, a copy of the IRB approved consent form is attached to this email. This “stamped” copy is the consent form that you must use for your research participants. It is important for you to also keep an unstamped text copy (i.e., Microsoft Word version) of your consent form for subsequent submissions. Note that if you are conducting an online study the stamped consent form is only for record keeping purposes.  

Federal regulations and Kent State University IRB policy requires that research be reviewed at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year.
HHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design, or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB must also be informed of any adverse events associated with the study. The IRB further requests a final report at the conclusion of the study.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); FWA Number 00001853.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at Researchcompliance@kent.edu or by phone at 330-672-2704 or 330.672.8058.

Thank you,

Kent State University Office of Research Compliance

224 Cartwright Hall | Fax 330.672.2658

Victoria Holbrook | Graduate Assistant | 330.672.2384 | vholbroo@kent.edu
Tricia Sloan | Administrator | 330.672.2181 | psloan1@kent.edu
Kevin McCreary | Assistant Director | 330.672.8058 | kmccrea1@kent.edu
Paulette Washko | Director | 330.672.2704 | pwashko@kent.edu

For links to obtain general information, access forms, and complete required training, visit our website at www.kent.edu/research.
APPENDIX C

SAMPLE OF FIELD TRIP NOTES
Appendix C

Sample of Field Trip Notes

I have been to inner city villages and apartment communities (xiao qu) in Xi’an. The living conditions and rents are quite different. Most middle school or high school dropout migrant girls rent a single room in a house in inner city villages. The rent is 380-500 RMB per month. There is no private restroom in the room. The single room is usually 15-25 m². They share a simple restroom with another four-five people or families, which have no shower supplies. There is no kitchen, so they cook inside the room or in the corridor. The corridor is sometimes very dark and narrow. There is no air-conditioner but a fan in the bedroom. It is very hot in the summer in Xi’an, the average temperature is about 100 degrees thus people living in these places suffer a lot. In the same floor, there are 4-5 other rooms rented by other people. The house is very crowded. The security is not good. Even though the doors can be locked, sometimes thieves can break in and steal their valuable stuff.

People who have well-paid jobs in the city choose to rent an apartment in apartment communities (xiao qu). The rent is 900-1500 RMB per month depending on the location. It usually includes bedroom, living room and bathroom, and has much nicer environment and better security. They have better doors and sometimes there are security people at the front gate. For all the girls I interviewed, only the girl who just graduated from the college rent a two-bedroom apartment with her cousin in the apartment, sharing 1300 RMB rent per month. The two vocational school graduates, one tries to find a job in
kindergarten that provides dorms, the other who works for construction company lives in the house provided by the company. All other migrant girls stay in inner city villages.

There are lots of hair salons or massage centers in the inner city villages. Many of these places provide sex service, said by Pan Jian. Thus, this is one of the risks of living in the villages. Migrant girls who could not find jobs in other places may choose to work in these places and provide sex service. Pan Jian paid attention to girls from his village and persuaded them not to work in these places, though many girls did not know what risks they may have in these places.

It’s much cheaper to live in Qingshan Qu. Girls can rent a house in the suburban villages close to the city center. The rent is about 150-250 RMB per month for a house with a few bedrooms, living room, and restroom. It is about 10-20 minutes away from the city center. Most of the girls I interviewed rent these kinds of houses with friends or families. There are much fewer massage center or hair salons in these places, thus girls have less risk to get involved in sexual service business. Besides, they are much safer because their parents are around.
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