

## **Making the Cut: A Case Study of Migrant Workers in the Chinese Hairstyling Industry**

by: Benjamin Ross

### **Abstract**

The following paper examines employment and residential conditions of barbershop workers in Fuzhou, China. Other than where cited, information presented is based off of an ethnographic project I conducted on my own accord in May of 2007. As part of the project, I worked for one month as a hair washer in a Fuzhou barbershop, putting in eleven hour shifts for 27 days, as was the regular schedule for all employees. After my official employment ended, I remained in daily contact with my coworkers for a period of four months, spending several hours per day in the barbershop as an observer, as opposed to being an actual employee. The goal of this study was to gain a firsthand understanding of the lives and working conditions of China's floating population, specifically those in the hairstyling industry. In this the following sections, I will be examining the conditions of three classes of barbershop laborers in terms of job descriptions, residential accommodations and obstacles they face as migrants living in the city. All images were taken by the author. Images and names are used with subjects' consent.

### **Background on China's Floating Population**

As a result of the economic reforms of the 1980s and 90s, China's economy opened up to world markets, ushering in a massive influx of foreign capital and unprecedented economic growth. A corollary of this economic growth has been rapidly increasing demands for labor in urban centers, leading to what many demographers have called the most expansive migration in human history (Fei 9-10). For those residing in China's agricultural areas, the cities offer improved job prospects, the potential for additional social welfare benefits, as well as change of scenery and daily lifestyle.

As a means to regulate the burdens associated with the continuous influx of migrants, the Chinese government uses the *hukou* (household registration) system to limit housing and social welfare benefits to only those with official local residency status (He, Li and Wu 441). Two kinds of *hukou* exist: rural and urban, and each individual has to register in a single place (city, town, village, etc) of residence. Urban *hukou* entitles several benefits which can include urban employment, pension, and subsidized food, housing, and healthcare. Those with urban *hukou* may also enroll their children in city schools without paying the surcharge required for those without local residency. Furthermore, many city governments require enterprises both public and private to hire only local residents, thus limiting the white collar job opportunities for those without urban *hukou* (Liu 136-137).

China's urban population can be sub-divided into three groups: non-migrant natives, permanent migrants, and temporary migrants. Non-migrant natives consist of those who were born in the city to

parents with urban *hukou*. Permanent migrants are those of rural stock who have relocated to the city and obtained urban *hukou*. Those who have relocated to the city, but have yet to obtain urban *hukou* are classified as temporary migrants (He, Li and Wu 441) or “floating population.” Among the migrant population, those with urban *hukou* were outnumbered by those without 13 to 1 (Poston and Zhang 694).

The main flow of China’s migration patterns has been from the interior provinces which are heavily dependent on agriculture to the more developed regions along the eastern coast (Fei 4). On a provincial level, Guangdong has experienced the greatest influx of migrants, both in total numbers and as a percentage of its population. Directly north of Guangdong lies Fujian province where this study takes place. According to the 2000 census, Fujian had a population of 34,098,000, with a floating population of 3,159,000, making Fujian one of only six mainland Chinese provinces and municipalities (out of 31) in which the floating population constitutes over 10% of the total population (Liang 472).

### **The Barbershop**

One sector of the Chinese economy which is particularly dependent on migrant labor is the hairstyling industry. Traditionally, most Chinese barbershops, if you could call them that, were small enterprises, consisting of little more than a chair in an alley, a barber, and a pair of scissors. These small ventures, some of which over time graduated to diminutive storefronts, served the sole function of cutting patrons’ hair, without offering such bourgeoisie services as facials, massages, and perms. As China’s economy expanded in the 1990’s, urbanites who a few short years before had barely enough to eat were now confounded with the new “problem” of expendable income. As a result of this, the hairstyling industry has changed rapidly to meet the needs and desires of China’s burgeoning middle class.

While the *putong* (common) haircut is still available in most Chinese cities, urban Chinese are increasingly opting to satisfy their hairstyling needs at *zhongdeng* (middle class) barbershops which offer a wider array of services. In addition to the ostensible purpose of cutting hair, middle class salons also provide a tranquil, indulging experience, coupling haircuts with a satiating hair wash and rudimentary therapeutic massage. They also provide such cosmetic services as dyes, perms, and customized styles for weddings and special events. In order to provide these extra services, *zhongdeng* barbershops require larger staffs than the those that provide the *putong* haircut, often with upwards of 30 employees. *Zhongdeng* barbershops further deviate from the *putong* haircut by their extensive investments in interior design investment. This serves to provide clientele with a modern, chic setting to compliment the overall experience and is of utmost importance when attracting customers in a competitive environment.

The service at most Chinese *zhongdeng* salons follows a particular formula whereupon arrival, patrons are greeted at the door by an employee, poured a warm cup of water, and led to the back of the salon for a pre-wash. As the patron lies on a washing bed with head in the sink, their temples are washed and massaged, to a point beyond what would be necessary if cleaning were the sole desired result. Once the hair is thoroughly washed and rinsed, the customer is offered a cleansing facial, during which ointment is rubbed into their face



Moderne is the style of choice for most *zhongdeng* barbershops. Maintaining a sleek image can be as important as the service itself in attracting clientele.

and rinsed off with a stream of warm water. To further ease the customer, employees are instructed to affably engage them in conversation, often with flattering compliments about their hair and general appearance. Upon completion of the hair wash and facial, the customer's face is draped in hot towels. Once the towels have cooled, they are removed and a fresh towel is wrapped around their head as they are led to the barber chair, where they await their haircut. During the ensuing five to ten minutes, the customer is provided with a therapeutic massage, performed by the same employee who has washed their hair. As the massage finishes, responsibility for the customer is turned over to the barber. Compared with the aforementioned process, the actual cutting of the hair is rather straightforward. A customer tells the barber what style and length they desire, the barber complies, and when the haircut is complete, the customer receives another hair wash, essentially an augmented repetition of the initial process. On average, the entire service including haircut takes one hour and fifteen minutes and costs around 30 RMB. Due to its relaxing, as opposed to purely hygienic effects, customers also frequent barbershops between haircuts solely for the hair wash service. This is a common activity among groups of friends and couples and costs roughly half the price of a haircut.

To economize on labor costs in *zhongdeng* barbershops, owners typically implement an employment segmentation pyramid. At the top of the chain is the *laoban* (owner) who is responsible for management, accounting, and in many cases still provides haircuts. Below the owner are the barbers, or as they're commonly known *shifu* (masters). Their sole responsibility is haircuts. Below the masters are the barbers' assistants or *xiao di* and *xiao mei* (little brothers and sisters) as they are called, who perform the pre and post haircut services, as well as any necessary janitorial duties.

## The Red Sun

The venue where this study takes place is The Red Sun Salon. It is located in a neighborhood referred to by its main thoroughfare, Guxi Lu, and located one mile northwest of Dong Jie Kou, the main shopping district and geographic center of Fuzhou.

As the provincial capital of Fujian, Fuzhou along with the Xiamen, both located along the Eastern coast, are the main economic engines of the region. Due their larger GDP's and opportunity for migrant work, Fuzhou and Xiamen are the only two cities in Fujian which have not rescinded quotas on their respective city populations (Chen 122). Of The Red Sun's 18 employees at the time of this study, all had been born and raised within Fujian province, yet none had originated from either Fuzhou or Xiamen. Rather, they had come from small towns, primarily in the central and western parts of the province, where economic conditions had not seen as much improvement as the coast. 17 of the 18 did not have a Fuzhou *hukou* and thus could be classified as members of the "floating population." The lone employee who could be classified as a permanent migrant was the owner, Mr. Zheng, who had applied for a Fuzhou *hukou* when he had purchased his home in the city.



Located on central Fuzhou's Guxi Lu, The Red Sun is one of four *zhongdeng* barbershops within a half mile radius.

At 30 RMB a haircut, the Red Sun is priced out of reach for the typical temporary migrant. Therefore the workforce at the Red Sun is of blunt contrast to its clientele which consists almost entirely of nonmigrant natives. The class divide is further insinuated by the pervading views of the natives that employment in a barbershop would produce a severe loss of face to individuals of native stock. This culminated with the greater educational opportunities for Fuzhou natives, ensures that the barbershop workforce in Fuzhou consists almost entirely of migrants. The following three sections will explore the lives and trajectories of these migrant barbershop employees by examining the three segments of the workforce at The Red Sun.

## Little Brothers and Sisters

At the bottom echelon of The Red Sun staff are the little brothers and sisters, whose primary responsibility is the pre-and post wash and therapeutic massage service. As the lowest ranking employees, little brothers and sisters are also responsible for the barbershop's various janitorial requirements which include sweeping hair, taking out the trash, and folding towels. Additionally, every evening at ten o'clock when The Red Sun closes, the little brothers and sisters perform a thorough

cleaning, waxing the floors, vacuuming the barber chairs, and scrubbing the bathroom, in order for the shop to be in presentable shape the following morning.

At any given time, Mr. Zheng strives to employ 10 little brothers and sisters at the Red Sun. This number can fluctuate due to the occasional unexpected firing or the sudden departure of an employee, but remains constant the majority of the time. With 5 masters on staff, this makes an even 2 to 1 ratio, fairly typical to the industry. The little brothers and sisters range in age from 17 to 21, (there was one who was 24, but this was an anomaly, not the norm), and are all migrants from small towns and counties across Fujian.

Working as a little brother or sister is not a job from which many Chinese teenagers aspire to begin a career. In the words of Chen Rong, a little brother who has worked at The Red Sun since he finished high school, “We don’t study well. If we did, we’d be in college now like some of our former classmates. Instead, we are stuck doing this (working in a barbershop). The work is boring and unpromising, but what’s the alternative?”



Little brothers and sisters perform the pre-wash service for customers awaiting haircuts.

The national education system requires that students receive a minimum score on their college entrance exam to attend college. If a student fails to reach the mark, they are afforded the option of repeating their final year of high school and taking the test once again. Few take this road, and one option for those who do not matriculate is to migrate and enter the labor force. A similar policy, albeit with a considerably lower standard, is also required to enter high school. Of the entire Chinese migrant labor force, three fourths have a middle school education level or less (Liang 484). At The Red Sun, the staff consists of a 50/50 mix between those with high school educations, and those with middle school or less. None have been to college.

Like Chen Rong, many little brothers and sisters choose to migrate straight out of high school, and a job in a barbershop can function as a gateway to a career in the hairstyling industry. Thus, each employee in The Red Sun (except cashiers who will be discussed later) began their career as a little brother or sister. The choice to migrate to Fuzhou is usually predicated on a suggestion by a friend or family member who is already in the city, and instances of blind migration are relatively scarce. Jobs in the

service industry are plentiful, and young migrants often relocate before a job has been formally secured. For many workers at The Red Sun, hairstyling is not the first industry in which they have been employed. They often progress through a sampling period, testing various jobs in order to decide which line of work is most appealing and lucrative. One little brother, named Xiao Jiang, has worked 5 different jobs in the 6 months since he left home, each in a different sector of the service industry.

“I’m young. I have lots of energy. I just want to experience as much as I can. I’ll probably quit this barbershop job in a few weeks too,” he confided to me.

Among the barbershop staff, an un-spoken divide exists among the little brothers and sisters—those who have decided to build their careers in the hairstyling industry, and those who are still “just trying it out.”

Little brothers and sisters can expect to earn between 600 and 1000 RMB per month depending on their skill levels and the flow of customers. Their pay is based primarily on commission, with 2.5 RMB awarded for each customer serviced. To ensure fairness, little brothers and sisters follow a queue to determine who will service each customer who enters the shop. If a specific little brother or sister is requested by a customer, they may jump the queue, creating a small incentive to provide memorable service.

In addition to their commission, little brothers and sisters receive a token base salary of 150 RMB per month. The main avenue for them to augment their income is to expand their skill set to include curling, dyes, and perms, which each payout a commission of 6% of the total receipts. Little brothers and sisters learn these skills through the unofficial Red Sun on-the-job training program.

“Education, education, education. It’s all about education. You never stop learning,” Mr. Zheng avers to his little brothers and sisters.

This education entails the curling, dyes, perms, and several other hair related-services not performed by the masters. During slow times in the shop, Mr. Zheng orders the little brothers and sisters to practice the various styling techniques on one another. The fruits of this training can be seen through the windows of any Chinese barbershop where little brothers and sisters display a veritable parade of perms, spikes, and polychrome dyes.

Advancing in the educational program serves three practical functions for little brothers and sisters. Firstly, the 6% commission generated from the extra services provides a substantial income supplement. Secondly, an expanded skill set carries with it an unofficial rank and clout among the other little brothers and sisters. And thirdly, a complete mastery of curling, dyes, and perms is required before little

brothers and sisters can begin training to become a master, the most significant promotion for those who remain on the barbershop career path.



A little sister looks on as Mr. Zheng instructs a master how to cut his hair. Education is a daily part of work at The Red Sun.

Little brothers and sisters, like most temporary migrants, are attracted to the cities because of higher salaries and a wider array of career prospects. Yet these advantages can quickly be offset by the higher cost of living in a large city such as Fuzhou (Zhu 72). In The Red Sun, this extra cost basis is mitigated by the fringe benefits offered to employees: the housing and meal plans. As is standard practice through

much of the service industry in China, all employees at The Red Sun are offered free housing. This consists of a

bunk in “the dormitory,” a three-bedroom unfinished apartment owned by Mr. Zheng and located on Guxi Lu, five minutes from the shop on foot.

With monthly incomes all below 1000 RMB, the most acute obstacles little brothers and sisters face in the city are pecuniary. For several, their meager allowances are further diminished by remittances required by parents to be sent home every month. Thus, living in the dormitory is a necessity for the little brothers and sisters, as renting their own housing could easily engulf 50% or more of their incomes. With the exception of one little sister, who is Mr. Zheng’s niece and lives with him, each of the little brothers and sisters reside in the dorm. Each bedroom contains 3 bunk beds, and at the time of this study, the dorm housed a total of 12 individuals: the two cashiers, both female, and one little sister in one room; 5 little brothers in another; and 4 little brothers and a male master in the third. The three bedrooms are centered around a living room, with a bathroom off to one side, containing a single shower, toilet, and sink.

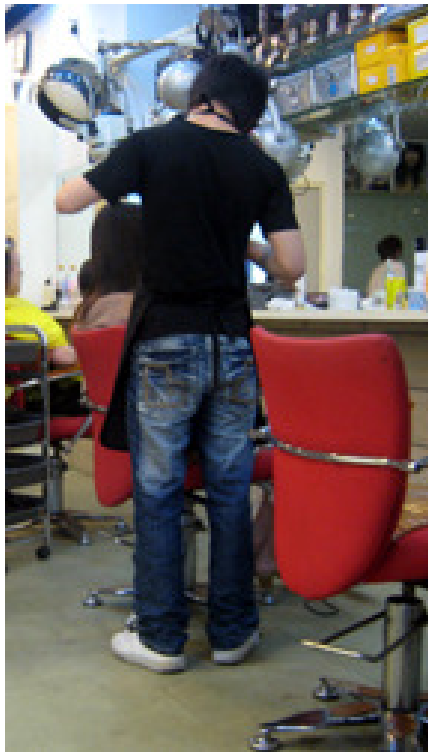
The second fringe benefit offered to Red Sun employees is the “employee meal plan,” purchasable for 200 RMB/month. Mr. Zheng hires an *ayi* (auntie) who is responsible for preparing lunch and dinner in the dormitory every day for employees who have paid for the meal plan. Breakfast is not included, and employees usually either skip the morning meal or eat a bowl of rice porridge and pickled vegetables at one of the numerous canteens located near Guxi Lu. Meals cooked by the *ayi* are kept simple, typically consisting of a stir fried green vegetable, a fried egg, and occasionally a varying meat entree, either pork or fish. At all meals, a large cauldron of white rice and a pot of brothy soup are also available. Averaged

out, each meal costs 3.3 RMB on the meal plan. By contrast, the cheapest meals available at cafeterias on Guxi Lu run between 5 and 6 RMB, and therefore the meal plan provides considerable cost savings to employees. At the time of the study, all 10 little brothers and sisters had purchased the meal plan.

### The Masters

A little brother or sister who opts to remain on the job long-term usually does so with the goal of becoming a master. This process requires roughly two years, during which the little brother or sister is constantly expanding their skill set as mentioned above. If they excel in both work and training, Mr. Zheng will allow them to begin barber instruction. While all little brothers and sisters can be trained to do dyes, perms, and curling, only the ones specifically approved by Mr. Zheng may train to become

masters, and at time of this study, only one little brother and one little sister had reached this point.



A little brother trains to become a master by cutting the hair of a fellow employee.

The job of master has several inherent advantages over that of little brother or sister, the foremost being remuneration. Masters receive half of all receipts from haircuts (equal to 15 RMB each), and in a good month can earn upwards of 2000 RMB. As most customers remain loyal to a single master, it is to their advantage to provide quality haircuts and maintain sound relationships with their clientele. Since most patrons of The Red Sun are repeat customers, it can be difficult for a new master (or one who has recently switched employers) to generate a high income. However, once a substantial customer base has been established, masters enjoy a fairly stable income which gradually increases over time. Therefore, the turnover rate among masters was considerably less than that of the little brothers and sisters, whose incomes were more subject to the vicissitudes The Red Sun's revenue fluctuations.

Masters are also excused from all janitorial duties which are the responsibility of the little brothers and sisters. This division is

most pronounced when the shop closes every evening at 10 pm, and the nightly cleaning takes place. Although no employees may leave until the area is spotless, the masters are free to relax, chat, and read the newspaper as the little brothers and sisters mob, sweep, scrub, and dust. This causes little animosity from the little brothers and sisters as it is known and respected that the masters have already put in their dues as underlings.

Of the five masters employed at the time of this study, each had lived in Fuzhou at least three years, yet none had obtained a Fuzhou *hukou*. Unlike the little brothers and sisters at the Red Sun, none of whom are married, the *hukou* issue does present immediate issues for several of the masters due to their more advanced age and domestic status. Two of the masters are married, two are engaged, and only one is single. One of the married masters, named Jiang, has a two-year-old son. I learned of Jiang's son one afternoon when he shared with me a short video of a toddler on his cell phone.

"You see that? That's my son. He doesn't even recognize me. He has no idea I'm his father."

At thirty-two, Jiang is the oldest employee in the Red Sun other than Mr. Zheng. Five years ago, he and his wife left their hometown in Western Fujian to seek employment in Fuzhou. When his wife became pregnant, they decided that the baby would remain in their hometown while Jiang and his wife returned to Fuzhou. The child would be raised by his grandparents, and only see his parents when they returned home for the Spring Festival. The decision to leave their son back home was based on two factors. Firstly, while incomes are higher in the big city, so too is the cost of living. Migrants often opt to minimize the costs associated with migration by having their children reared in the home village where living costs are less. (Zhu 72). Leaving the children in the hometown also frees the parents from the burden of childcare, allowing both to work longer hours. The second reason Jiang opted not to bring his son to Fuzhou is that since he has yet to attain a Fuzhou *hukou*, it would be impossible for his son to enroll in Fuzhou schools without paying the associated fees for non-residents. While Jiang is the only master currently facing this predicament, it is an issue which all masters know they will face in the near future.

Unlike the little brothers and sisters, all but one of the masters rents their own housing. Free housing in the dormitory is offered to all employees, but with incomes over twice as high as those of the little brothers and sisters, most masters rescind their free housing in favor of a private residence.

There is, however, one master who has opted to live in the dorm, but he does this solely because he is engaged, and hopes to save as much money as possible in order to pay for a wedding. Once this expense is paid, he plans to rent an apartment with his soon-to-be wife. While masters at The Red Sun generally do not take advantage of the free housing benefit, all but one participate in the meal plan. The one master who does not participate declines on request of his wife who insists he return home every day so she can cook him lunch.

### **The Boss**

As *laoban* of The Red Sun, Mr. Zheng serves the roles of owner, manager, teacher, and occasionally barber. As a former little brother and master who ascended the ranks of the hierarchy, Mr. Zheng represents the ultimate success story for a barbershop employee. Originally from a small town outside

the city of Nanping in Northeastern Fujian, Mr. Zheng began working as a little brother in his hometown at the age of sixteen. Several years later, after he had become a master, he moved to Nanping and opened his own shop. In 2001, he relocated to Fuzhou where he worked as a master for several years before saving up enough money (and procuring the necessary outside investment) to open The Red Sun.

Other than the cashiers who occasionally micromanage the little brothers and sisters in his absence, Mr. Zheng is the only individual who yields any true authority at The Red Sun. While the masters are indeed above the little brothers and sisters in rank, they are not responsible for any oversight or managerial duty. In addition to his managerial role, Mr. Zheng does still occasionally cut hair. However, he does so only for long-time customers, with his haircuts costing 50 RMB as opposed to 30 for a one by any of the masters.

At the time of this study Mr. Zheng's income was averaging between 5000 and 6000 RMB per month, enough so that he was able to purchase an apartment in a middle class Fuzhou neighborhood where many of his neighbors were Fuzhou natives. Mr. Zheng is married and lives with his wife and two-year-old daughter, but what most clearly separates his status from that of the other employees is that he has successfully obtained a Fuzhou *hukou*.



In addition to his managerial responsibilities, Mr. Zheng still provides haircuts for longtime customers, but at a price 20 RMB higher than haircuts from one of the masters.

Recent years have seen the Chinese government institute reforms to the *hukou* system allowing migrants to obtain local residency. However, these efforts have focused primarily on those migrants who are either well-educated or have the financial means to purchase private housing. This effectively places local residency above the reach of most of the floating population (Liang 484). Unlike Jiang, who remains part of the “floating population,” Mr. Zheng has been able to become a permanent migrant, and raise his family in Fuzhou, on account of his real estate purchase.

As a small business owner, Mr. Zheng's income affords him the means to invest in both the stock market and several business ventures, in effort to further increase his economic and social standing. One such venture is a new barbershop in which he is an investor and a principal, but is not involved in daily affairs as he is with the Red Sun. In spite of Mr. Zheng's success within the insular world of hairstyling, he still views himself a failure within the greater society.

After I finished my stint as one of his employees he confided in me, “My life has no meaning. This industry has no meaning. We work hard every day. For what? To all those Fuzhou people, we’re still just bumpkins. Someday, I’m going to get out of this industry. But if I am going to be staying in the industry, at the very least I don’t want to be doing any of the manual work.” he said.

It was his short term plan to phase himself out of cutting hair and managing The Red Sun, in favor of the new owner/investor role to which he was increasingly dedicated.

### **The Cashiers**

The third group of barbershop employees is the cashiers. At The Red Sun, there are only two, both female. As their title denotes, cashiers are responsible primarily for working the cash register and keeping record of which services are performed by which employees. Like the masters, the cashiers are exempt from the janitorial tasks undertaken by the little brothers, but their clout in barbershop affairs falls only slightly above that of the little brothers and sisters. Since they neither perform nor train for any of the tasks directly related to hair, their actual positions exist outside of the regular hierarchy of the barbershop. Unlike the little brothers and sisters or the masters, the cashiers’ skill set is not specified to the hairstyling industry. This allows them additional flexibility within the service industry should they choose to quit and search for a new job. Since their careers evolve on the periphery of the other employees, I have opted not to cover them in depth in this paper.

### **Conclusion**

A career in the hairstyling industry is an end to which few aspire in modern day China, and it would be accurate to say the vast majority of The Red Sun’s employees view their jobs as a form of consolation. “I didn’t do well in school. My family is poor. What else can I do?” is a common drone when discussing career prospects and aspirations. The lone exception to this rule is a girl named Mao Mao who aspires one day to become a famous hairdresser for the stars. She views her job at The Red Sun as a stepping stone to her ultimate goal and fundamentally enjoys her work. It should be noted that Mao Mao was raised in Tokyo, where her family emigrated to when she was 9 years old. According to Mao Mao, in Japan work in the hairstyling industry does not carry the stigma it does in China, and her outlook on her career is “very different from the others, who are more focused on money and status.” The other employees, when asked about their work, categorically deny having any affinity whatsoever towards the hairstyling industry. These attitudes are consistent across all three levels of the hierarchy. One master, who goes by the English name Adam, reiterated to me on several occasions that his dream is to illegally emigrate to the United States and become a barber in New York City.

“Here in Fuzhou a haircut only costs 30 RMB, but in New York I can charge 15 US dollars.”

Adam has a distant relative who emigrated to New York, and his accounts have inspired Adam to one day make the journey as well. However, Adam has yet been unable to procure the funds necessary to

utilize the services of a “snakehead,” one who specializes in human smuggling, and has thus remained in Fuzhou.

For most of the masters though, they are effectively stuck in their careers. After toiling for several years in the industry, they have reached a plateau point where both their income and status in urban society are effectively maximized. Their lack of college, and in some cases high school education, effectively excludes them from white collar jobs, and a switch to a different field within the service industry would result in a significant pay cut. The primary outlet for economic mobility for a master is to save money and ultimately open his own barbershop as has been the course for Mr. Zheng. The potential profits from opening one’s own shop also open the possibility of purchasing a home, the predominant method by which migrants can obtain local *hukou*.

While a career in the hairstyling industry is not viewed enthusiastically by the employees of The Red Sun, it still represents an improvement over standards from their hometown. Cheng Qing, one of the masters, puts it succinctly.

“Look, the life of a barber is boring and monotonous. But, I can either be bored in my hometown where I might make 1000 RMB per month, or I can be bored in Fuzhou and make 2000. When I go back to my hometown for the Spring Festival, I’m viewed as successful compared to those who never left.”

While the workers at The Red Sun are not particularly satisfied with their jobs, they do view them as the lesser of two negative possibilities. Furthermore, with the free housing and affordable meal plans provided, barbershop employees are effectively guaranteed a living wage, plus money for savings, as long as they remain employed. This helps offset the lack of public welfare benefits extended to those with a urban *hukou*. Even when considering the problems which arise for temporary migrants, specifically those related the *hukou*, a career in the hairstyling industry remains a viable option for rural teenagers seeking to extend their career trajectories and earn a living. It may not provide glamour and excitement nor the full social benefits enjoyed by those with local residency, but it does provide a means for subsistence and advancement within the urban milieu of 21<sup>st</sup> Century China.

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