



## Rural to Urban Migration – A Mind Movie

Zhao Yadong is 28 years old. He has a wife; a young daughter aged 5 and a baby son who is now 9 months old. He hasn't seen his son for the last six months. Zhao used to live in a small village in the province of Henan which is about 500 miles from Beijing, the capital city. His village is on the edge of the mountains and most people there are subsistence farmers and they live on the food that they grow. Almost all the families are very poor. Zhao's family, like others in the village has a small plot of land that they rent. All land is communal and belongs to the whole village. It is controlled, like all aspects of life in the village by a small group of communist party officials. Zhao believes that many of the officials are corrupt and often accept bribes. Some of his neighbours have lost their land because the village officials have sold it to developers who want to build some new houses on the edge of their village.

Zhao's home is small and has just three rooms. As well as his wife and children, his 60 year old mother and father also lives with them. The house is built from local stone. Water is drawn from an outside well and there is no electricity. The family has enough to eat but this is mainly noodles, eggs and vegetables. It is rare to eat meat. They keep chickens and own a water buffalo which is used to pull the plough in the fields. There is very little furniture or modern items in the house. A neighbour owns a small television and sometimes their daughter is allowed to go and watch with the neighbours children. Zhao and his wife earn very little money, typically about 500 yuan or £40 per year.

Like most families in China, Zhao and his wife were encouraged by local officials to have just one child but since it was a girl, they were allowed to try for a second child and were delighted when it turned out to be a boy. Zhao, however, knew that he would be unable to provide a good education and all the things that his children needed if he stayed in the village so six months ago he borrowed some money and travelled 300 miles to Zhengzhou, the nearest large city. Zhengzhou has a population of two and half million people. Many of the people are very rich compared to those in Zhao's village.

Zhao knew a man in the city who came from his village and he was allowed to stay with him when he arrived. The man lived in a single, cramped and dirty room with three other men who all worked on construction sites in the city. When Zhao had got off the bus, he couldn't quite believe his eyes. All around him were cars, lorries, buses, bicycles and vehicles of all descriptions. As far as he could see into the distance, through the haze of grey pollution, there were cranes and new buildings covered in bamboo scaffolding. Everywhere was very noisy and very busy.

On his first day, Zhao was told to join a group of men standing on the corner of a busy road junction. Each carried a heavy bamboo pole. These were 'bang bang men' willing to do any work that involved carrying things. The pole is laid across their shoulders and



sacks or other objects hang from the ends of the pole. The work is backbreaking and the day is long but each man can earn up to 500 yuan (£40) a month, as much as Zhao was earning in a whole year.

After doing odd jobs for a month and often working 6 or 7 days a week, Zhao was fortunate; his friend got him a job on one of the construction sites. Again the working days were long and the work often dirty and dangerous but now Zhao was earning almost 1000 yuan a month (£80). However, he hadn't seen his baby son or his wife and daughter for over six months. He continued to live in the one small room with the four other workers. His tiny space was just sufficient to roll out a sleeping mattress each evening. His two meals a day were still very simple but he was beginning to save some money and each month he sent some to his family in the village. He hoped now that his family would be able to buy some better food and some luxuries. His children would be able to go to school and get a good education. Maybe they would even be able to join him in the city.

At the end of his first six months, Zhao's wife wrote to say that his father had fallen ill. They had taken him to the nearby town where there was a small hospital but the hospital wanted over 3000 yuan for an operation and the drugs that he needed. This would be almost all the money that Zhao had saved.....