

CHINESE MIGRANTS

在中國的生活...和希望

Their experiences in their own words

他們向你親自細說自己的經驗



This collection of stories forms part of a research project into Forced Labour for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

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CHINESE MIGRANTS

华人移民劳工

Their experiences in their own words

他们向你亲自细说自己的经验

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INTRODUCTION

What is life like for Chinese migrant workers who have come to the UK in the last ten years?

This collection of stories is about:

- * what draws people from China to the UK;
- * how they made the move;
- * their experiences when they get here;
- * how they build a new life.

It shows how difficult it can be to move to better jobs here;

- * how vulnerable they are; and
- * reveals the impact on family and relationships.

Finally, how do people decide if they should stay or leave – what stops them leaving exploitation here?

37 Chinese migrants describe their experiences in their own words ...

NOTE: In this collection, most of the data comes from a study of recent Chinese migrant workers' experiences of forced labour and exploitation, mainly in north-west England in 2010. Therefore it may not represent the experience of all of the Chinese population in the UK (e.g. students or longstanding migrant workers).

簡介

近十年来到英国的华人移民劳工的生活是怎样？

这本书辑录的故事内容包括：

- 是什么吸引他们从中国来到英国
- 他们如何来到英国
- 到达时候的经验
- 如何建立新生活

这些故事也展示在这里转到更好的工作是有困难：

- 他们是如何的脆弱
- 家庭及伴侣关系受到的影响

最后，他们是怎样决定是否留下来还是回去 – 有什么阻止他们逃离在这里遭受的剥削？

37 名华人移民劳工向你细说他们的经验...

注：在本书集里面，大部份的资料来自在 2010 年一个有关主要在英国东北地区的华人移民劳工被强迫劳动和受剥削的经验的研究。所以这并不代表所有英国华人(例如学生，在这里已经定居很久的移民劳工)的经验。

LIFE IN CHINA... AND HOPE



在中国的生活...和希望

“IF MY FRIENDS CAN MAKE IT ABROAD, WHY CAN'T I?”

I worked in fishing for 8 years in Fujian, where most of the people worked as fishermen. I lived with my parents and my elder sister. There weren't many worries and troubles. However it was getting harder and harder to make a living, and my salary was only enough for basic living. Therefore many people started to go abroad. Some went to the US, some went to Spain and they had better life. Going abroad has become a common practice. At least one person from each family in Fujian go abroad to earn money. Almost all of my friends went abroad. Some of them went to the UK and told me about their life in the UK. I was told that it was easier to earn money in the UK. I was thinking, 'I am so young. I want to make my parents' life better. If my friends can make it abroad, why can't I?'

*Zhao Yi¹, 31,
arrived seven years ago and worked as a chef*

如果我的朋友都能够在国外挣钱，为什么我不能？

我在福建做了渔民八年；在那里很多人都是做渔民的。我跟父母及姐姐住在一起。那时的生活没有很多担心烦恼，但是越来越难生活；我的工资只是足够基本生活而已。很多人开始去外国；有些人去美国，有些去西班牙；他们的生活都比之前好。去外国是很普遍的。在福建每个家庭最少有一个人去外国赚钱。差不多我所有朋友都去外国。有些去了英国之后跟我说他们在那边的生活。他们说，在英国赚钱比较容易。当时我在想，我还年青；我想父母的生活过得好一点。如果我的朋友都可以在外国赚到钱，为什么我不可以？

周宜，三十一岁，
七年前来到英国，在這裡當廚師

¹ All names in this collection of stories have been changed.

“I HAD A DREAM FOR WHICH I COULD GIVE UP EVERYTHING”

I had a dream – going abroad – because everyone in my hometown including my family kept telling me how good it was to go abroad. My parents supported me going abroad very much. That’s why the idea ... always stuck in my mind. When I was a teenager I did a vocational course on accounting very well in China. I won a scholarship as a top student and my teacher recommended me to employers who offered quite good jobs but I didn’t go, nor did I study for the professional certificate to become a qualified accountant. After the vocational course when I was about 20, I did many jobs. I opened a supermarket; I worked in a petrol station. I didn’t plan to stay in China. Somebody tried to invite me to a blind date but my mum didn’t allow me to go. I waited until I was 24 when I could manage to go to the UK. I had been pursuing a dream for so long, now the dream came true finally.

*Mei Hua, 28,
arrived four years ago and got married*

为了我的梦想，我可以放弃任何东西

我有个梦想，就是去外国，因为在家乡每一个人，包括我的家人，都跟我说去外国有多好。我的父母很支持我去外国。所以去外国的念头一直都在我脑里面。我年青的时候，在中国读会计读得很好。我考到给第一名学生的奖学金；老师也推荐我很好的工作，但是我没去，我也没有去考试做会计师。我读完大专会计之后，大约二十岁，做过很多工作。我开过超市；也在电油站工作。我没打算留在中国。有人想找我去相亲，但是我妈妈不让我去。到我二十四岁的时候，我终于有机会去英国。我追求这个梦想那么久，现在终于梦想成真。

美华，二十八岁，
四年前来到英国，後來結婚

“WE WERE IN DEBT. WE HAD NO CHOICE”

When I was 17 years old, my father was in heavy debt and left China. We still had to pay interest for his debt once a month but no one in my family was working then. My mum was a housewife and my two younger sisters and one younger brother were still studying. I just graduated from secondary school and I didn't have any job. I heard people saying it was very easy to earn money outside [of China]. I was quite ignorant and believed what the others said and I had no idea how hard it was to earn money [abroad]. We didn't have any choice. I really wanted to help my family financially.

*Xiao Yan, 30,
came to the UK illegally and settled*

“I WAS ALONE”

I was alone in China. My parents divorced and died very early. Then I started living with my grandma when I was a teenager. Later my grandma died as well. I only reached grade 1 in primary school. I just stayed at home [and] only worked occasionally. It was hard for me to find a job. I relied on my neighbours' help and support, like sometimes they invited me to their house for dinner. I heard the people around me talking about how good UK was, how much freedom and how many human rights you could get there – people would have freedom to choose who to marry and who to fall in love with, which made me think the UK was like a heaven.

*Wei Yun, 27, single,
came to the UK four years ago*

“WE WERE IN POLITICAL TROUBLE”

We didn't find it hard to make a living in China since my husband was a schoolteacher, but we were in some troubles related to politics ... which made our life very difficult. We heard from TV and other people that there were human rights in the UK. We couldn't discuss with our family as we had to make the decision quickly. We decided that my husband came here first and I came later to reunion with him.

*Xiu Lan, 32,
arrived two years ago,
following her husband*

“I WANT TO SEE THE OUTSIDE WORLD”

As a high school graduate, I used to work at the government in China. I did have quite good salary. My wife and I had a 12-year-old son. Because of political reasons, I needed to leave China then and also was wondering if I should go out and see what the foreign countries were like. If I could earn a lot of money that would be a bonus, but if not then I might go back home after working for a few years and paying back the loans I borrowed. It is not a big deal.

*Yong, 37,
came to the UK two years ago*

“I DON’T WANT TO GO BUT MY FAMILY
WANT ME TO”

I was educated in Macau up till age 15 and then found jobs through my friends’ referral. I worked in different jobs such as construction (working on windows), restaurant (waiter and assistant chef). I was happy with my work and I had friends to hang around. One day my parents told me I had to go to the UK because they wanted me to have better future there and they had made all the arrangements (e.g. air ticket). I was unwilling to go. I had never thought of going to the UK, though I [had] some aunts there, who told me life in the UK might be a bit boring. I was only 19 years old then and all my friends were in Macau. At the end I did go, telling myself to see what it was like living abroad. I wanted to cry during the journey to the UK, feeling like I might not go back to Macau.

*Ah Wai, 31,
came to the UK in 2000 aged 19*

JOURNEY TO
THE UK



前往英国的旅程

“MORE AND MORE DEBT”

Through my friends, I got to know a snakehead [Chinese smuggling gang member]. There were many snakeheads around. Wherever you want to go, there are ways and people to arrange for you. We borrowed money from friends and relatives for my journey to the UK, which cost us RMB\$300,000. They supported my decision of going abroad very much. It was a huge amount of loan (besides the debts of my dad) but I believed I could pay off the debt if I worked hard in the UK.

*Xiao Yan, now 30,
paid off the debts after working
in the UK for five years*

欠的债越来越多

透过朋友我认识了一个蛇头。那裡有很多蛇头。你想去那里，总有方法和人士可为你安排。因为我去英国的旅程需要三十万人民币，我们从朋友和亲戚借钱。他们都非常支持我去外国的决定。那是一笔很大的债(除了我爸爸的债以外)，但是我相信只要我在英国努力工作，我可以还清那些债。

小燕，三十岁，
来到英国五年后才还清债

“THE MOST EXHAUSTING, DANGEROUS JOURNEY IN MY LIFE”

It was the first time I went abroad. I went together with my friend and during the journey a dozen of Chinese from different cities in China and 30 to 40 foreigners joined us. The journey started from Fujian. I flew to Moscow with my real China passport; then the snakehead took away my passport. We had to walk from Moscow to Ukraine and then from Ukraine to Czech [Republic] by car, on foot and by climbing mountains. I went to Germany and stayed there for a few days before going to Belgium, then from Belgium to UK (London) by ferry. During the journey, sometimes we were told to stay in a place and wait a few days to a month until there was a ‘better’ route available. When we stayed in a house, we were not allowed to go out. We had no communication with outside while the snakehead didn’t tell us anything about the journey. In total, it took me six months to arrive in the UK. Throughout the journey, I felt very worried because I found it quite dangerous and I didn’t know when I could get there.

*Ah Hai, 38,
arrived eleven years ago
with a snakehead*

我人生中最疲惫，最危险的旅程

那是我第一次出国。我跟我的朋友一起去。在旅途中，有十多个来自中国不同城市的人和三十到四十个外国人跟我们一起去。我们从福建出发。我用我真实的护照飞到莫斯科，然后蛇头拿走我的护照。我们要从莫斯科走到乌克兰；再从乌克兰坐车，走路，和爬山才到捷克；我到德国之后，要在那里留好几天才去比利时，再从比利时坐船到英国(伦敦)。在旅途中，有时候我们要留在一个地方，等好几天或者一个月有更好的路线才走。当我们留在房子时，我们不可以出去。我们跟外面没有任何通讯，蛇头也没有跟我们说任何关于旅程的事。我们花了六个月才到英国。我一直都很担心，因为旅程很危险，我也不知道什么时候我才到英国。

阿海，三十八岁，
十一年前透过蛇头来到英国

“IMPRISONMENT”

Upon arriving at the airport in France, I was detained at a centre for not having a visa as [an] illegal visitor near France airport for 18 days. When there were flights to Hong Kong, I was asked whether I would like to go back to Hong Kong, but they could not force me to go back. At the end I was imprisoned for two months for illegal transit. After that I was released and was asked to leave France in seven days. Since the snakehead who initially arranged me to go to the UK couldn't arrange me to leave, I stayed and did a job of ironing clothes for one month, before I got another snakehead to arrange me to go to Dover (UK) by ferry and to London by lorry.

*Ming, 33,
came to the UK seven years ago*

監禁

到了法国机场后，因为我没有签证，是非法入境，所以被扣留在法国机场附近的一个中心十八天。每一次有飞机去香港，他们都会问我想不想回香港，但他们没有强迫我回去。最后我在那里因为非法转机被监禁两个月。之后我被放出来，要在七天之内离开法国。因为本来安排我去英国的蛇头不能安排我离开，我留下来，做了一个月的熨衣服工作；然后另外一个蛇头安排我坐船到英国多佛港，再坐货车到伦敦。

明，三十三岁，
七年前来到英国

“PAID HALF OF THE FEES”

I sold the house which I used to live in with my grandma, and paid part of the fees (RMB\$300,000) to the snakeheads, who said I could pay them back once I earned money in the UK.

*Wei Yun, 27,
worked very hard for a year
to pay off her debt*

“TRAINING FOR THE JOURNEY”

They [the snakeheads] were very professional – before we set off, they got their own teachers to tell us how to cope with the situations, including answers to specific questions, which would come up. The teachers would give us a final test. If we couldn’t pass the training they wouldn’t let us go.

*Mei Hua, 28,
came to the UK four years ago
on a fake passport*

“A JOURNEY THAT CHANGED MY LIFE”

I joined a package tour, aiming to visit my aunt in the US after I had graduated. We first flew to Cambodia where some elderly [people] left the tour. The tour travelled around Europe including Holland by coach/ferry. After arriving in France, we stayed there for many days. Finally I was told that two other people and I had to go via England by ferry (though we sat in a car) to the US. However on arrival in the UK when the car was driven to a place which I didn't know, I was told to get off the car and was told that someone would pick me up. The 'tour guide' didn't give me back my passport as they hadn't got all the money from my family. At the end, no one picked me up and with only US\$600-700, I felt very afraid and asked for help from a man who seemed to be from my hometown. I asked him to help me get a train ticket to London. After arriving in London, I called my mum and she called my aunt in the US, who asked a friend of hers in London to help me find a place to stay. Since then, my life has changed and I stayed in the UK instead of going to the US to visit my aunt.

*Ah Fong, 30,
arrived eleven years ago,
now settled with her new family*

ARRIVAL,
AND A NEW PAGE
OF LIFE



抵达和生活新一页

“THE DREAM HAS BECOME A NIGHTMARE”

When I decided to go to the UK, I felt like I could escape from the hell. My life in China was already tough as my parents were imprisoned for political reason, and I had to worry about being caught by the police and I couldn't say anything to anyone. So when I left China, I was a bit happy. However my hope turned into a nightmare once I arrived in the UK. Because I owed the snakeheads money, they forced me to do prostitution, even though I said I didn't want to do it. I told them, “You can send me to do any work but I definitely won't do that thing.” They started to treat me nasty because I didn't do what I was told. I used some extreme ways to protest ... if they forced me I would try to kill myself or I stopped eating anything. But it didn't work, they still tried to force me ...

*Ah Jing, 24,
left China for UK aged 16,
released by snakehead after being raped and getting pregnant*

梦想变成恶梦

当我决定去英国的时候，我觉得我终于可以离开地狱。我在中国的的生活很苦，我的父母因为政治原因被监禁，我还要担心给警察抓住，我也不能跟任何人说什么。所以当我离开中国的时候，我是有点开心的。但是当我来到英国之后，我的希望变成恶梦。因为我欠蛇头的钱，他们要我做妓女。我跟他们说我不想做；我说，你要我做什么工作也可以，但是我绝对不会做那些事。因为我不听从他们，他们开始对我不好。我用很极端的方式去反抗，譬如如果他们强迫我的话，我会尝试自杀或者是我吃东西。但是他们还是强迫我...

阿静，二十四岁，
离开中国的时候只有十六岁
被强暴，怀孕之后，蛇头放走她

“I DON’T HAVE MANY CHOICES BUT TO ACCEPT WHATEVER IS AVAILABLE”

My first job was at a massage shop – to do cleaning and cooking. I had to work seven days a week, 19 hours a day, with only five hours’ sleep, and could earn £200 per month, with accommodation provided (living at the massage shop). I didn’t know what other jobs I could do. I was educated up to junior secondary school only and didn’t know any English. I had very few work experience and had no skills before as I had no job in China and relied on my mother’s pension then. I didn’t have any friends in the UK. So I had to accept whatever was available referred by the employment agency; but I did the job [for] three months only as I did not want to see “those things”. The massage shop was “dark”.

*Ah Ning, 47,
arrived two years ago*

我没有选择，只能接受任何工作

我第一份工作是在一间接摩院里面做清洁和做饭。我一星期七天工作，每天十九个小时，我只有五个小时睡觉，每个月赚到 200 英镑的工资，还有住的地方(住在按摩院)。我不知道自己还可以做什么工作。我只读到初中，不懂英文，我在中国没有工作，所以我的工作经验不多，我也没有什么技能。我靠我妈妈的福利金生活。我在英国没有朋友。我要接受就业介绍所给我的任何工作。但是那份工作我只做了三个月，因为我不想看到那些东西；按摩院很黑暗。

阿宁，四十七岁，
两年前来英国

“WHO AM I?”

We started using fake passports after we had got to Malaysia. My (fake) passport was taken away after I got to France. When I arrived in the UK, I got detained and was taken to an asylum centre. They asked me a few things before taking me to the asylum centre. I remembered that before arriving in the UK, the snakehead told me to apply for asylum and make up a story of my own once I arrived in the UK. So I followed what he said and made up a story. I was scared and I didn't know what I was saying then.

*Ling, 36,
came to the UK four years ago,
picked up by snakehead*

“NO ONE CARED ABOUT ME”

The snakeheads deliberately didn't tell us about the bad side of the UK. They said that the government would give a lot of things to asylum-seekers, like registration certificate, money etc., and that no police would arrest you and you could go out to work after getting the registration certificate. You could even get a legal status if you were lucky. But once I arrived in the UK, the customs at the airport just asked me to sign some documents and to come back the next day. The snakeheads picked me up at the airport after I had got released from the asylum centre (without support from the government). After they had received money from my family in China, they wouldn't care about me any more. I had waited very long on the street as no one picked me up. Fortunately I met a woman who helped me ... otherwise I would end up living on the street.

*Xiao Li, 29,
arrived seven years ago*

“DISAPPOINTED – IS THIS HONG KONG? CHINA?”

I knew very little about UK before I left China. Based on what I saw on TV, I thought UK would be a very glamorous country. It should be full of skyscrapers like Hong Kong, because Hong Kong used to be governed by the UK. However, when I arrived in the UK, I found the buildings were badly maintained. When you walked onto the street you might get lost and didn't know how to go back, since the design of all the buildings and house was the same.

*Yu Lian, 32,
came to the UK seven years ago
to reunite with her partner*

“CROWDED BUT CHEAP ACCOMMODATION”

I rented a room where there were bunk beds and shared it with five other people. It was the same as bunk beds in the students' hall in China. The rent depends on the regions. Like here in London, this place costs at least £25 to £30 per week. It was crowded but to save money, it was okay to me.

*Lao Li, 45,
an illegal immigrant*

“I NEED A JOB, WHATEVER IT IS”

Once I arrived in the UK and got released by the snakehead, I started looking for jobs straight away. I really needed a job. For the money I borrowed for my journey to the UK, the interest had to be paid. I wandered around on my own on the street. I saw a takeaway and I went into it. I asked them if they needed a worker. They only told me where I could find a place to live. As the place where I lived was shared with many other Chinese in a small house, I asked those people to help me find a job. My lack of English skills limited my choice of jobs as I could only find jobs within the Chinese community. At the end I found a job as a general duties worker at a kitchen of a shop. I wasn't happy at work because of [the] language barrier. But I didn't quit the job till I found another job, because I was worried about how I could support myself [if I quit the job], even though the pay was very low.

*Yan Fen, 26,
came to the UK five years ago*

“I HAVE A LANGUAGE BARRIER WITH OTHER CHINESE”

When I first came here, my friend referred a job in a Chinese restaurant to me. I worked as a general duties worker. I had a language barrier with my colleagues. When we had a quarrel, I really couldn't understand what they were saying in another Chinese dialect. When I asked them to say again, they would start losing temper. When they were not in good mood, they would say “This one is not done well. That one is not either.” They would ask me to clean this and that. They intentionally made my life difficult. I couldn't get along with other people. I was far away from the people I knew [in London] and transport was not convenient.

*Guo, 39,
arrived three years ago,
moved to another job two weeks later*

“VERY TOUGH WORK FOR WOMEN”

After arriving in Manchester to reunion with my partner, I found a job at a Chinese takeaway as a general duties worker, the only job we could do as a newcomer, but after one week I quit the job because I found the job very tough when I had to do tasks like washing dishes in a cold weather, which I hadn't done in China before, and I felt looked down upon. After one to two months, I got a job at a Chinese buffet restaurant where I worked at the bar. But I quit the job later because I had my back bones hurt at work when I had to move those heavy boxes.

*Li Ying, 31,
came to the UK six years ago,
did office work only in China*

“EVERYTHING IS ARRANGED BY THE EMPLOYER”

I started working the next day after I had arrived here. I worked in the takeaway six days a week, from 3pm till midnight. I am paid £150 a week, though it is lower than what the contract states. The employer said he would pay tax for me. I live with him and his family. My employer asks me to do a lot of things that are not part of my job as a chef, e.g. helped him to move house, repair the toilet, stock supplies, give his wife and children a lift, and clean the shop after it was closed. Even on my day off, I still have to do some work for my employer's house. I am not willing to do all the extra work but out of what Chinese call “favour”, I don't reject his requests. If I tell him I don't want to do the extra work, he won't be happy. I still have to rely on him.

*Quan,
lived in the UK on work permit
for two years*

MOVING –
OR NOT MOVING
– BETWEEN JOBS



转工… 或是不转工

“I WANT BETTER PAY, BETTER JOB, BETTER COLLEAGUES, BETTER LIFE”

I first worked in Birmingham as a general duties worker for £120 in a Chinese restaurant. Then after one year I thought I had been working for so long, and it was time to earn more money (so that I could pay off the debts more quickly) as I got more experience and skills. I heard my friends saying there was a job that paid more, so I moved to another job in Nottingham as a chef for six months. Because of conflicts with other colleagues, I went to another city to work for a year, before moving back to Birmingham to work for the same employer as in Nottingham, for four months.

*Ah Ming, 33,
came to UK illegally seven years ago,
no work experience as a chef in China*

我想有更高的工资，更好的工作，更好的同事，更好的生活

我先在伯明翰的华人餐馆做打杂，每月的工资只有一百二十镑。一年之后我想，我做了那么久，有了经验和技能，是时候我去赚更多的钱(那我就可以更快还清我的债)。我听朋友说，有一份工作的工资高一些(一百八十镑)，所以我去诺丁咸做大厨六个月。后来我跟同事合不来，我转到另外一个城市打工，做了一年，然后再回到伯明翰帮同一个老板打工四个月。

阿明，三十三岁，
七年前从不正规途径来到英国，在中国没有当过厨师

“WE HAVE BEEN HANGING ON FOR SO LONG. THE STAKE IS SO HIGH”

My husband is currently working in a restaurant near Birmingham as an Assistant chef. The employer's relative took charge. I thought that relative might not like my husband as he always criticised my husband's performance and threatened to sack him: "If you continue working like this, just quit the job!" A few days ago, that relative asked my husband to work in their restaurant in London instead on the following Monday. I am worried. First, we have been hanging on for so long and there's only nine more months to go before we can apply for permanent residence. He is a work-permit holder. If he doesn't work there, no one will employ him and he won't earn any money. Also, if my husband loses his job, what can four of us live on? We don't know where we can find any source of income. We can't go back to China as we don't know what we can do back there and my child has been studying here for so long.

*Mrs Su, late 20s,
came to UK dependent on her
husband's work permit*

我们都挺了那么久

我老公现在在伯明翰附近的一个餐馆做二厨。老闆的亲戚管理。我想那个亲戚不喜欢我的老公，他经常批评我老公，威胁辞退他：如果你继续这样子工作，你辞工吧！过了几天，那个亲戚叫我老公下一个星期一到伦敦的餐馆做。我很担心。首先，我们在这里已经那么久，还有九个月我们就可以申请永久居留；他拿的是工作签证；如果他不在那里打工的话，没有人会请他，那他就赚不到钱。如果我老公没有工作的话，我们四个人靠什么生活？我们不知道在那里可以赚钱。我们不能回中国；回到中国我不知道我们可以做什么，而且我的孩子已经在这里读书那么久。

苏太太，二十多岁，
丈夫是用工作签证来到英国

“I WANT TO QUIT BUT THEY DON’T ALLOW ME TO QUIT!”

I can't do any catering work because of my health problems. Through my friends I found a source of (fake) DVDs and started selling DVDs to support my living. I sold DVDs mainly in North Manchester, to people in bars, salons, supermarkets, and many other places. At the beginning, the income was enough to support my living. But two years later, there were more and more people selling DVDs and there were more police arrests. I felt under a lot of stress. I tried to quit and got referred to a job as a general duties worker but having worked one or two days, I couldn't stand the stress and quit the job. Also, the people who provided DVDs to me (as wholesaler) said to me that I must buy DVDs from them, and they didn't care whether I could sell [them]. I can't say "no" to them; they are very fierce, aggressive and they know many people. They kept asking me by phone ... at the end I really could not stand the stress of being asked and I started selling DVDs again.

*Xiao Bao, in his 20s,
arrived six years ago*

我想不干，但是他们不让我不干！

因为健康问题，我不能做饮食业。透过朋友我找到一个翻版光碟的货源。我开始卖光碟来支持我的生活。我主要是在北曼城卖光碟，我去酒吧，发廊，超市和很多地方。开始的时候我的收入还不错。但是两年之后，越来越多人卖光碟，而且警察也多了逮捕。我感到压力很大，我不想卖。我找到一份打杂的工，但是工作两天之后，我受不住压力，没有做下去。而且，提供光碟给我的人跟我说，我一定要从他们处买光碟，他们不管我是否能够将光碟卖出去。我不能跟他们说“不”；他们太强，认识很多人。他们不停的给我电话，要我买光碟。最后我真的受不了他们的压力，我再开始卖光碟。

小寶，二十多岁，
六年前来到英国

AM HAPPY WORKING, I WORK THERE”

If I am not happy at work, I'll leave; if I am happy, I'll continue working there. We earned some money and we should be happy at work. “Being happy” is, get along with colleagues and the employer. Sometimes if we can tolerate, we try to tolerate – if we make a mistake which makes the employer unhappy, we just let him scold us for a while and then we just forget about it. I rarely met the worst employers, because if ... I found he was not nice, then I would quit the job, like my (third) job, which I did for one month and I found another job through an employment agency, which I paid £150 for [a] referral.

*Liang, 40,
worked illegally in catering
in the UK for six years*

“JOBS GO, THEN I GO”

Construction work was casual work – each construction task may last from a few weeks to a few months. I found my first construction job through my friends. The job paid me £45 per day and I worked six days a week. Three months later, I became unemployed as the construction work finished. Fortunately through my Chinese housemates, I found my second job in the construction industry; later through my friend I got to know a Chinese employer and worked for him for three months. The pay was £65 per day. That Chinese employer told me I could go to a B&Q shop where construction employers would go to for materials and I could take that chance to ask if there was any job available. Since then I managed to get some short-term jobs every now and then. I could get paid £80 to £90 per day, sometimes even more than £100. Nowadays I usually get paid £80 per day.

*Hua Liu, 40,
worked in construction without
status in the UK for five years*

“NO PAY, WE LEAVE”

Some employers don't pay us. Once when we finished the construction work, the employer said that two days later he would go back home and there'd be a new employer. The new employer said, "Two days later I'll give you the money." Very soon I couldn't reach him by phone, which means I wouldn't get the money. Where can I find him to get the money? Since I was here, I have had such an experience two to three times. Which section of law is applied to deal with the employers of the private sector to protect us from the deduction of salary? That's why if we don't get paid, we will only work for one week at maximum and then say goodbye. Who will do that kind of job? If I find anything wrong with the employer, I'll leave and change to another job.

*Lao Li, 45,
an illegal immigrant, in construction industry*

“TOO AFRAID TO REPORT EXPLOITATION, NOT
KNOWING WHERE TO GO”

My friend, who is 45 ... and [a] single man, has been working as a chef in a Chinese restaurant for three years. He works from 11am till midnight, only one meal is provided. The employer will check the number of dishes against the order – the workers have to pay for any extra. His salary is below the minimum wage – £240 for 60 hours per week. The pay for his first month is being kept by the employer as ‘deposit’ – if he doesn’t give enough notice before quitting the job, the deposit won’t be returned to him. Also, each worker in the kitchen is responsible for a fridge and has to pay for any costs involved. He was asked to sign a contract but the employer didn’t give him a copy of it. No bank holiday, only one day off per week. He did think of moving to another job (also in catering), but he can speak Fujianese only. He doesn’t know a lot of things about everyday life, though he has been [here] for about eight years. He doesn’t have many friends. He is afraid to come forward to do anything to his employer.

*John, arrived 20 years ago,
sought help for his friend at a
local Chinese organisation*

“IF YOU HAVE NO STATUS, YOU CAN’T FIND A JOB”

I am asked to do a lot of things in the takeaway. I am not only a general duties worker but also a cashier. I have to deep-fry chips and peel potatoes. I need to tidy up as well. When it rains, I have to help collect the clothes from the hanger. I get paid for working nine hours a day but I usually work ten to eleven hours per day. Once the employer went to Hong Kong for three weeks and asked me to look after the shop, e.g. stock the supplies, open and close the shop. My working hours were much longer but still I only got paid for nine hours per day. I have never thought of moving to another job. If you don’t have a status, no one will employ you.

*LiLi, in her 20s,
overstayed her visa*

“THERE WAS NO WAY BACK”

I got a friend who was from the North East of China and he was asked by his friend if he was interested in “planting flowers” in Scotland. He didn’t know until he got there that it was about planting cannabis. He had no choice but to do it because he had no money to go back to London and he wanted to earn some money first. Before he stopped doing it, he got arrested. He was about to get deported back to China as he had overstayed his business visitor visa. He committed suicide in the detention centre as he could not accept the fact that he had to go back to China since he had borrowed a lot of money.

*Xiao Zhang, 30,
talking about his friend*

FAMILY AND
RELATIONSHIPS



家庭和伴侶

“WORK, SLEEP, WALK AROUND, THEN WORK
AGAIN – EVERY DAY’S THE SAME”

On working days, every day as soon as I wake up, I go to work in the restaurant. I work until around 12am and then eat something. Sometimes I go to Tai Wu for late-night meals, three or four days a week. Life’s as simple as that. On my day off, I may buy a one-day ticket and take a bus to the Chinatown as I don’t know many other places. Sometimes I may go to the Trafford Centre. I have no hobbies but watching football and go to a casino to watch football ... On Fridays or Saturdays I’ll have a drink with my friends. Other than that, who do I communicate with? I go to parks but I will just stay there alone. I can understand when local English people say hello to me, but that’s it. I wouldn’t understand what they say ... the next moment. I can’t talk to them even though I want to.

*Ah Wen, 40,
left his wife and children in China,
sends them money*

工作, 睡觉, 到处逛街, 再工作 - 天天都是这样

在工作天, 我一起床, 我就去上班; 我工作到半夜, 然后吃一点东西; 每星期有三天到四天晚上我会去太湖吃宵夜; 生活就是如此简单。我休息那天, 我会买一天票, 坐巴士到唐人街, 我对其他地方不认识。有时候我会去 Trafford Centre。我的兴趣就只有看足球, 我会到赌场看足球。之后大概晚上八点, 九点, 我回家。在星期五或者星期六我会跟朋友出去喝东西; 除此之外我还能跟谁沟通? 我去公园只有我一个人。英国人跟我打招呼, 我明白, 但就只有那么多; 我不知道他们之后跟我说什么; 我想跟他们谈话但是我不懂怎么说。

阿文, 四十岁,
留下他的妻子和儿子在中国, 定期寄钱给他们

“HAVING A FAMILY DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO OUR LIFE”

When I was alone here, I had very few things to do; all I did was working, making phone calls to home and doing shopping. But when my wife came here, I could have someone to talk to and we could help and support each other. The birth of our son also made a difference to our life and thoughts. There is more fun in life and I have more motivation to work hard. Actually I did not think of asking my wife to come to the UK to join me but later, I thought a couple should live together and a snakehead told me there was a safer route to the UK. I borrowed money from relatives and friends again to pay for my wife's journey to the UK. Though I had to work hard again to pay off the debts, I feel happier with my wife and children here.

*Ah Wang, 35,
arrived seven years ago*

有家庭后的生活真的不一样

我在这里很孤独，我没事做；我只是工作，打电话回家，购物。但是我老婆来了这里之后，我有个人可以跟我聊天，我们可以互相帮助，支持。我俩孩子的出生对我们的生活和想法有影响。生活多了很多乐趣，我更有动力去努力工作。其实我当初没有想过叫我老婆过来英国的，但是后来我想，夫妇应该在一起；而且有个蛇头跟我说，有一个来英国的比较安全路线。我向亲戚和朋友借钱来付我老婆过来英国的钱。虽然我要再努力工作来还清债，我觉得有老婆跟小孩在我身边我更开心。

阿王，三十五岁，
七年前来到英国，后来妻子也来到英国跟他重聚，生孩子

“I WANT TO LOOK AFTER HIM”

In China I was divorced and got two children, who are in their 20s now; when I came to the UK, my two children were living on their own and so I did not have much “burden” ... While working as a nanny for a family, through my friend I happened to find a British boyfriend who was of the same age as me and was so nice to me – I really want to stay here and we want to get married but I found the procedures are too complicated, with me having no status. I don’t mind much. I just want to live with him and look after him. After all, we both are old now. What else do we want?

*Xiu Ping, late 50s,
came to the UK on a visitor visa
eight years ago*

“MARRY A CHICKEN, FOLLOW A CHICKEN”

My husband came here first on his work permit. One year later I came here to reunion with him. There’s a saying in Chinese: “Marry a chicken, follow a chicken; marry a dog, follow a dog.” He didn’t know much, even when being exploited by his employer, until I came here to help him. I want to get our daughter to come to the UK too; she’s only two years old and is being looked after by my mother-in-law; but my parents-in-law are around 70 years old and so I am worried about their health.

*Hui Yi, mid-30s,
dependent on her husband’s work permit*

“HE GOT A WORKER BUT LOST A WIFE”

Soon after I came to the UK to get married with my husband, I started working in his takeaway six days a week. In the first three months, I had to cut onions, meats and made fries; thereafter I had to cook. I got a wage of £100 per week. When I got pregnant with our daughter, I continued working till our daughter was born, as I didn't want my husband to work too hard. Three weeks after I had taken my daughter back home, I continued working. I don't think I had a choice then because the takeaway had no worker but my husband. I looked after our daughter while at the same time working in the kitchen. As my husband's temper was getting worse and worse, our marriage broke down. I stopped working and separated from him. I moved out of his house with my daughter and I still tried to make up for our marriage but four months later, I decided to move to Manchester.

*Lai Lai, 32,
came to the UK seven years ago to marry*

“I MISS MY DAUGHTER”

I stopped working when my daughter was born. I stayed at home to look after her while my husband was working. When my daughter was two years old, I sent her back to China where my mother could look after her, since my husband and I wanted to earn more money. We plan to go back to China [in] a few years ... after earning and saving some money, as I miss my daughter and want to spend more time with her.

*Xiao Yan, 30,
had a son last year, planning to go back to China
to see her daughter after being granted legal status*

“IT’S ALL ABOUT FAMILY”

My elder brother was in the UK then and he helped me to get a place to live and a job to do. He has gone back to China now but his son is still here and runs two shops. I want to go back to China too, but my daughter, who tried to apply for visa to study here but failed, came to the UK more than a year ago. I have to continue earning money, as my two younger children are still studying and I need to pay back the debts for my daughter’s journey to the UK.

*Lao Zheng, 48,
been in the UK for eight years*

“HE IS MY ONLY FAMILY MEMBER”

My one-year-old child is my only family member here. I have never thought of giving him up. I always feel worried about how to look after him well, especially when he is ill. Fortunately I got help from a worker [at] Sure Start, as my GP referred me ... I have been arranged to attend some classes about being a mother and ESOL classes. I [have] started feeling settled.

*Ah Jing, 24,
got pregnant after being raped by a snakehead;
parents imprisoned in China*

STAY OR GO
HOME?



留下来或是回家

“NO LIFE, NO FAMILY, NO STATUS, NO FUTURE,
SO GO HOME!”

I came here as I hoped to raise the [living] standard of my family in China, but my life quality here is much worse than my life in China. Everyday I go downstairs for work in the kitchen; after work I go back upstairs to sleep. Sometimes I may watch TV and on my day off, I may go out for several hours and then get ready for work the next day. It's just the same week after week. What's the point of life if we live like that? Also I have no legal status. How long can I stay here like that? I can't go to see the doctor when I am ill. If it's not a big problem then I would just take some medicines posted from China. Without a legal status, I can't do anything, like driving, learning to drive, start a business, open a bank account, etc. Also my physical state does not allow me to undertake high demand work or work long hours anymore. I can't do other types of work (here) but work in the kitchen because I don't know English and I don't have the legal status. [My friend] lives in London whereas I am in Manchester. I only have one day off per week. So how can I have time to travel there to meet him? The only good thing is you can earn more money here, but I won't even miss any other thing when I leave here.

*Lao Wu, 45,
went back to China this year after working
in the UK illegally for eight years*

没有生活,没有家人,没有身份,没有将来,那我回家吧!

我来这里是因为我想改善我在中国的家人的生活水平,但是我在这里的生活水平比我在中国的差很多。每天我到楼下,去厨房工作;下班以后我回到楼上睡觉。有时候我会看电视;我休息的那天,我会出外一会,然后回来准备第二天。每个星期都是一样。这样的生活还有什么意义?

而且我没有身份。我可以这样留下来到什么时候?我生病的时候不能去看医生;如果不是什么大病,我就吃那些从中国寄来的药。没有身份,我什么都做不了;我不能学开车,不能做生意,不能开银行户口。我的身体状况也不能让我再做那么辛苦,那么长时间的工作。我只能做厨房工,因为我不懂英语,也没有身份。我有些朋友,但不多;他住在伦敦,我住在曼城,而且我每个星期只有一天休息,我怎能去见他?我真的没有零钱用。这里的好处是你可以挣到多一些钱,但是当我离开这里,我不会怀念什么!

老吳, 四十五岁,
在英国不合法工作八年之后, 今年返回中国

“NO FACE IF I GO BACK WITHOUT A LOT OF MONEY”

I will stay here and keep working, and see if there is any progress. I will lose face if I go back now because when I go back I have to give money to people. Say, before I left, those relatives gave me RMB\$500, so I have to pay them RMB\$1000 when I go back. If I have a legal status here, I will go back immediately; if I can't get a legal status, I will go back when I earn enough money. It is hard to earn money in Fujian; the life in other cities is much worse than in Fujian.

*Ah Qiang, 25,
came to the UK illegally three years ago*

“MY BURDEN IS STILL HEAVY”

How do I not want to ... go home? Everyone misses home. I have left my wife behind for almost ten years. When I came here, my eldest child was only this tall. Now she's as tall as me. But my burden is still so heavy; I can't go back home and I have to continue working to earn money. Two of my children are still studying while building a house has cost me RMB\$100,000. We want to buy another one in town too. People in the village hope for better and better houses. They want fame. “How big my house is and how many square meters it's got!” “He is very rich.” Fame is money. “That person went abroad and earned a lot of money, and the house he built is so big. He's so capable.”

*Lao Zheng, 48,
arrived illegally eight years ago;
his eldest daughter did the same two years ago*

“TOO RISKY IF I LEAVE”

In the first six months after I had started working (mainly deep-frying food), everything seemed ok. However, the attitude of my brother (who was my employer) to me was getting worse ... everything was so much different from what I had expected and told. He was picky about my work. I also found my salary was not as high as what the contract stated and was worried that it would affect my application for permanent residence. My brother agreed to pay enough tax for me but I had to give him back the difference. Also I had borrowed HK\$100,000 (equivalent to £8000) from him before we decided to come to the UK. I was under a lot of stress, but I felt that there was no way back for me. If I went back to Hong Kong, I had to start from scratch and the risk was too big, especially since my whole family emigrated to the UK with me. I thought I just needed to wait till I got permanent residence after being in the UK on work permit for five years and then I could be free.

*Ah Yuk, early 50s,
arrived on work permit with her family seven years ago*

“WE HAVE BETTER LIFE AND I WANT TO HELP OTHERS”

After I got the legal status I feel there is hope ahead of me because I have the freedom to choose what I want to do. My children can have better future. I will open a shop when I have the money ... [as] the older generation from Hong Kong did. Now I will just continue with my job and do some voluntary work in my spare time. Because I know there are many asylum-seekers with language difficulties and don't know what to do when something happens. So I help them by working as an interpreter for those in 'Happy Home' scheme to sort out their applications for housing. Like my wife, she didn't know a single word in English when she came here. So I can understand those people. As they haven't got the legal status yet, they cannot seek much help. If they have then there are social workers who can help them.

*Xiao Li, 29,
came to the UK seven years ago, got settlement last year*

“STAY OR GO HOME? THERE’S NO PERFECT SOLUTION”

I am in a ‘no-win’ situation. I want to stay; I like the living style here and I got a lot of friends, having been here for some years. My boyfriend wants me to stay too. But my parents always want me to go home; they want me to look after them and think that with my degree qualification, I can find better jobs back home nowadays; they think I was underpaid and got exploited here. Also it’s unlikely that I can get a visa to stay and work after changes in the immigration rules, though I did work hard before at places like [a] takeaway and help many other Chinese migrant workers at a local Chinese community centre.

*Yan Zhi, 29,
went back to China after failing
to extend her visa*

“NO UK BUT U.S. NEXT TIME”

In the future, if everything’s going well, they give me back my passport, maybe I’ll stay here for two more years and then go back to China. After I go back home, I’ll go to the U.S., because my family has a shop in the U.S.

*Mr. Shi, 26,
came to the UK three years ago*

“WHERE IS ‘HOME’?”

In the past I thought I would work here for several years and go back home. Now my mindset has changed. I have been here for so many years already and I have adopted the lifestyle here. I don't want to go back. Family? My parents are very old now. My son has grown up now and doesn't know much about me. My wife? I have been away for so many years and she is probably with someone else now. To be honest it's quite harsh for her ... we have been separated for so long and I still don't go back. Also, China has changed dramatically ... To be honest I would feel like a useless person if I go back there now because I wouldn't understand the mindset of the people there, also it would be really hard for me to find a job as I am not educated and skilled. I haven't learnt any skills since I came here. Even if I would like to work as a chef back home I wouldn't know the kind of taste the local Chinese there would like because I have got used to cook food which suits the westerners' taste. My friends who had gone back to China from the UK a few years ago told me they were like idiots. No one wanted to employ them. They felt like they didn't have the common language, especially talking to those who were born after 1990; they said they couldn't understand each other. Also they are not old enough to retire, which means they still have to work.

*Ah Wen, 40, arrived 17 years ago,
leaving parents, wife and son in China*

何處是吾家？

以前我以为我工作好几年之后就会回去；现在我的想法已经改变。我在这里那么多年，我已适应这里的生活方式；我不想回去。家人？我的父母已经很老了。我的儿子已长大，对我的认识很少。我的老婆？我离开那么多年，她很有可能现在已经跟别人了。说实话，如果你帮她想想，这对她来说是很苦的；我们分开那么久，我还没回去。

而且，中国已经变了很多；因为这样，现在我回去的话，我不知道我可以干什么。说实话，如果我回去的话，我会觉得自己没用，因为我不知道那里的人的想法。而且我没有高学历，没有技能，我会很难找到工作。从我来到这里之后，我没有学到什么技能；就算我想回去做厨师，我也不知道当地的中国人喜欢的口味，因为我一直都是做适合西方人口味的菜。好几年前，我有些朋友从英国回到中国，他们告诉我，觉得自己好像傻瓜；没有人想请他们。他们觉得跟其他人没有共同的语言，特别是当他们跟 1990 年出世以后的人谈话，他们根本不能明白对方在说什么。他们还没到退休的年龄，还是要工作。

阿文，四十岁，
十七年前来到英国，留下他的父母，妻子和儿子在中国

If you have been affected by similar problems, or would like more information about Chinese migrant workers and the issues they face, please contact:

Wai Yin Chinese Women Society

66 Swan Street,

Manchester M4 5JU

United Kingdom

Telephone: (0161) 833 0377

Email: info@waiyin.org.uk

如果你遭到同样的问题, 或者想知道更多有关华人移民劳工和他
的问题的资料, 请跟慧妍社华人妇女中心联络:

地址: 66 Swan Street,

Manchester

M4 5JU

电话: (0161) 833 0377

电邮: info@waiyin.org.uk

If you would like to discuss future research projects please contact RIHSC,

The Research Institute for Health and Social Change,

Manchester Metropolitan University,

Hathersgate Road, Manchester M13 0JA

United Kingdom

Telephone: (0161) 247 2774

Email: rihsc@mmu.ac.uk

What is life like for Chinese migrant workers who have come to the UK?

This collection of 37 Chinese people's stories lets them describe their experiences in their own words.

It explores what drew them from China to the UK, how they made the move and what their lives were like when they arrived. Their stories show how difficult it can be to move to better jobs here, and the impact on family and relationships. Finally, it looks at what stops them escaping exploitation.

“I had a dream for which I could give up everything”

为了我的梦想，我可以放弃任何东西