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Domestic Work in China:

A look at the scope and size of labour brokerage agencies

Lydia Zhou & Professor André Laliberté

School of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa

Introduction

In China, the combination of an aging population and a lack of state-funded care services has led to a documented rise in the demand for at-home care. Care provision may include all sorts of duties, from household services to end of life care. As a result of high demand for this type of labour, an industry of labour brokerage agencies which sell domestic services of a primarily female and low-skilled workforce has grown.

An ILO analysis of domestic work in China from 2009 estimated “about 20 million domestic workers and 600,000 domestic service agencies”. However, there is no publicly available national household sample survey or census containing data on the number of domestic workers in China, and many work through informal channels.

This research takes an initial step to collecting empirical evidence for the number and location of labour brokerage agencies advertised online. This data was collected from the top website platforms used by agencies to gain an initial look at where these domestic workers toil, and also to see whether the demand for domestic care is met by them.

Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in this survey. The number of agencies advertised on the top three online platforms where brokerage agencies list advertisements for their services, and a general breakdown of the number of agencies in different major cities for each platform was collected.

On one of the bigger platforms, www.198526.com, more detailed data was collected on the types of services and specific locations of the advertised agencies. Location data and services provided by the agencies advertised on 198526 in Beijing and Shanghai (the two biggest cities in China) was collected and mapped in Google Fusion Tables. www.198526.com was chosen for this as it is the most frequently updated website, with the most clearly presented information.

Results

The number of agencies in the top cities serviced by the most popular platforms for labour brokerage agencies:

City	# Agencies
Beijing	620
Tianjin	600
Nanjing	540
Shenzhen	430
Suzhou	400
Xiamen	370
Guangzhou	360
Hangzhou	310
Shanghai	240
Wuhan	200

www.homekey.cn

Total: 4070

City	# Agencies
Shanghai	984
Beijing	322
Tianjin	205
Guangzhou	105
Shenzhen	384
Hangzhou	400
Jinhua	65
Ningbo	26

www.198526.com

Total: 1940

City	# Agencies
Shanghai	733
Beijing	464
Shenzhen	407
Guangzhou	336

www.yunjiazheng.com

Total: 2491

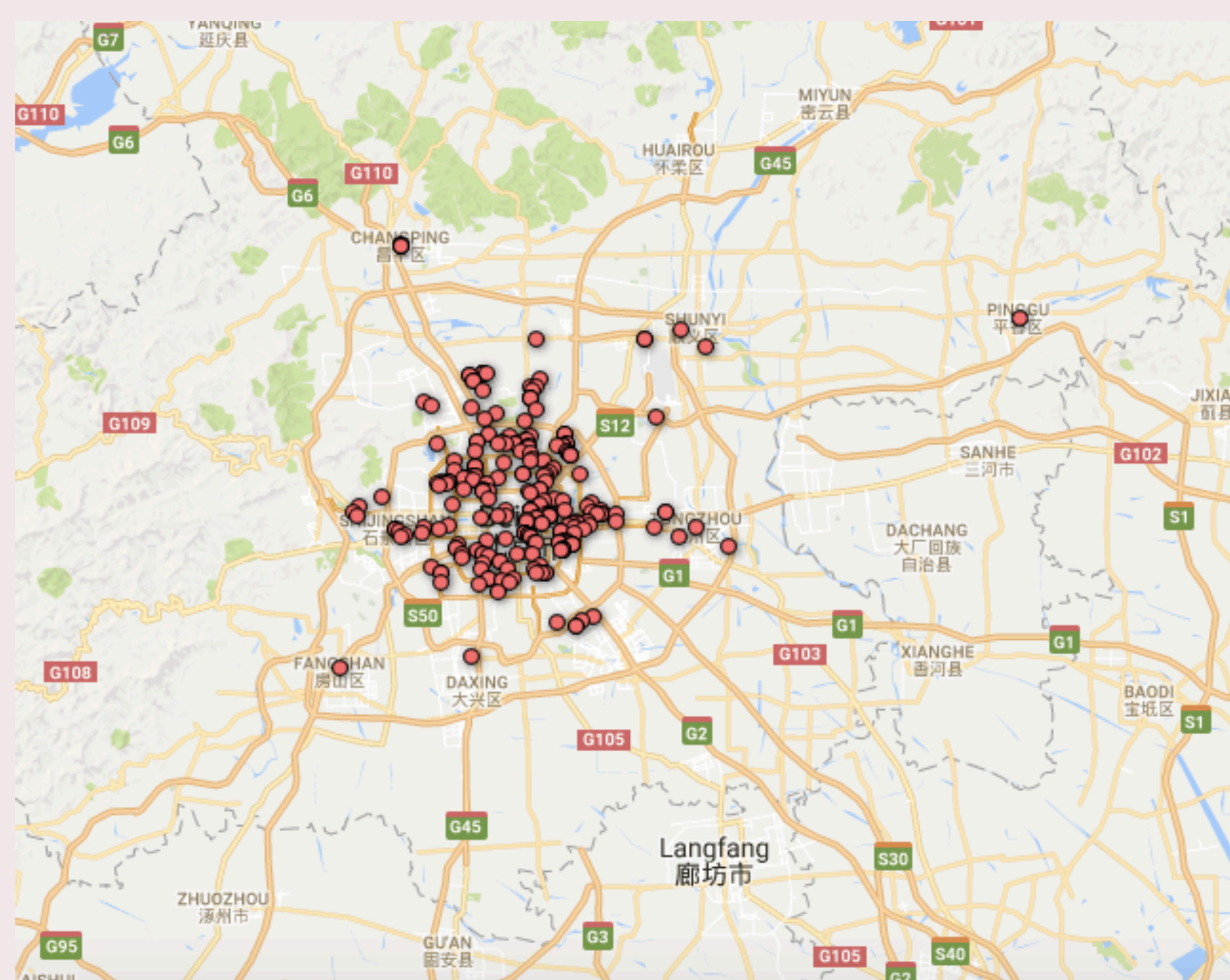
Shanghai and Beijing agency listings from 198526.com



Map of Shanghai

855 out of 984 listings were valid links.

- 374 companies (~44%) advertised childcare/maternity services
- 208 companies (~24%) advertised cleanings services
- 149 companies (~17%) advertised foreign workers
- 119 companies (~14%) advertised care and cleaning services for the elderly



Map of Beijing

257 out of 322 listings were valid links.

- 81 companies (~32%) advertised cleaning services
- 76 companies (~30%) advertised hourly work
- 67 companies (~26%) advertised childcare/maternity services
- 29 companies (~11%) advertised care/cleaning services for the elderly

Conclusions

These are tentative findings which map out the first step to understanding a new and rapidly changing industry.

The results presented here show the density of labour brokerage agencies in the main metropolises in China. However, there is a clear difference in the size of the industry in different cities, for reasons that remain to be investigated.

A next step would be to crosscheck the information presented here for accuracy, and to collect more data: the number of agencies in different-sized cities, the number of workers, the composition of the labour force by regions of origin.

The industry is growing and changing quickly, from an estimated 7 million workers in 2004 to 20 million in 2009. It is also using new technology: mobile-based companies have popped up to replace labour brokers as with Uberization. There are not many, but the ones that exist connect a large number of workers directly to private employers.

One example is www.linkcare.cn, a mobile application and website launched in Beijing in 2013, which connects over 10 thousand members to each other in cities across China. e家洁, a mobile-only domestic ordering app, doesn't state their number of employees, but is now a publicly traded company and operates in six major cities.

References

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Acknowledgements

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