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Foreword

Before coming to the Netherlands, I worked at Tianjin University of Finance and Economics in China as a lecturer. My research work was mainly engaged in doing quantitative analysis on various social economic issues. I still remember the time when the head of our department discussed with me about my future direction of academic research. I told him that I was very much interested in European labour markets and would like to specialize in EU related research topics. Due to various reasons, this wish was not put into effect when I worked in China during the 1990s. In January 2000, I was accepted by the University of Amsterdam as a PhD student and came to the Netherlands. From that time, I strongly felt that my previous goal of academic research could be realized in the Netherlands. It is obvious that the past four years' study and research at the University of Amsterdam have laid a solid foundation for my further research on European labour markets. Without doubt, I should be grateful to Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies (AIAS), Professor Theeuwes, and Professor Tjzens for their giving me the chance of studying and carrying out research at the University of Amsterdam.

Special thanks should be given to Professor Kea Tjzens. I will never forget the day we met in Gothenburg for a job interview. During the past few years when I studied at the University of Amsterdam, Kea Tjzens gave me enormous support in my PhD study and research. I was deeply moved by her understanding, encouragement and support, which helped me overcome a wide range of difficulties. Several times, Kea Tjzens even used her own research funding to support me in attending international conferences and presenting my papers. I have benefited a lot from attending these conferences, which widened my academic vision and enabled me to acquire a lot of useful comments on my papers.

I spent most of time of my first year's PhD study at Tinbergen Institute. At that time, Tinbergen Institute was in Keizersgracht, which is one of the most famous streets in Amsterdam. I still remember the first day when I got to Tinbergen Institute, Marian warmly welcomed me with her lovely smile. I was very impressed by Tinbergen Institute's strong academic atmosphere. Every week, there is a seminar in Tinbergen Institute. Professors, researchers and PhD students get together and have an open and free discussion. Everyone has certainly gained benefit from such discussions.

As a PhD student, I also had the chances of visiting the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), at the University of Essex in the UK, and CEPS/INSTEAD in Luxembourg. I am thankful to them for allowing me to do research at their institutes. I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr. Salverda, director of AIAS of the University of Amsterdam, for his help in obtaining a dataset.

When I studied and lived in Amsterdam, a lot of people cared for me and supported me spiritually. Every Wednesday morning when Froukje Mebius came to office, I always tried to make time to talk with her. I really had a good time talking with Froukje. Froukje also gave me a lot of support when I had difficulties. I will never forget her care and encouragement. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to Robert Helmink and Wilma de Kruijf for their administrative help.

When I studied in Tinbergen Institute, I made a lot of friends: Pedro Cardoso, Felix Eschenbach, Eiko Kenjoh, René van der Kruk, Peter Rodenburg, Marije Schouwstra, Ton Wrasai. I still can recall the time when we were together for academic discussions and relaxing parties. The good time that we had will always be happily remembered. Some of my friends have graduated and found very nice jobs. I sincerely wish them great prospects for their careers.

Last, but not least, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my wife, Xu Shuang. Her continuous support and encouragement enabled me to concentrate on my study. In addition, my brothers and sister took most of the responsibilities of taking care of my mother while I studied abroad. I should like to express my deepest gratitude to them for their understanding and support.

Yongjian Hu
Amsterdam, April 2005