

New Identity, New Mission: A Survey on Contemporary Migrant Workers in Beijing

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Abstract

Ever since the middle and late 1980s, migrant workers have started to move and work in Beijing. Compared with the old generation of migrant workers, the average age of contemporary migrant workers in Beijing is 30.71 and they are inclined to decent jobs with comparatively high education. Migrant workers with high school or above diploma account for 82.5 of the total population. More significantly, having got rid of country culture, the contemporary migrant workers have created new culture.

Key words: Beijing; New generation; Migrant workers; Features

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since the migrant workers flow in Beijing, they have been making great contributions to the development of the city, and gradually turn to be an important strength in development of Beijing. However, it is a long way for us to have a full understanding of features of the contemporary migrant workers to make good use of this important strength. Thus, it is necessary to conduct a thorough investigation of the migrant workers in Beijing in order to further study their characteristics, figure out the problems they are encountered, demands they need to be satisfied with and reasonable polices to guide

their development. Despite the fact that there are some researches related to the life and work of the migrant workers, they are mainly confined to the following three aspects: a) the respondents are limited in certain professions, b) the research methods employed are not scientific, c) the survey content is not abundant enough. Therefore, the partial and extreme results are concluded, which could not properly reflect characteristics of the contemporary migrant workers in Beijing. And this status quo will lead to the lag or absence of government policies which should have been conducted in time. In order to avoid this drawback, a questionnaire survey and timed examination were employed to conduct a sampling investigation about the basic condition, the adaption to the city, the culture feature and some other aspects of the Beijing migrant workers of dozens of different kinds of jobs such as building construction, food service and cleaning. It is hoped that the investigation will give other scholars some insight into the characteristic of the contemporary migrant workers in Beijing today.

To highlight basic features of the contemporary migrant workers in Beijing, the research takes three items as referents: a) taking the “migrant worker phenomenon” development period as reference and thus putting forward the concept of “the new generation migrant worker”; b) taking the migrant workers in Dongying, Shandong province as reference, the age, education level, occupational distribution of the new age migrant workers in Beijing will be discussed¹; c) referring the feature of the old-age migrant worker, the characteristic of the new

¹ Dongying City is a young city, which is more representative in China’s secondary cities. Strong momentum of its urban construction attracted a lot of migrant workers from this province and neighboring provinces, with a sufficient number of sample population. Adapted to its characteristics and level of urban development, the migrant workers in Dongying approximate the first generation of migrant workers. As a result, in Dongying City as a sample reference object is more rationality.

generation migrant workers' urbanization and culture will be analyzed.

1. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION ABOUT THE STAGE OF "MIGRANT WORKER PHENOMENON" AND THE OLD GENERATION OF MIGRANT WORKERS

Before detailed analysis of the characteristics of the new age migrant workers in Beijing, the developing history of the "migrant worker phenomenon" must be made clear with the reference of basic features of the old-age migrant workers.

1.1 The Stage of the "Migrant Worker Phenomenon"

As a matter of fact, the migrant worker phenomenon is a transitional one that exists in the Chinese society evolution process, and will finally disappear after the economic transformation and the establishment of the new system (Zheng, 2006). Before 1991, the migrant workers had been labeled with various titles such as "temporary worker", "outsourcing labor", and "alternate worker". At that time, the number of migrant worker was not that big, and so did their influence on the city development. Thus the period before 1991 were generally called the "budding stage". In 1991, the state council issued The Police of The Contract System of The Enterprise Owned by The Whole People Recruiting Peasant-worker, which gave a definition of the migrant worker. After that, the number of the migrant workers grew rapidly, and the migrant workers gradually become an important group that plays an important role in the social development and were taken as a special group by some specialists (Lu, 2002, p.3). The "migrant worker phenomenon" develops in to the "initial stage" after 1991. With the development of the migrant worker phenomenon and the consciousness of their own group, the migrant workers become more aware of the social right they deserve, such as the right for their children's education, the right of labor security and the right of medical security. In 2004, the prime minister, Wen Jiabao, used the concept of "migrant worker" in the "government work report", and around this time, many other ministry of the government, such as the justice department, the ministry of construction and the department of social security, laid out many documents that protect the right of labor of the migrant workers². Thus, the period from 2004 is labeled as the "middle

² For example, on September 30, 2003, the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Construction published The Notice about the Construction Enterprises should be Resolved the Problem of Wage Arrears for Migrant Rural Workers. On November 6, 2004, they published The Notice on the Field of Construction to Resolve Outstanding Payments and Farmers Workers' Wages to Provide Legal Services and Legal Aid.

stage" of the migrant worker phenomenon. In the future, with the accomplishment of economic transformation, migrant workers, as a special group, will finally develop into normal citizens or peasants and their work will turn to be stable instead of the unstable one. And that will be the highest period of the migrant phenomenon, which will also be the period that the migrant workers disappear.

1.2 Brief Introduction of the Old Generation of Migrant Workers

If the migrant workers who exist during and before the "initial stage" are categorized into the old generation of migrant workers, the migrant workers who are around 25 years old in the "middle stage" would be the new generation of migrant worker. The features of the old-age migrant worker are summarized as followings: First, their age is older than 35, most of whom merely accepted education in primary school or middle school, the only thing they good at is farming. Secondly, the old-age migrant workers generally treat themselves as a "guest" in the city, still living the way as they did in their village, and pay little attention to the great contribution they made for the city. The old-age migrant workers could hardly adapt themselves to the life style in the city, thus they are actually "peasant workers" just living in city. Thirdly, the reason why the old-age migrant workers have little feeling of adaption to the city is due to that they are strictly restrained by their local culture which normally show up as conformism, resigning themselves to their fate, being content with the status quo, hard working and enduring hardship, hating to leave their living places, raising sons for old age, believing children could bring home many blessings of good luck, not worrying about poverty, but worried about the uneven distribution of wealth, self-sufficiency rather than cooperation, and abiding by tradition (Wang, 2004, pp.125-128). Fourthly, the one and only purpose for the old-age migrant worker working in city is to make money. So they care little about the life condition if only they can make money.

2. ANALYSIS ON THE BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW AGE MIGRANT WORKERS IN BEIJING

Taking the migrant workers in Dongying, Shandong province as reference, the status quo, culture trait, adaption to urban life and life situation of the new age migrant workers in Beijing will be further analyzed in this thesis.

2.1 Differences in Age, Education Level

The average age of the new age migrant workers in Beijing is 30.71, which is 9 years younger than the migrant workers in Dongying. In Beijing, the new age migrant workers account for 30.15% of all the migrant workers, the old-age migrant worker account for 32.10%. The features of other transitional migrant worker (25 to

35 years old) tend to be like that of the new age migrant workers. Thus it can be found that as the capital of China, Beijing attracts more new age migrant workers rather than the old-age one, while the city of Denying attracts more old-age migrant workers from nearby village rather than new age one. The new age migrant workers have become the mainstay of workers in Beijing³. In terms of age and career, the work of the migrant workers can be divided into the following three kinds: physical work, technical work, and knowledge related work. The workers who are engaged in physical work are generally aged from 26 to 45, and 86% of the workers that are of 26 to 45 years age are devoted to physical work. Migrant workers in Denying are mainly taking up physical works, such as porters and construction workers. The calculating results indicate obvious differences in choosing jobs between the new and old age migrant workers. On one hand, new age migrant workers have a wider scale of jobs to choose and have greater ability to be adapted to the city. For the migrant worker aging from 16 to 25, 14% are normally doing household service, 19.41% of them are doing jobs relating to computer, and 26.74% of them are doing jobs about building. Other jobs that the 16 to 25 years old migrant workers choose are mainly vehicle repairing, business and driving, which shows that the migrant workers tend to do non-physical jobs. However, migrant workers in Dongying are majorly doing construction jobs, which accounts for 46% of all the migrant workers in Dongying. On the other hand, new age migrant worker would like to choose decent jobs to do, for example, none of the migrant workers younger than 25 are doing collecting scraps. Different from the old-age migrant worker, new age migrant worker would like to do jobs that could not only bring them money, but also give them spiritual fulfillment.

Table 1
Distribution of Age and Occupation of Migrant Workers in Beijing

Occupation	Age				
	Under 16	16 to 25	26 to 35	36 to 45	Above 46
Cleaning	0	5	16	12	2
Catering	0	13	5	5	0
Work force	1	31	150	115	11
Housekeeping	0	38	19	13	0
Administration	0	2	5	1	1
IT	0	53	4	0	0
B u i l d i n g industry	2	73	85	54	5
Trading	2	23	42	39	0
Auto repair	0	18	6	5	0
W a s t e collection	0	0	3	10	2
Driving	0	9	6	7	0

³ Statistics show that 16-25-year-old new generation of migrant workers accounted for 30.15%, with a new generation of migrant workers characteristics of transitional migrant workers accounted for 37.19%, the total proportion of migrant workers has been more than old ones. This seems to think migrant workers in Beijing has been completed.

2.2 Differences in Career Choice

It can be concluded from the above Table 1 that in terms of education, migrant workers with a high-school diploma or above account for 82.5% of the new generation of migrant workers in Beijing and 18.64% of the overall migrant workers in Beijing. On the contrary, few old-generation migrant workers have been educated in high schools or universities. Among the new generation migrant workers in Beijing, 27.32% of them have awarded with high school diploma or above and 81.13% of them has awarded with middle school diploma. It can be concluded that a vast majority of new generation migrant workers in Beijing have accepted secondary education or vocational education or higher education of all kinds. Besides, Beijing migrant workers stand for new generation of migrant workers and Dongying migrant workers model as old generation of migrant workers. There are significant differences in the education with the gap of one year or so in terms of average education time. Moreover, occupation is closely related to the education migrant workers have accepted. The illiterate migrant workers primarily are employed to building construction, collecting trash and cleaning. And migrant workers with secondary education mainly work on service industry, computer design, management and so on. Those with college degree or above usually work on automobile repair, computer design, business, typing and so on. Notably, technology related occupation is not in conformity with degree of education. For example, carpenters and painters are popular among migrant workers of various degree of education. The phenomenon can be explained as below: the occupation belongs to technology related industry, in which master-apprentice model is prevailing. Despite of education, migrant workers can pick up the skill and find those kinds of jobs from the model.

Table 2
Distribution of Age and Education of Migrant Workers in Beijing

Education	Age			
	16 to 25	26 to 35	36 to 45	Above 46
Illiterate	7	15	4	0
Without primary school diploma	17	21	45	3
With primary school diploma	13	41	34	3
Without middle school diploma	13	41	54	3
With middle school diploma	55	96	67	5
Without high school diploma	79	95	80	4
With high school or technical school diploma	49	42	21	1
With college diploma	31	26	11	0
With above college diploma	7	10	2	0

2.3 Gradually Getting Rid of Fetter of Local Culture and Forming New Culture

New generation migrant workers in Beijing have gradually got rid of the constraints of local culture and formed new culture. There are several reasons behind the new culture: first of all, the new generation migrant workers become younger in average age. Few or even none of migrant workers have work as peasants without the influence of local culture. It is calculated that 21.53% of the migrant workers have not participated in farming and only 46.34% of the migrant workers have worked in farms for less than two years. And among those migrant workers, 42.82 of them work as peasants when they are less than 25 years old. Secondly, new generation migrant workers mainly transit from students to workers. However, the current education system is urban culture oriented. Therefore, the migrant workers can adapt themselves to urban life without the constraints of various traditions and old thoughts. To be specific, features of new culture of new generation migrant workers in Beijing can be concluded as followings:

Firstly, with the pioneering spirit, new generation migrant workers in Beijing come from other cities around the country. Far from native place, migrant workers struggle in Beijing. Instead of following old tracks and submitting to the will of Heaven, migrant workers are devoted to improving their skills and learning knowledge with limited time to change their destiny. For example, according to an investigation on "To deal with adversity", although suffered from misfortunes, 35.2% of migrant workers in Beijing still hold that they will stay in Beijing and find a way while 20.5% of Dongying migrant workers agree to stay the policy. And 30.4% of Dongying migrant workers can not tell. This reflects the Bandwagon effect.

Secondly, in terms of life view, the new generation of migrant workers in Beijing is dissatisfied with the present situation. They went to the country trying to through the efforts to change their life status. Survey of income disposal, for example, shows that the new generation of migrant workers do not attach importance to "accumulate their own pension", and are keen to learn technology which can improve their Urban survival ability.

Thirdly, as to the marriage and child rearing view of planned eugenics, the new generation of migrant workers in Beijing has basically abandoned "many sons", obsolete concept of marriage and childbearing, attention to eugenics and eutrophication. Survey of marriage and child rearing view shows that if the state canceled the family planning policy, considered the ideal number of children is a share of 40 percent of those surveyed think three or more children, the most ideal total number does not exceed 3%.

Fourthly, there is obvious feature in the labor view of a disciplined punctuality of contemporary migrant workers. The new generation of migrant workers' labor lifestyle has transformed into "workers" labor lifestyle. On the one hand, they maintain hard-working, diligent and thrifty

virtues. On the other hand, they acquire labor workers disciplined punctual lifestyle, overcome the original concept of community, such as "loose", "self sufficiency", "neglect cooperation".

In conclusion, the new generation of migrant workers in Beijing formed new cultural and its essence is rather "local culture" than "urban culture", but unlike pure "urban culture", also left "local culture" traces tentatively be called "local culture".

CONCLUSION

As a newly-emerging force among migrant workers, contemporary migrant workers are no longer mechanical superposition of peasants and workers. Casting off the appearance of yokel in the eye of journalists, citizens and the public, instead, contemporary migrant workers inject in new blood for the development of cities. It is investigated that there is no substantial obstruction for contemporary workers to walk out of countryside and embrace urban life. Nevertheless, it is still difficult for them to assimilate into urban life. For the moment, what the related parties shall pay great attention to is to take powerful actions to promote the integration of urban life and suburban life in system, culture and psychology. In this case, contemporary migrant workers can integrate into urban life in real sense.

If contemporary migrant workers are a thriving sports car, then the government is the steering wheel, deciding the direction and destination of the car. In the meantime, the government is also the gas station of the sports car, which provides timely and sufficient power the sports car. Accordingly, the government should make efforts in the following aspects: First of all, the reform of household register system is crucial. The root of unfair treatment of migrant workers lies in the different household register system between urban and rural. Secondly, spare no efforts to create equal opportunity so that the equal right to educate, sharing of educational resources, cognition of social status and asserting dignity can be guaranteed. Thirdly, reasonable rights and interests are safeguarded. Because migrant workers have always been marginalized and then they have no say to safeguard their rights and interests, there is lack of the ways or channels for them to safeguard rights and interests. Besides, there is a wide range of their rights and interests. This also adds to dispersity of their rights. Thus, it is difficult for them to actively unite together to safeguard their reasonable rights and interests.

And in the sports car, the multimedia acts as the horns. In China, it is the carrier of brilliant culture and social models. Equipped with authority and effectiveness, the multi media should report and promote more successful example and representatives of migrant workers. It is no doubt that the coverage is the best feedback and encouragement to other migrant workers. What's more, this kind of coverage also conveys that migrant workers

are no longer ignored and marginalized. In this case, they can learn from the examples and then inspire their life.

The last not the least, the public is to migrant workers as car converter to sports car. It should be common understanding that open your mind and embrace migrant workers. What contemporary migrant workers pursue not only fortune and interests, but also the belonging to urban life. It is investigated that a vast majority of migrant workers hope to be recognized in terms of their study and work, tolerated from the regional difference and understood from the perspective of values. What they desire or even wish is to be a real citizen, standing in

the same platform to communicate, cooperate and even compete, instead of mentally detaching from the urban life and living without respect.

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