

# Review and Prospect of Small Town Youth Research from the Perspective of Sociology

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## ABSTRACT

Small town youth group is a new group in recent years. Different scholars have conducted various studies on it. Only by reviewing the past research can we grasp the future research direction. In the past, the academic research on returning youth mainly focused on the youth who went to the countryside against the current, as well as their cultural attributes and consumption characteristics. After summarizing previous studies, this paper finds that there is less attention to the young people who were born in the county and returned to the county, and there is a lack of in-depth investigation on how these young groups reintegrate into the life of small towns, which is also the research field that future scholars need to work hard.

**Keywords:** *Small town youth, Literature review, Theoretical research, Research prospect*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

101 years ago, a patriotic movement dominated by young students swept through Beijing, injecting new strength into the nation in danger. 101 years later, a group of Chinese youth are leading the tide of the new era. This group is scattered in cities below the third tier of the motherland. They may be the enviable "rich and free" group, and they are also active participants in modern social life. Today, they gradually come into the public's sight and have become a cultural symbol that can not be ignored. Young people in small towns are a group that receives dividends from the Internet and modernization. This is directly related to their spending power. In recent years, due to the large population and amazing consumption capacity, especially the high contribution rate to the film box office, young people in small towns have attracted much attention and are known as the "most influential consumer group". In addition to spending power, the mobility and cultural attributes of young people in small towns have also attracted attention. The purpose of this paper is to find and make up for the lack of research on small town groups by analyzing and sorting out previous studies. It is of great significance to guide the benign development of this group in the future.

## 2. DEFINITION OF SMALL TOWN YOUTH

The term "small town youth" first appeared in cyberspace. It is not an academic concept or a specific group. At the beginning of its birth, it means that different researchers often make corresponding definitions according to their own research needs and classify them according to regional standards. Tian Feng believes that in a broad sense, small town youth includes both youth groups born in the third, fourth and fifth tier cities and youth groups living in the third, fourth and fifth tier cities. In a narrow sense, young people in small towns are a group of young people who are both born in the third, fourth and fifth tier urban areas and live in the third, fourth and fifth tier urban areas [1]; Dai Yuqi and Li Jiyuan defined their research objects as young students who came from small towns, studied hard and were good at taking exams, but lacked certain vision and resources[2]; Paipai loan and Nanfang Weekend jointly released "believe in insignificant changes: 2018 white paper on the development status of China's small town youth", which defines small town youth as young people who are born in counties and towns at or below the third and fourth tier, live and work in their hometown, or go to big cities and cities around the provincial capital[3].

Different researchers or research institutions have different definitions of young people in small towns. There are two major differences in the definition of young people in small towns: first, based standards of urban

division in China, some scholars believe that small town youth are groups in prefecture level cities and below, and some scholars believe that small town youth are groups in third and fourth tier cities and below[4]. Different division bases also have their similarities, that is, this group has distinct regional symbols. A large number of studies define it as youth in the third tier and below urban areas. on whether their geographical location has migrated, some scholars believe that young people in small towns are groups from third and fourth tier cities and below, but live in first and second tier cities; Other scholars believe that young people in small towns are groups who have been living in third and fourth tier cities and below. Second, according to the different

Many other researchers believe that the definition of small town youth only by regional standards is too generalized and weakens the differences between them, so they put forward a classification method different from the region. For example, Penguin think tank defines "small town youth" as a figurative concept. "Small town" is not a real town, but represents the consumption ecology that is relatively different from the first and second tier cities [5].

### **3. RESEARCH DIRECTIONS RELATED TO SMALL TOWN YOUTH**

#### ***3.1 returning Town Youth***

Previous studies focused on the returning young migrant workers in the context of the financial crisis and economic transformation, as well as their adaptation difficulties after returning home. For example, many young people have not yet internalized the values of the countryside when they go out, so the behavior patterns they form in the city will contradict the traditional values of the countryside after returning.

Since the 19th national congress, under the background of new rural construction and Rural Revitalization Strategy, many scholars have begun to study the countercurrent of population. Wang Chenglong and Wu Xiaowei focus on the social group of returning young people in small towns, start from the reasons for the return of young people in small towns, show the current situation of social integration of returning young people in small towns in the drastic changes in rural areas, analyze their characteristics in social norms integration, lifestyle integration and social and cultural integration, and try to explore the deep-seated reasons for this phenomenon[6]. In his opinion, the returning youth in the town show different psychological and behavioral characteristics from other young people of the same age in the town, and show obvious Urbanization Characteristics in terms of cultural and social integration; In terms of social norm integration, the returning youth in small towns linger in the conflict between modern public rules and traditional human relations; In terms of lifestyle

integration, the consumption, leisure and entertainment styles of returning youth in the town are diversified and differentiated; In terms of social and cultural integration, it is difficult for returning young people in small towns to adapt to the cultural environment in which local social values are supreme.

#### ***3.2 consumption analysis of young people in small towns***

The living conditions of a typical young man in a small town may be described as follows: with the help of his parents, he bought a house with all the money, drove more than 100000 cars, and lived only twoorthree hours' drive from the surrounding metropolis; Compared with those childhood playmates who struggled in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, they don't have high pressure and fast pace. They live a nine to five day. They have a lot of time for leisure and entertainment after work. They can also visit overseas from time to time. With the advent of the era of advanced consumption and consumption sinking, the originally neglected small town consumer groups have gradually attracted social attention, and their unique aesthetic preferences and consumption trends even began to lead the consumption trend.

The consumption potential of young people in small towns is increasing day by day. In the consumer market, young people in small towns have become an existence that cannot be ignored. They have relatively less pressure on life and work and more leisure time, so they are more willing to spend money and dare to spend. It is noteworthy that young people in small towns do not like some standardized goods very much, which is directly related to the great abundance of consumer materials. On the contrary, they are more affected by the circle. Young people in small towns are affected by the consumption boom in the field of Pan entertainment, including games, short videos, live broadcasting, online reading and other related circles, so they are more inclined to consume new things on the Internet. Moreover, young people in small towns have better expectations for the future economy, which is the economic basis for ahead consumption. Their living consumption even surpasses that of young people in first and second tier cities.

#### ***3.3 cultural attributes of town youth***

What kind of portrait does "small town youth" have? For this group, there is a vague consensus, that is, young people aged 20 to 40 living in small and medium-sized towns between big cities and villages. A few years ago, "small town youth" was just a derogatory term. People who were labeled with this term often felt disgraced because it was associated with "local flavor, low income, lack of taste" and other characteristics. However, today, in the eyes of the urban elite, the young people in small

towns have become a force that cannot be underestimated, and their appearance has greatly subverted people's impression. Although most of them have bachelor's degree or below, they have a stable and decent job in their hometown. Their income is not very high, but their pressure is small, and their living cost is relatively low. They do not need to worry about high housing loans. They have more and more freely controlled property and rising consumption. There is no fierce talent competition, complex workplace relations and crowded traffic in big cities. Their pace of life is relatively slow, and their living conditions are leisurely and comfortable. By combing and analyzing the literary works of young people in small towns since the founding of new China, some scholars found that under the social background of different periods, the group image and social status of young people in small towns are closely related to the relationship between urban and rural areas. They have experienced the gap transformation from cultural back feeding to the tension between urban and rural cultural relations and group cultural anxiety until the culture of young people in small towns is defined as the bottom culture.

For young people in small towns, the life in the countryside is too monotonous, and the lights in the city are dim and do not belong to them. Therefore, young people in small towns between the city and the countryside have formed their own unique aesthetic taste and style. They are the main registered users of short video platforms such as Kwai and Tiktok, and are also the main creators of early unfashionable culture. While showing themselves, they also praise and reply to similar content. These interactions have further consolidated the circle of "unfashionable" and promoted the continuous enrichment and dissemination of unfashionable culture. Liutianyuan believes that the young people in the town are in the blind spot of academic and media research, and even are often "stigmatized", such as indulging in "Kwai" and "Tiktok", and keen on "poisonous chicken soup" and "non mainstream culture".

## **4. RESEARCH ON RELEVANT THEORIES OF SMALL TOWN YOUTH**

### ***4.1 parody theory***

Parody theory is developed by American sociologist Goffman on the basis of symbolic interaction theory to analyze the interaction between people in society. Specifically, the pseudo drama theory mainly includes impression management, performance field and self role reconstruction. Different scholars use this theory to analyze the town youth from multiple angles.

Cai Runfang believes that with web2.0 with the advent of the digital age, media connects the labor and capital market of the audience, and is also regarded as the "labor factory" of users by communication political

economics. In its view, the emergence of small town youth groups has benefited from the era of modernization and new media. The application of we media technology has enabled small town youth to pay more attention to the right to speak. In the short video platform, the plot skits created by the town youth with their own roles and experiences show their unique values. The idealized images created by the town youth are vividly reflected in the skits. These idealized images are free from real life and are only carried in the short video content as a constructed ideal. The Danish scholar Stig Chava put forward the "shaping force", that is, the media should be understood as a force shaping action, rather than the action itself or a causal relationship. In other words, the group culture and behavior of young people in small towns are shaped by relying on short video platforms.

### ***4.2 constructivism theory***

Constructivist theory is put forward by the Geneva School. It holds that learners have initiative. Learning is a process in which individuals generate meaning and construct understanding based on their original knowledge and experience, which is often completed in the process of social and cultural interaction.

According to the theory of constructivism, there is no so-called "small town youth" in reality. As a group identity, small town youth is a defined and constructed "signifier", which is filled with significance by various relevant news reports, comments, literary works, film and television dramas. The power of social construction can not be underestimated. It can not only construct reality, construct thought, but also construct identity. Just like the "Buddhist Youth", the "small town youth" will also be a new class constructed by discourse and gradually pushed into reality. However, social construction is not a one-way process, and small town youth groups are also actively integrating into this construction process. At present, the self media platform based on live broadcast and short video is the main position for identity performance of young people in the town. They either shoot and record their leisure life, or show the image of chasing dreams and working hard. The new media platform gives the original "nowhere to speak" groups the opportunity to perform themselves, and in this process, it also gives their groups a unique cultural brand.

### ***4.3 life course theory***

The Chicago School of America put forward the life course theory in the study of immigrants. This theory focuses on the impact of social change on personal development choices. At present, it is also applied to the study of the mobility of young people in small towns.

Jing Xiaofen and Ma Fengming pointed out that the birth group effect has a positive impact on whether migrant workers return home: the later they are born, the

weaker their willingness to return home. Zhang Shiyong's research points out that there are differences in the purpose and adaptation results of returning home between married migrant workers and unmarried migrant workers, that is, migrant workers in different family cycles.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Previous academic research on returning youth mainly focused on the youth who move against the current to the countryside, as well as the cultural attributes and consumption characteristics of these youth. Less attention was paid to the youth who were born in the county and return to the county, and there was a lack of in-depth investigation on how these youth groups reintegrate into the life of small towns, which is also a research field that needs the efforts of scholars in the future.

Different from the second generation of migrant workers, young people in small towns benefit more from modernization. Although they were not born in the city, they are not alienated from the city in the process of growth. Therefore, the counter current movement of young people in small towns has its own characteristics, and the problem of their return and adaptation is worthy of attention. The reason why "small town youth" are important is that they constitute a very important part of the "olive society" to be built in today's Chinese society. In other words, the "small town youth" between urban and rural areas, the changes in their daily lives and their growth path, to some extent, affect whether we can achieve the development goal of expanding middle-income groups, and reflect on whether China in transition can embark on a higher quality, more balanced and more adequate development path. For a long time, we have been used to labeling certain groups, "post-80s", "post-90s" and "small town youth". Having a label means incomplete and incomplete. Many generalizations and descriptions of "small town youth" may seem thin and one-sided, far from showing such a rich and diverse group. However, such a label in turn can form enough attraction to remind us to pay attention to such a young group, care about their growth, pay attention to their needs, provide them with a stage for development and create a better growth environment.

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