



Double Consciousness in the Residents of Relocated Households—Take Binhu District, Hefei for Example

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Abstract. Residents of the relocated households refer to those who have relocated their houses in the city and experienced a sharp transformation from rural residents to city residents. They witness rapid growth in the development of urbanization in China and they embody two separate identities at the same time: urban and rural. This paper takes the residents of the relocated households in *Binhu* district, Hefei city as the research object to study how double consciousness is reflected on them. Both fieldwork and interviews are used. The fieldwork explores the identities embodied in their agricultural practice in the small lots of cities. Interviews are conducted to get a deeper understanding of their change of accent and how this would imply identity change. The result shows that they do embody double consciousness in these two aspects. The appearance of double consciousness is considered to be closely related to field construction and exclusive behavior: rural identity is strengthened through rural life field and the acceptance of the new identity results from other people's exclusive behavior.

Keywords: Double consciousness · Relocated households · Accent · Agriculture · Rural-urban differences

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

With the fast development of urbanization, more and more Chinese cities are expanding into rural areas. The land of rural residents is expropriated by the government for urban construction during the process. Then the government will compensate them with the “relocated houses” in the city, making them urban residents. This group of people is named “residents of relocated households”.

However, the transition happens so quickly that many problems occur. For example, these relocated households may have difficulty in finding jobs or fitting into the lifestyle in the city. Also, they have to cope with identity transition, shifting from rural to urban. This paper considers the relocated communities in *Binhu* district, Hefei, focusing on their agricultural practices and change of accent. It aims to answer the following questions: To what extent can these two identities co-exist? Is double consciousness reflected? If yes, how does this affect their adaptation to city life?

1.2 Literature Review

As a special group that emerged during the urbanization process, many researchers have paid attention to the residents of relocated households. First, the difficulties at the life level have been noticed. The relocated households find it hard to maintain the city life. The employment problem has not been solved from the root and in terms of social and cultural adaptation, the younger generation can integrate quickly into urban society but the thinking and behavior models of the older generation of villagers are solidified. Also, at the level of structural integration, scholars find that villagers lack a platform to interact with other groups, making it difficult for them to expand their social network [1]. Scholars attributed the problem to the absence of a public field [2].

Regarding identity cognition, many of them also encounter problems. Scholars believed that the rural identity is greatly different from urban identity and the differences are mainly considered in four aspects: citizenship, civil rights, behavior pattern, and value orientation [3]. At the same time, the social status of villagers has not been improved with the improvement of economic status, leading to their insufficient understanding of the urban identity [1]. Other research also found that residents of relocated households have a sense of insecurity when they try to keep their rural identities because of the long-time discrimination against them like “no culture” or “no quality” [4].

Existing studies have covered many aspects of the group of relocated households including their difficulties in accepting new urban identities and keeping old rural identities. However, in the aspect of the relationship between these two identities, there is still room for further research. For example, how do these two identities conflict in one group of people and then affect their cognition and behavior? This paper will further explore this through the theory of double consciousness.

1.3 Definition of Double Consciousness

Double consciousness was first raised by Du Bois in his *The Souls of Black Folk*. It refers to the situation of African immigrants in America who tended to have two identities: one is from Africa and the other is in America. These two identities are formed unreconciled strivings in one body and lead to the peculiar sensation of African Americans. It is identified as a “sensation” in Du Bois’s work, which falls short of “true” self-consciousness, but is a consciousness of one’s self, nonetheless [5]. Regarding the consequences of the double consciousness, Du Bois mentioned that it “must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretense or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism” [6].

Later, different scholars further enriched the meaning of double consciousness. In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy attempted to extend Du Bois’s double-consciousness, going beyond the American context and the category of “race” [7]. Gordon specified the “negative version” of double consciousness: the self-images of Africans are wholly determined by how other races view them. Then their self-images become a “white point of view” [8].

1.4 Research Ideas and Methods

Research methods consist of two parts. The first part takes the form of a field survey. The proportion of the residents of relocated households working on vacant lots is collected.

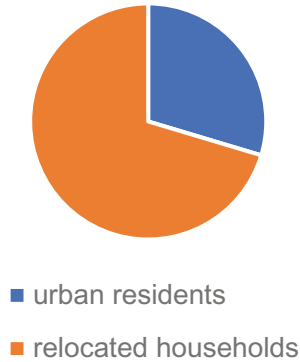


Fig. 1. The Number of People Farming in Lot A

Personal interviews are conducted in the second part. The interview questions mainly focus on whether their accent has changed and why they choose to change or not. The interview ends with questions about their views on urban and rural life.

The sample of the field survey is the residents of the relocated households who live in *Binhu* district and participate in agricultural practice. They participated in agricultural labor from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. on the day of the survey and have a total amount of 42. The interviewees in the interaction section are also residents of relocated households in *Binhu* district and the total amount is 7.

2 Results and Discussion

2.1 The Agricultural Practices of the Relocated Households

2.1.1 Results and Data Analysis

Residents' agricultural practices in the two vacant lots are investigated in this research. In this area, the ratio of relocated households to urban residential areas is 4:7. In the lot A, 27 people come to farm from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and 19 of them are residents of relocated households. In the lot B, 15 people come to farm from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. and 7 of them are residents of relocated households. Figures 1 and 2 demonstrates agricultural labor on these two plots of land.

2.1.2 Result Discussion

The result from both two lots shows that compared with the ratio between relocated households and urban residential areas, which is 4:7, the proportion of residents of relocated households that participated in agriculture practice is much higher. Even in the lot A, the residents of relocated households have a larger number than urban residents. In the lot B, the number of residents of relocated households is slightly smaller. Probably it is due to the location of the lot B which is quite far from relocated household areas but close to the urban residential areas. In general, the residents of relocated households show a greater interest in agricultural practices.

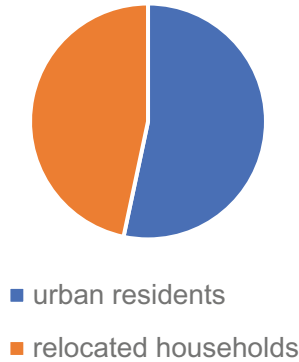


Fig. 2. The Number of People Farming in Lot B

Agricultural production has long been regarded as a part of “farmers’ consciousness”, which refers to the ideology and behavior of agricultural society [9]. The high ratio of people conducting agricultural production indicates the remaining “farmers’ consciousness” of the residents of relocated households even after they live in the urban area.

2.2 Attitudes Towards the Accent

2.2.1 Outcomes of the Interviews

The total number of people who participated in the interview is 7. Their age distribution is shown below in Fig. 3.

Three of the interviewees are below the age of 31 and two of them are between the age of 31 and 50. Two interviewees are older than 50. All the interviewees below the age of 31 claimed that “they only learned how to speak mandarin” and thus have never used dialect.

One of the interviewees between the age of 31 and 50, claimed that he is able to “speak mandarin both with and without an accent”. However, he thought that the usage of dialect decreased after he moved into the urban areas because he has fewer opportunities to communicate with the people in the previous village. Another reason was that his son can only speak mandarin.

One interviewee between the age of 31–50 and one interviewee older than 50 years old claimed that they “can hardly speak mandarin” before moving but learned how to speak later. They used “other people’s feelings” as the reason to change their accent: people in the city may don’t understand what they say and get confused. They insisted that there is a need to change their accent even after being reminded of “you are in the same area and speak with a local accent. Probably most people will understand what you say”. They considered that as a major difference between the rural and urban life. They need to meet and communicate with more people in the city. For the phenomenon of accent discrimination, they thought they understand this phenomenon but have not encountered it in real life. However, they struggled to give a clear answer to the question

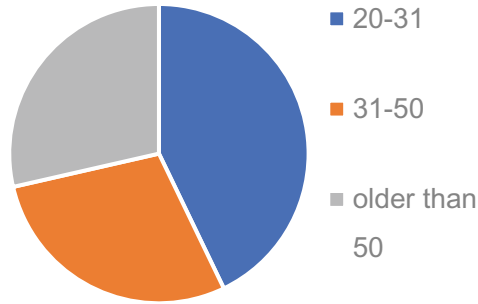


Fig. 3. Age Distribution

of where their knowledge of accent discrimination came from. They also expressed that they do not want to be the targets of accent discrimination.

Another interviewee over the age of 50 claimed that she never changed her accent even after moving because other people around her can all understand what she says. She only plays with a small circle of friends who know each other before moving into the city so they can make sure that everyone understands each other. When she was asked the question “if someone who only speaks Mandarin speaks to you?”, she was visibly overwhelmed and failed to give a clear answer. Finally, she claimed that she has nearly no chance to meet such a situation in her daily life. Regarding the problem of accent discrimination, she had nearly the same opinion as the previous interviewees. At the same time, she also expressed a tougher attitude towards encountering discrimination. “Those who discriminate against others because of their accent are very unqualified and I won’t communicate with them”, she said.

2.2.2 Result Discussion

Generally, accent decreased after the residents of relocated households moved into the urban areas. A large part of them start to speak mandarin frequently or learn how to speak mandarin. They used the reason that “others can understand” to change their accent. They also acknowledged the big difference between the cities and the countryside: cities are more open and they need to reach more different types of people.

Age and personal language education from childhood also have a greater relationship with the accent. The younger people generally learned mandarin from language acquisition. For relatively young people, previous research has found that they have higher learning abilities and generally perform better in the mandarin training course, indicating that it is easier and more likely for them to change their accents [10].

China’s “Mandarin” is the product of complex interactions between economics and politics, and this standard language is an important part of modern nation-building [11]. In the long run, the standard level of Chinese mandarin started to build an inevitable connection with the level of education and occupation held by people and accents have become the symbol of personal identities.

3 Analysis

3.1 Analysis of Agricultural Practice

The relocated households constructed the identity of rural residents in the past, which was closely related to agricultural production. With the long-term usage of land, agriculture is not only the material carrier of production and life but also the basis of their behavior and mentality [12]. That is how “land attachment” emerged within the rural identity. The social and geographic spaces in which the residents of relocated households lived were completely forcibly changed after they moved into the city. From the perspective of field theory, the field is the main place for individuals to participate in social activities. The habitus formed in a specific field for a long time with the attributes of a specific group makes people show a stable psychological and behavioral tendency and forms an obstacle to the social integration of the agricultural migrant population [1]. The small lots in urban areas provide a way for them to reframe the social and geographic space which they are familiar with to some extent. In other words, agricultural production helps them to “recall” their rural identities. The result shows that in general, the residents of relocated households have a greater interest in farming than urban residents. Compared with urban residents, the proportion of returning households planting on small plots is also higher. Urban residents usually take farming as a way to kill time and harvest fresh food. However, for the residents of relocated households, farming has more meaning related to identity construction. For example, the residents of relocated households participating in agricultural production show the characteristic of “gathering”, which means that they always farm with their family members or friends from old rural life. Working in agriculture helps them remember the social networks of their rural days and their positions in it. Although they live in the city now, they are not willing to cut off the bond with the land, indicating the remaining rural identity.

3.2 Analysis of Accent Change

With the popularization of compulsory education, the younger generation of the relocated households can learn how to speak mandarin once they start language acquisition and can practice that in their daily life. However, for most of the older generation, they can only speak mandarin with a strong accent or at least, have fewer opportunities to speak mandarin in rural life. With the influence of urban-rural differences, speaking mandarin with a strong accent is considered as a symbol of rural identity and is related to the stereotypes like backwardness and ignorance. Language usage is an activity of consciousness and is greatly influenced by experience brought about by consciousness [13]. The attitude of the residents of the relocated households towards accent is also largely affected by the “feeling” during communication. Although accent-based biases are often not directly apparent in direct communication, the long-term advantage of urban identity over rural identity will also prompt them to actively change their accents. Also, “to make other people understand” becomes an acknowledged reason for the change of the accent by many residents of relocated households in the interview. They admit the differences between city and country life. Objectively, this further illustrates the

differences in their perceived rural and urban identities. Compared to rural identities, people with urban identity need to communicate with more people.

The exclusive behavior can partly explain the accent change. Williams defined it as the state of “being rejected, lonely, or isolated” [14]. Most of the interviewees have the experience of being misunderstood or rejected by others just because of their accent or at least, they show concern about that. People who were excluded are considered more likely to develop a greater sense of belonging to the special group [15]. For the residents of relocated households, although most of them has already changed their accent, the past experience of “being rejected” still reminds them of their rural identity. Then this tends to trigger the conflict between the two identities and further influence their willingness to fully embrace urban identity even with the same accent. Another noticeable phenomenon is that with the confusion on identity recognition, people tend to have selective interaction in interpersonal communication due to the need of clarifying identities, which will result in the exclusive behavior in a reverse direction [16]. The interview also proves that this phenomenon exists in the residents of relocated households. One of the interviewees clearly rejects to change her accent and communicates only with those people “from the rural areas”. She does not have a clear idea of how to communicate with the “urban people” who speak mandarin and will avoid communication with them. Though this behavior is often unconscious, it still encourages relocated residents to further retain their rural identities and increases the difficulty of integrating into the urban life.

In general, the identification with the urban identity and the remaining rural identity are both reflected in the residents of the relocated households, which indicates the emergence of double consciousness in them. Despite the conflict, identification with the city’s residents unquestionably takes the dominant position. Only with very few activities like farming, the residents of relocated households can reconstruct their perception of rural identity. Other factors like accent discrimination make them feel the urgency to change their identities quickly. All these lead to the situation that they neither have fully accepted the urban identity nor have completely abandoned the rural identity.

4 Conclusion

The government’s land acquisition policy has made rural residents lose their familiar living space, and the long-standing “rural discrimination” in the society has further led to the confusion of identities. The relocated households have difficulties in accepting and recognizing urban identity while retaining rural identity is difficult to be accepted by the cities where they live. Therefore, double consciousness is formed. The conflict between the two identities often requires them to compromise in many aspects of life, which will further increase the difficulty of their integration into urban life. To solve the problem, the government needs to take the responsibility to provide help, not only physical but also mental. Through the ways like promoting community culture construction, the government can significantly enhance their sense of belongings and identity in the urban community. Their nostalgia for rural identity should also be seriously considered. Residents of relocated households should be able to demonstrate their rural identity more confidently and without discrimination, which will also need government’s efforts of promoting equality between urban and rural areas.

This research also has some deficiencies due to the limitation of time. For example, only two aspects of subjects' lives were covered in the survey. For future research, there is still a large space to explore, such as the different aspects of relocated households' lives in multiple regions.

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