

A Research on Public Education and Rural-urban Migrants' Urban Adaptation

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Abstract

Rural-urban migrants' urban adaptation is essentially the process of transforming peasants into citizens. The key is to see if they have or develop new relations and survival skills in the city. Urban governments and urban society should assume the responsibilities of mobilizing urban public education resources to help rural-urban migrants better adapt to and integrate into urban society, to eliminate a variety of problems in current public education for rural-urban migrants in urban-rural binary partition system.

Keywords: Rural-urban Migrants; Public Education; Urban Adaptation; Direction Change

1. Introduction

In current China, rural-urban migrants have become an important part of urban population. However, this group is generally referred to as "peasant labor", "floating population" and "external population" by the government and scholars. These titles distinguish them from residents with local urban household registration. Meanwhile, urban administrators and researchers also attribute rural-urban migrants' difficulty in adaptation to this group and its individuals' qualities and abilities, but seldom consider it from the perspective of urban governments and urban society's responsibilities. In this institution, the research will set rural-urban migrants' problems as problems in the process of transforming peasants into citizens and try to explore how urban governments and urban society in the "urbanization" framework mobilize urban public education resources to help rural-urban migrants better adapt to and integrate into urban society.

2. Relationship between Public Education and Rural-urban Migrants' Urban Adaptation

2.1 Public Education Should Be Responsible for Rural-urban Migrants' Social Adaptation

Generally speaking, "adaptive behavior" is "individuals' behaviors to adapt to social

environment. Through socialization, when individuals know their social rights and obligations and acquire knowledge, skills, values and characters in line with social requirements, they will take actions conforming to social requirements in social interaction and social actions. Conversely, if they cannot well adapt to social environment, they will fall into confusion. Human's life is a process to constantly adapt to environment." "Adaptation" and "socialization", closely related, are different expressions of an event from two aspects. American sociologist Goldscheider said, "Migrants' adaptation can be defined as a process, and in this process, migrants respond to the changed political, economic and social environment. The rural-urban process generally includes three aspects of change." Goldscheider emphasized change and process and tended to interpret adaptation as behavior, namely, a continuous behavior adjustment made by migrants in the changed environment. According to the explanation, rural-urban migrants' urban adaptation can be understood as this group's socialization or their continuous socialization in a new environment, namely, the process of rural-urban migrants' transformation from peasants to citizens.

Migrants' adaptation process in the city can be generally divided into three stages. Stage 1: shock

and resistance. At the very beginning when rural labors come to a city, they always feel extremely excited and delighted, but they show their obvious maladjustment such as a big shock or a kind of resistance against various phenomena in the city, because they have to face a totally different real world, complex social relations, and a series of difficulties in work and life. In the 1920s, a sociologist used to point out: city and countryside represent two opposite poles in contemporary civilization, and they have their own specific benefit, interest, social organization and humanity. Stage 2: study and imitation. After a period of time, most rural-urban migrants working in the city begin to imitate, study or accept urban elements willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously. They selectively absorb or borrow some useful elements, such as vocational skills and life style. Stage 3: absorption and integration. After study or imitation for a period of time, migrants selectively absorb or borrow some useful elements of urban society, but they also preserve some elements of their place of origin. When these two kinds of element are harmonious, it is called integration, and when integration becomes perfect, it means that migrants have totally adapted to the city.

These three stages are ideal patterns of urban adaptation. In reality, some migrants may not complete the process of absorbing and integrating urban elements, thus causing division and marginalization. Division means subjectively refusing urban mainstream elements and intentionally avoiding contacting any urban element; marginalization means intentionally approaching to mainstream elements but failing to develop skills and relation network to approach to mainstream elements.

In the whole process, the key for migrants to adapt to the city is to see if they have or develop new relations and survival skills in the city. Due to the scarcity of economic resources, it is difficult for rural-urban migrants to make much devotion to social relations or develop new relations, and their main relation network consists of colleagues and fellow-villagers with the same background. Therefore, their social interaction in the city has two characteristics: introversion and superficial nature. Introversion means that they tend to contact with their families, fellow-villagers and countrymen from other areas. When they encounter a problem in work and life, they are more likely to turn to their families and fellow-villagers. Introversion results in the homogenization of social network, while the high information repeatability makes information with high homogenization difficult to happen, so their occupation always shows a low-level movement instead of an upward movement.

Besides, according to the interview investigation, rural-urban migrants generally have very few opportunities to receive training and learning in respects of technology and management sponsored by governments, social organizations or units. For example, on construction site, vocational training is generally carried out in the form of mentoring, unless it is special work. As training requires cost and rural-urban migrants' employment is relatively stable, the labor contractor is unwilling to train them. However, rural-urban migrants are incapable of bearing the cost of this kind of training. Additionally, education and training organizations everywhere are mainly open to citizens with local residence registration. It is learnt from Labor Bureau, Social Insurance Center and Re-employment Service Center that only unemployed persons and social insurance persons with local urban

residence registration, laid-off persons entering re-employment service centers as well as enterprises' redundant staffs are quailed to apply for training subsidy. Up to now, there are very few vocational schools that are specially founded for rural-urban migrants and most of them are privately owned for lucrative purpose. Thus, their vocational training is basically completed in the process of employment. The difficulty in new relations formation and the shortage of technique and skills make rural-urban migrants difficult to adapt to urban life and employment.

In the explanation for above phenomenon, namely, whether "peasant labors' difficulty of adaptation" is a social problem or their own problem, there have been two different viewpoints for a long term: one holds that the city fails to provide public education resources for them to improve their adaptive capacity; the other holds that it is caused by "peasant labors'" individual qualities (idea, character, culture, and skill). In essence, the basic divergence between these two viewpoints is that if the government should take rural-urban migrants as a part of the city and assume the responsibility of providing public education for them. The author believes that urban government and urban society should assume their responsibilities when rural-urban migrants adapt to urban life, thus taking the problem that how urban government and urban society mobilize urban public education resources to help rural-urban migrants better adapt to and integrate into urban society as the main focus.

2.2 Main Problems at Present

Public education aims at providing education service with pure properties of public product, i.e. it is free, equal and universal; however, in China's urban-rural binary partition system, there are still various

problems in current rural-urban migrants' public education. To sum up, there are following problems.

Firstly, it is law and policy. The existence of household registration system and unequal treatment to rural-urban migrants prevent them from forming citizen consciousness. The social management of urban-rural binary partition based on household registration system extends to binary social management inside the city, and relative to the change of employment system, the reform of this binary social management system seriously lags. At present, rural-urban migrants cannot enjoy the treatment of urban residents but suffer discrimination and rejection in respects of housing, employment, social insurance, children's compulsory education, medical health and family planning service. All of these prevent rural-urban migrants from realizing their rights, thus directly affecting the formation of their rights & obligations consciousness and legal consciousness. The core of citizen consciousness is right consciousness. Some complain about rural-urban migrants' poor quality and stress civic education for them. However, how does the city give the basic right to rural-urban migrants to help them have corresponding right and obligation consciousness? It can be implemented by laws and policies.

Secondly, it is idea. Local people's prejudice and discrimination is the soft environment causing rural-urban migrants' lack of identity of community and hindering them from adapting to the city, and as well the result of public education's overlooking anti-discrimination education for local residents. The prejudice and discrimination they suffer in daily life and social interaction directly hinder rural-urban migrants' urban adaptation. For example, a painter on a construction site said, "Shanghai people are not so

friendly, and they turn their nose up at migrant labors like us. When we pass by them with work clothes after work, they always keep away from us as if we are virus-infected monsters.” There are many similar narrations. These respondents always feel that they cannot access to the circle of urban dwellers, “They treat us as migrant labors from other areas and feel insecure about us.” This situation causes their negative response to urban life. From the investigation in H Village, it is found that apart from the cheap house rent, a major factor attracting migrant labors to move here from various areas is that all of them are outsiders and they won’t look down upon each other. Urban people’s rejection forces rural-urban migrants to give up trying hard to integrate into the city to different degrees. They generally do not have a sense of identity of the city and residential community but tend to regard their urban life as a short-term behavior. To some extent, some contradictions and conflicts are their reckless extreme behaviors to fight against unfair treatment and as well the objective manifestations of their maladjustment in urban life.

In addition, at present, urban governments have a misunderstanding of public education. One of the problems is that they have not yet completely changed their traditional idea but still tend to treat rural-urban migrants as the destabilizing factor of urban order, so they adopt preventive management and education for them. The method, with obvious “infusion” feature, is mainly manifested in this way: the educators carry out ideological and political education for the educated from top to bottom, while the educated always passively receive education. The government’s attitude towards rural-urban migrants is mostly based on management instead of service and safeguard. Grassroots communities are equipped with

external population management office; besides, labor, police, urban construction, and family planning departments have specially-assigned persons to manage external population. They are mainly in charge of following works: certificate handling and charging; certificate checking and fine imposing; in case of social order rectification, they always point the finger at rural-urban migrants. They almost carry out specific practice from the perspective of management way but seldom pay attention to their living environment, conditions and requirements. The problem of this management mode is: due to people’s increasingly diversified economic activities at present, the resulting social mobility and idea renewal make social members’ existing way out of the traditional single mode, so it is hard to achieve actual effect through traditional infusion education with its little persuasion; besides, the government carries out public education by distinguishing and separating local residents from external population, which causes the lack of interaction between urban residents and rural-urban migrants and intensifies their difference in social attribute.

Thirdly, it is specific practice. Problems such as insufficient human and material resources, management staffs’ quality and the sense of identity inside the management actually cause binary partition public education. Due to the big mobility of rural-urban migrants, existing household registration system prevents their settlement tendency. Therefore, the public education for rural-urban migrants requires more human and material resources, because personnel structure always changes in the implementation of a project. Besides, most rural-urban migrants are faced with more survival problems; they do not have high income, so after removing daily expense, they have little money or

time to enjoy spiritual life. These objective reasons indeed increase the difficulty in developing civic education for rural-urban migrants.

Besides, the binary partition system of urban public education is still the major problem. At present, urban public education system still mainly covers local residents, and street and residential committee personnel actually carry out education and management to rural-urban migrants by isolating them from local residents. In the investigated community with centralized residence of rural-urban migrants, basically, there is not public education service similar to that enjoyed by local residents. Respondents said that residential committee personnel just occasionally came here for health management and they never heard about public education.

Fourthly, the immaturely developed civil society and the unfulfilled socialized management of community are other reasons for the failure of in-depth development of public education for rural-urban migrants. With the transition from planned economic system to market economic system, more and more superior units begin to have their subordinate units weaned. As a result, units of different levels and types start to change their “enterprise-built society” condition and remove their original function of social insurance. However, the release of units’ social responsibilities does not mean the growth of “society”.

3.The Direction of Public Education Transition

3.1 The Precondition of Public Education

Respecting and implementing rural-urban migrants’ basic rights is the precondition of public education. To require migrants to fulfill their civic moral obligations and consider and implement their rights within the scope of system as far as possible,

administrative staffs at all levels should respect migrants’ dignity and rights and completely avoid making inroads on the benefit of migrants. Besides, personnel of all functional departments should enforce the law normatively. Law-executor’s strict enforcement and citizens’ law-abiding are mutually supplemented.

3.2 To Change the Government’s Working Principle

To change the government’s working principle and turn management to service is the guarantee of public education to improve rural-urban migrants’ urban adaptation capacity. Thus, the government should drive the transition of its management function and shift the focus of peasant labors management to protection and service of lawful rights and interests. Besides, it should change the traditional working pattern of ideological education and focus on turning “infusion education” to the interaction between teaching and learning. It cannot be denied that the influx of rural-urban migrants brings much difficulty to urban management and public security. However, millions of rural-urban migrants are active on all fronts of urban construction nowadays and their busy figures can be found everywhere, including breakfast stands, peddlers’ markets, construction sites and urban environmental sanitation. It can be said that today’s city is the outcome of not only urban people’s own efforts but also the rural-urban migrants’ contributions. Urban governments should make it clear that rural-urban migrants have become a very important part of urban society and it is the city’s responsibility to meet their living needs and help them to adapt to urban life.

3.3 To Develop Anti-discrimination Education

The government should develop anti-discrimination education to local residents and improve the soft

environment for rural-urban migrants' urban adaptation. The content of civic moral education to local residents should be added with the education of respecting and helping migrants. Migrants' identify of community and their social interaction with local residents depends on local residents' changed attitude towards migrants. "Urban people's" prejudice and discrimination against "migrants" and "peasant labors" is an important factor causing migrants' difficulty in identifying community and their mental depression, so it is necessary to take anti-discrimination as an important content in civic moral education. In civic education for urban residents, citizens' personality equality and mutual respect should be classified as important content. Urban governments and urban society should devote themselves to removing prejudice, discrimination and infringement against migrants.

3.4 Interactive Mode

The government should establish an interactive mode between media, occupation, school education and community rural-urban migrants' social education, to form rural-urban migrants' public education network and improve their urban adaptation capacity. In terms of system reform, it should reform public education system and achieve free, equal and universal public education, which is not only necessary but also urgent. Firstly, education is an important mechanism to cultivate social morality and remove social inequity. However, the consequence of continuing some previous urban public education systems (no system supply but discrimination and restriction on migrants) is to form two social groups with different mentality, emotion, values and deep gap in the city; the difficultly integrated social distance and huge tension imply various social conflicts and threaten social stability. Meanwhile, education is an effective

way to change and prevent vicious circular accumulation of rural-urban migrants' urban life. Secondly, according to assimilation theory, it is a long-term process for migrants to finally integrate into the migration destination, for it always requires a generation and even several generations' efforts. Based on China's current national conditions, it is impossible for migrants to completely adapt to and integrate into the city in a short time, and this process may extend to their second generation and even the third generation. However, the goal of providing education service with pure properties of public product is one of the important contents to reflect free, equal and universal public education, i.e. the nine-year compulsory education for rural-urban migrants' children is still faced with huge challenge. Existing education management system follows the principle of attending a school which is nearest to the registered residence of the educated. To migrants and their children, their registered residence is not moved with their migration, so it is much difficult for them to receive equal school education in the city they migrate to. Besides, in their urban adaptation, migrants especially the second generation of migrants require not only normal school education but also a favorable environment and a historical process. The investigation shows that there are diversified channels for the younger generation of rural-urban migrants to acquire information in various aspects, including parents' behavior model in a family, mass media's report of public affairs, the influence of politicians' words and deeds, the experience of participating in social activities, vocational training, etc.

Thus, it is urgent to establish an interactive mode based on school education and supplemented by media, vocation, and community rural-urban

migrants' social education, to form interactive mode and contacting network of rural-urban migrants' public education and integrate the resources of public education. For example, media public education platform has been established on the district government's webpage. To younger generation of rural-urban migrants, the traditional disseminating way cannot meet their demand. To combine dissemination with network public education can bring about subtle influence, which is conducive to forming younger generation of rural-urban migrants' civic consciousness and improving their capacity to adapt to the city. Specific practices include: establish financial investment mechanism for community education based on rural-urban migrants, broaden financing channels, and solve the shortage of funds for school running; establish community education operation mechanism based on public schools and use idle school resources for migrants' education

cause; establish strongly targeted adult continuing education system for rural-urban migrants and create new models of social education such as vocational training and guidance for urban life, to become an important approach to improve and strengthen rural-urban adult migrants' capacity to adapt to urban life.

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