

# The Social Management and Development Approach of Urban Minority: “Boundary-Crossing” and “Cultural-Sensitivity”

Mu Wei

School of Public Management, Yunnan University of Finance and Economics, Kunming,

P.R. China 650221

( weimuzsu@163.com )

## Abstract

Specific to the problems that minority migrants encounter in the process of adapting to urban society, this paper comes up with the key problems for social management and development of minority, including expanding the professional social management and service of minority migrants, and strengthening cultural adaptability in social management. Besides, this paper presents a practical approach, namely, “boundary crossing” and “cultural sensitivity”, to facilitate the social management of minority migrants, as well as makes a preliminary discussion on this practical strategy.

**Keywords:** Minority Migrant, Social Management, Boundary-Crossing, Cultural-Sensitivity

## 1. Introduction

In modern society, nation and ethnic group, as the ubiquitous “human community”, still prove to be the important foundation of social classification and interest mobilization as well as the important factors influencing social development. Now, the strategic topic for government to carry out social management is how to cope with a string of problems after a number of minorities have migrated into cities from villages since 1980s, construct a favorable and alternative urban ethnic relationship, and boost the common development of all ethnic groups. Around the world, the protection of equal rights and interests of minorities has been wildly acknowledged and accepted as basic political stand, but the key lies in how to protect the rights and interests of minorities and establish a harmonious national society.[1]

## 2. The Problems of Urban Minority Migrants—Dilemma of Cultural Transfer

Different from resident urban minorities and new urban minorities, minority migrant refers to the minority population living in the city and working on a variety of economic and cultural activities without urban household register. Traditionally, rural minorities get involved in farming, greatly differing from the urban residents in the way of production and life. Comparatively, the former is simple, settled, and passive with poor consciousness of self-

organization, while the latter is complicated, floating, and positive with consciousness of self-organization and self-safeguard. The identity from peasant and urban resident proves to be a great challenge posed for the minority members who move to cities. Normally, minority migrants from countryside were originally living in a region with few ethnic groups, or only one or two ethnic groups. In countryside, the ethnic relationship can be easily handled because it has unstructured life style, infrequent mutual contact, and few interactions and conflicts. However, due to the substantial increase of ethnic groups, the increasingly frequent contact among ethnic members, and the closer contact after migration into cities, different ethnic members are faced with more interactions and conflicts, and meanwhile, multi-culture influences and interacts with each other in a more direct way. And adaptation, survival and development in the multicultural environment have presented another major challenge for the minority migrants who were originally lived in village.

### 2.1 Dilemma of Livelihood and Development

Career transfer turns out to be the primary problem of survival and development in the urbanization process of minority floating population. In urbanization process, minority floating population is exposed to two major problems.

First, industrial dilemma and low technical content: minority migrants primarily get engaged in the industries related to ethnic characteristic economy, such as individual retail industry and catering industry, including tea of Dong minority,

Tibetan knife, Lanzhou ramen, Xinjiang lamb shashlik, etc. undeniably, despite unique ethnic characteristics, these industries show low technical content.

Second, due to lack of social capital, it is difficult for social capital reconstruction to realize ethnic crossing. Ronald Burt assumed that social capital refers to friends, colleagues and the more universal relations, and all these can allow you to get the chance of utilizing capital (other forms); social capital shows the significance of fixing the existing vulnerabilities in social network and overcoming various problems in collective action to resolve the problem of social order. Constrained by the factors such as language, culture, custom and belief, urban minority floating population still stay in a comparatively closed social circle, with many activities restricted to their own ethnic group, though they lead a life in cities. In livelihood and life, they show a trend of involution and shut the development space of social capital.

## **2.2 Dilemma of Mental Adaptation**

Chinese minority is characterized by diverse cultural types. In urbanization progress, rural minority migrants will come up against adaptation dilemma in the aspect of cultural psychology. Instead of simple identification with living customs and emotional expression forms, such difference includes the three-dimensional identification with ethnically differential social geographical environment, cultivation type and cultural form: transfer from the minority settlements in border area to the settlement of the ethnic Han; transfer from the geographical society with traditional natural will as focus to the urban society with modern industrial technology as boundary; transfer from nomadic culture as well as hunting and fishing culture to industrial culture.

The difference of cultural types is accompanied by a series of practical problems, which will be resolved by dint of considerably rigid and opposite group environment. During the shift from traditional society to modern industrial society, the inclination of interest distribution turns out to be the primary challenge. It is sure that the problems of interest distribution will happen to the ethnic contact among different industrial models. During the rural-to-urban development, minority migrants are confronted with the break of social resources and the problem of adapting to the survival and development in the cities by constricting new social capital. The value standard problem in urban development environment will cause difficulty in social integration and psychological identification.

## **2.3 Prominent Ethnic Consciousness**

Minority migrants from countryside prove to be a special vulnerable group crossing three-dimensional space of time, region and culture. For the adaptation from rural life to urban life, and from ethnic language and culture to urban Chinese language and culture, it will take a long time to make adjustment in such cultural crossing because the difference between city and countryside as well as ethnic groups exists as the long-standing cultural deposits in different situation. Because of the ethnic awareness, ethnic difference can be naturally felt during the interaction with other ethnic groups.

To answer the questions above, the promotion of social management of urban minority migrants comes across two major problems: first, how to facilitate the penetration and popularization of professional social management organization, resource and service in urban minority migrants, and improve the service coverage and profession; second, how to implement professional services in accordance with the cultural features and preference of different ethnic migrants, and take full advantage of the cultural resource superiority of 'client system'. [2]

## **3. The Perspective of Boundary Crossing**

### **3.1 The Concept and Category of "Boundary Crossing"**

The minority social management of "boundary crossing" means enhancing the professionalism of ethnic social service from the perspective of professional service extension as well as the effective inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic interaction. This is achieved by integrating multilevel subjects and resources of ethnic social management, crossing the established geographic, social and cultural boundaries, expanding the service group and category of social management of minority migrants, and strengthening the communication and exchange between different subjects

The author highlights boundary crossing, because he primarily intends to tackle the following problems and challenges. Firstly, he aims to solve the problems of insufficient professions and resources of social management of local ethnic groups, and, the "boundary crossing" can assist in winning the support of external personnel and resources. Secondly, he wants to improve the problem that existing ethnic social management is primarily rooted in minority autonomous areas, and the social and cultural boundaries of all ethnic groups. This can

follow and satisfy the development trend and service requirement of ethnic boundary crossing. Thirdly, he intends to address the problem of how governmental administrators enter and expand the field of minority social management, and promote the development of minority social development by instantly and effectively removing the geographical, social and cultural boundaries. Finally, through boundary crossing, he plans to motivate the counterpart support of developed regions and realize mutual integration and coordination between national policy support resources and ethnic groups as well as self-development ability of ethnic regions.

Specifically speaking, minority social management of boundary crossing is mainly consisted of following contents. First, there is a need to cross geological boundary, realize the expansion of urban minority migrants and the sharing of professional resources. Second, it is necessary to cross inter-ethnic social and cultural boundary, advocate the problem-oriented rather than ethnic-identity-oriented minority social management, and propel the integrative rather than dual-structured management from the perspective of inter-ethnic interaction and intra-ethnic cooperation. Third, it is required to cross the established disciplinary boundary, make the best of fruitful multidisciplinary achievements, realize the crossed integration of relevant disciplines in the process of minority social management research and practice. Fourth, based on mutual study and equal interaction, the subjective and objective dual boundary between crossing manager and management object achieves mutual improvement from the perspective of inter-subjectivity.

### **3.2 Practical Strategies of Boundary Crossing**

To advance the development of minority social management of boundary crossing, the most important thing is to bring more professional social work subjects and professional resources in the communities of minority migrants with the help of more social work agencies, programs, systems and social workers. Besides, it is necessary to effectively integrate urban resources and meet all demands. Additionally, there is a need to accelerate the professional education of social work in minority areas, cultivate social workers of different ethnic identities, and implement 'anti-stigmatization'[3] for ethnic problems. Beyond that, the author proposes following important practical strategies.

Firstly, the coverage and practice types of minority social management are supposed to be expanded in accordance with the change of ethnic distribution, ethnic composition and floating population. On one hand, in the context of the urbanization and the acceleration of social

mobility, the established boundary of minority autonomous area, ethnic identity, and ethnic preferential policy is broken. This can further expand the coverage area and the group of social management of urban minority migrants, and reinforce the minority social management of urban population in the cities of non-minority autonomous areas. And besides, it can extend the minority social management to the foreign ethnic groups living and working in China and the Chinese ethnic groups working and living abroad. On the other hand, minorities are substantially changing their social service requirements with the improvement of their social economy and the transformation of life style. As a result, the existing social management of urban minority migrants which is limited to the fields such as the livelihood support and the protection of women and children is far from being able to meet the change of demand. Therefore, in order to provide the social management work that is diverse and close to realistic demand, it is necessary to quicken the transition from integral support to integral support, and further supplement the practical contents of social management of minority migrants.

Secondly, the inter-ethnic interaction and intra-ethnic cooperation are highlighted. The traditional method that defines the objects of minority social management in a single ethnic group based on the attribute of ethnic group is altered from the perspective of the ethnic relationship and the inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic effective interaction. On one hand, with the increase of inter-ethnic dependence and interaction, it is difficult for a certain ethnic group or its internal group to address the narrow problems in isolation, because the narrow boundary between ethnic groups must be crossed; meanwhile, attention should be paid to the implementation of the community-based social management of urban minority migrants; also, the support should be provided for the ethnic people staying in a particular region rather than for a specific ethnic group only. On the other hand, it is needed to focus more attention on the solution for the interest distribution and balanced development in an ethnic group by starting with the worsening trend of social differentiation inside every ethnic group. And beside, it is necessary to excel at applying and integrating the social and economic resources mastered by the earlier-rich group and cultural elite group inside all ethnic groups. This will thus improve the abilities of self-reliance and internal cooperation of all ethnic groups.

Thirdly, the connection between ethnic research and urban relationship of minority migrants should be cemented. On one hand, by

means of the close association between multidisciplinary research related to Chinese ethnic affairs and the practice of social management, the practice-oriented minority social management is enhanced, and meanwhile, theoretical and factual basis is provided for the practical activities of social management of minority migrants. On the other hand, the resources of different levels and the support system should be integrated and adopted to promote the ethnic management that emphasizes macro level and middle level, and value the complementary advantages of “multiple systems interfering with management”. This can further exploit the advantage that existing management of minority migrants excels at the utilization of related national social policy resources. At the same time, it can cover the shortages that existing ethnic social management highlights macro level, give full play to the advantage of local resource and subject, and carry on the macro and micro social management of minority migrants.

Fourthly, the application of the inter-subjective management process and methods is supposed to be stressed. Under the influence of superior cultural view and external professional dominance, it will be easy for the social management of minority migrants to develop one-way relational model between subjective and object. First, the inter-subjective management process and method highlighted by the author is expected to break the one-way relational model between subject and object. By way of self-study and self-reflection, the two-way interactive social management process should be constructed. Based on the active participation of management object, the subjectivity of all ethnic groups and the mobilization of local resources are applied to addressing the problem of management object. Second, the professional resources are supposed to be enriched and optimized through introducing more subjects related to the integration of governments, enterprises, commonweal organizations, etc.

#### **4. Perspective of “Cultural Sensitivity”**

It is certain that the management of the minority migrants attached to different ethnic cultural systems will be influenced by the factors, such as local social culture and system, and people’s ideas and ways of acts. Thus, consideration must be given to the specific management method and the pertinence of the involved minority cultural systems. That is, the management of cultural sensitivity should be carried out.

#### **4.1 The Concept and Category of “Cultural-Sensitivity”**

In author’s view, the minority migrant management of cultural-sensitivity means when improving the professionalism of management process, all ethnic groups’ appeal for multi-culture services is satisfied with a view to helping minority migrants with cultural adaptation. This is achieved by mobilizing the subject participation in local ethnic group and making use of local cultural resources based on sufficient knowledge about ethnic cultures with the attitude and value orientation of respecting cultural difference.

Since 1970s, social management of minority migrants has been attaching great importance to cultural sensitivity. However, the prevailing “cultural sensitivity” means administrators can observe and cognize cultural difference or see “cultural sensitivity” as a simple problem of management technique. In this case, “cultural sensitivity” is equal to a sense of values, attitude or cultural sense to a great extent; thus, it cannot really integrate with research and practical action of social management; and besides, the specific contents and practical strategies of “cultural sensitivity” are considerably obscure.[4] Meanwhile, administrator also has a problem with the discussion on “cultural sensitivity”. That is, cultural sensitivity problems are mainly aimed at exotic cultures, lacking sufficient attention to the cultural difference in every ethnic group as well as understanding and reflection on personal cultural systems.

The main reason why “cultural sensitivity” is emphasized during the promotion of the social management of minority migrants is to address the following problems. First, it aims to resolve cultural misunderstandings and even conflicts due to the shortage of the understanding on the cultural knowledge of the involved ethnic groups. Second, it intends to solve the problem of failure in offering differential and individual service, which results from the absence of the awareness and respect for different ethnic cultural difference. Third, it aims to overcome the difficulty of subject participation and insufficient local resource utilization caused by the little focus on the cultural systems and local resources of the involved ethnic groups. Finally, it intends to cope with the problems including the declining social management performance of urban minority migrants and even the “cultural oppression”, which are arising from little focus on the cultural systems and local resources.

Concretely speaking, “social management of cultural sensitivity”[5] mainly comprises following contents. First, the cultural knowledge of the involved ethnic groups is preserved on the

increase with the attitude and value orientation of respecting cultural difference. Second, the ethnic cultural knowledge and helping process are integrated; and meanwhile, through developing and applying the social management methods and techniques of “cultural sensitivity”, the proper management is ensured and the differential requirements of different ethnic groups are satisfied. Third, the local resources of the involved ethnic groups are mobilized to boost the practical participation of ethnic subjects, and integrate the ethnic cultural resources of the helped into the helping process. Fourth, in order to improve cultural sensitivity, continuous self-reflection is carried out to make clear and perceive the features and the limitations of the cultural knowledge system of social workers.

#### **4.2 Practical Strategies of “Cultural Sensitivity”**

As previously mentioned, “cultural sensitivity” is not a kind of external knowledge or the knowledge that can be easily acquired through classroom teaching only. Besides, it is not aimed at exotic culture. Therefore, the efforts are required to be made from the following aspects to facilitate the social management of minority migrants with the characteristic of “cultural sensitivity”.

First, in Chinese society with multiple ethnic groups and cultures, social administrators are supposed to strengthen cultural consciousness and introspection from the perspective of values and consciousness. Besides, they are expected to show respect for cultural difference by way of continuous study and introspection as well as provide the services required by different ethnic groups under different cultures. Social administrators are supposed to consider their personal position and professional knowledge. With the attitude of respect and openness, they are required to reflect on their personal cultural restrictions by starting with the cultural perspective of minorities. Additionally, they need to figure out the meeting points between social workers and minority values as well as mainstream values and alternative values.

Secondly, provided that social managers only revolve around the abstract concept of social policy but neglect the historical and cultural context and the realistic situation, the management practice will become a blind action.[6] Correspondingly, the social management of “cultural sensitivity” will require us to learn historical tradition and cultural difference of different ethnic groups; meanwhile, it will demand us to understand the daily living world of the managed objects, accumulate the

cultural knowledge of related ethnic groups, and strike up the mutually trustful and interdependent relationship with the managed objects. Surely, we also are supposed to make clear the priority of the problems to be solved in accordance with cultural features and requirements of different ethnic groups, and selectively adopt the working methods and techniques of cultural adaptation.

Thirdly, even though the requirements and development problems of all ethnic groups are featured by universality, different ethnic groups meet these requirements and address these problems in different ways. Only by cognizing, understanding, and utilizing the means of satisfying differential requirements or the models of solving problems, can the social management of urban minority migrants of “cultural sensitivity” be put into practice. However, it is a shame that current administrators show inadequate understandings on the cultural system compositions, requirements, value systems and behavior patterns of ethnic groups. In particular, they have conducted inadequate basic studies on cultural tradition, ethnic psychology, value orientation, behavior pattern and other related aspects of different Chinese ethnic groups. In this case, the social management research of “cultural sensitivity” is expected to be advocated and boosted, and meanwhile, ethnography and field investigation prove to be irreplaceable for the change of such management concept.

Fourthly, the training on the management concept of “cultural sensitivity” is expected to be reinforced. During the training for social administrators, the teaching methods such as group discussion, situational teaching, and field investigation should be applied to strengthening administrator’s management capacity in the environment of exotic culture and carrying out special trainings on ethnic language and cultural knowledge.

Fifthly, the concept of “cultural concept” should be put into the practice of management. It is necessary to highlight the improvement of subject participation ability of minority migrants from the perspective of superiority theory and excel at the utilization of the respective cultural resources of all ethnic groups.

## **5. Conclusions**

Specific to the social management of minority migrants from the countryside, this paper enhances the ethnic adaptability of social management and puts forward an overall approach, namely, “boundary crossing” and “cultural sensitivity”, to advance the social management of minority migrants. That is, social

administrators, institutes and resources should be urged to involve the field of social management of minority migrants through “boundary crossing”, and improve the management professionalism and resource integration. Meanwhile, the cultural difference of various ethnic groups should be fully cognized, understood and respected through the principle of “cultural sensitivity”; also, a method and skill of cultural adaptation should be used to mobilize the participation of all ethnic groups and the utilization of the local cultural resources as well as facilitate the social management development of minority migrants.

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