A study on the difference of the time and problems faced by the migrant population in the perspective of urban migration

Xiangyi Yuan*

International Department, Guangzhou Foreign Language School, Guangzhou, China, 511455

*Corresponding author: m18202039883@163.com

Abstract. Through the study of a particular group in the city: "urban migrants", this paper establishes a research framework with two-time nodes (2010 and 2018) as the dividing line, compares the different problems faced by migrant workers in different time periods to integrate into urban life, and then analyzes the subjective endogenous and external objective reasons affecting the living conditions of migrant workers. The study results show that the marginalized group of urban migrants is a social group that is ignored by the city, and their mentality and behavior are related to social stability. Because they are marginalized by the market, system, and attitude, they need to pay practical attention to the national, social, and individual levels, from social policies to living environments to psychological comfort and other dimensions, to improve the acceptance of "urban migrations" by urban and individual citizens.

Keywords: Urban Migration, Feelings of Social Distancing, Differentiation Studies, Social System.

1. Introduction

In the current process of urban reform in China, at each stage, rural people have poured into the city in the form of urban migration, facing different aspects of the problem, including a weak sense of belonging, the problem of their children's education, and the significant pressure on housing. These problems affect the quality of life of urban migrants and the development and reform of the entire city. This paper summarizes the emergence, development, and current situation of the phenomenon of urban migration through urban migrants and then analyzes the causes of these problems faced by the different migration phases. Thus, proposing corresponding solutions, aiming to solve the "contradiction between the people's growing needs for a better life and the inadequate development" from the dimension of the transformation of urban and rural population identity and social care.

2. Urban migrants: the situations of migrant workers

Migrant workers, the main members of urban migrants, refer to social groups that seek to develop and survive in rural to urban areas.Although they have the ability to work, they are mostly excluded from the formal urban labor market and mostly work in the primary content of the secondary or tertiary industries. Academic studies have found that urban migrants are more concentrated in manufacturing and service industries in the eastern region than in urban workers engaged in production and service-related occupations (Figure 1 for details, sources: National Bureau of statistics 2021 migrant workers monitoring and Investigation Report)[1].

Figure 1. Regional distribution and composition of migrant workers in 2021

Unit: ten thousand people/%						
Devided by output areas	Scale			Composition		
	Migrant workers	Intra-province mobilization	Inter-province mobilization	Migrant workers	Intra-province mobilization	Inter-province mobilization
Total	17172	7130	10042	100	41.5	58.5
Eastern Region	4636	700	3936	100	15.1	S4.9
Middle Region	6320	3578	2742	100	56.6	43.4
Western Region	5582	2669	2913	100	47.8	52.2
Northeast Region	634	183	451	100	28.9	71.1

Although they work in every corner of the city and keep it running, they are forgotten by the city: they cannot enjoy the same benefits as the locals.

As early as 2001, Wang Chunguang proposed in the article "The Relationship between the Social Identity of the New Generation of Rural Floating Population and the Integration of Urban and Rural Areas" that urban migrants are becoming more and more indifferent to their hometown identity, and they enter a difficult phase of loss and reconstruction of social identity [2]. In 2010, the No. 1 document of the Central Committee officially used the term "new generation of migrant workers". The study found that the new generation of migrant workers was close to the new generation of urban workers in terms of work skills and income level, but there were large differences between the consumption mode and the older generation of migrant workers [3]. At the same time, the national health department had organized a nationwide dynamic monitoring survey of the floating population since 2010, indicating the state of urban migrants had undergone new changes. The most recent turning point in the new tense occurred in 2018. The "China Floating Population Development Report 2018" released by the National Health Commission pointed out that the scale of China's floating population is entering a period of adjustment.

In summary, combined with relevant institutional documents and previous research results, we can draw preliminary conclusions: most urban migrants before 2010 had low social status, precarious incomes, and marginalized ideas. Urban migrants from 2010 to 2018 struggled to survive in cities, gradually gaining the ability and ideas to begin to improve their socioeconomic status, but most did not have the ability to take root. As the rise of educational attainment in intergenerational transmission, the marginalization of branding is gradually fading. Since 2018, urban migrants have had a tendency to migrate to second and third-tier cities in large cities or first-tier cities in small cities. They live more comfortably and at ease and gradually find their own positions, resulting in a “reflux” phenomenon. Therefore, this paper will perform a phased comparative study with 2010 and 2018 as key time nodes.

3. Education, security and a sense of belonging: the phased problems caused by different immigration times

In more than a decade of change, the quality of life of urban migrants has improved. Still, many fundamental issues have not been solved, which has shown different appearances with the differentiation of migration time.

3.1. A weak sense of belonging of urban migrant

Most urban migrants before 2010 were only able to secure zero-hour, phased jobs, which left them with a lack of identity and security, and it was difficult to find their next job once they lost their jobs. And the general urban migrants are husband and wife partners at the same time. They didn't have

other relatives in the city; hence they yearned for money to return to the countryside to reunite with their families. This struggle between working and making money reduces their sense of belonging.

Since 2010, the interests of migrant workers have changed. Compared to the older generation of migrant workers who would eventually return to their hometowns, the biggest interest appeal of the new generation of migrant workers was to integrate into and settle in the city. From the actual practice of them wanting to buy a house in the city and bring their children to the city to live together, it could be found that they were eager to become "urban people". Clearly, their sense of identity as "rural people" had become weak, and they hoped to have a sense of urban belonging.

Urban migrants after 2018 have more opportunities to choose and have peace of mind. After learning new skills in first-tier cities and saving money, they choose to migrate to second and third-tier cities, settle down to buy a house, have the conditions to take their parents and children with them, and give their families better-living conditions[4]. Furthermore, they have the opportunity to apply for a local registered permanent residence, where they can gradually find a sense of belonging.

3.2. The insufficient educational resources and environment of urban migrant children

Before 2010, most migrant workers went to the city to work alone, leaving their children in the countryside; thus, their children became left-behind children, usually cared for by the elders or relatives in the family. They only went home to see their children during the Spring Festival. As a result, their children were often not well educated, very few went to college.

After 2010, most urban migrants brought their families into the city. They would try to take their children with them and find suitable public schools for them to attend. Most urban migrants expected their children to have a college degree or higher. Nevertheless, settling their children in suitable schools was also a huge difficulty for them, and the high enrollment cost had led many parents to give up letting their children finally study in the city. Some chose to send their children back to the countryside, while some still spent most of their wages to provide for their children's schooling, but they only went to the "peasant children's school" set up by migrant workers. However, there was a risk of being banned anytime due to problems with school qualifications and teacher conditions.

After 2018, urban migrants work in first-tier cities for a few years and then transfer to second and third-tier cities. It is easier to achieve urban resident status through "points settlement" or other methods. Then they will take over the whole family, which satisfies the "migration" of the family, as well as provide their children with the conditions to go to school.

3.3. The lower social security and pension security of urban migrants compared to urban population

Before 2010, almost all urban migrants had no way to obtain a local registered permanent residence. This "social shielding" effect of the registered residence system made it more difficult for urban migrants to integrate into society. They lived in poor conditions, partly because of money and partly because most locals were reluctant to rent their homes to urban migrants. Since most urban migrants were not regular workers and had no access to formal workers' health care, many were injured at work. Therefore, the vicious incident of urban migrants could be seen in the newspaper every month in order to recover the arrears of wages, using multiple extreme methods to exert pressure on the government, such as jumping towers.

Since 2010, the situation has improved. Urban migrants had a certain amount of savings and could selectively and appropriately change their living conditions. Attitudes of local residents towards urban migrants had changed, but not much. Some urban migrants have the ability to move into neighborhoods where locals live, but they didn't take the initiative to interact with their neighbors and rarely participated in community activities. Medically, if they encountered medical needs such as surgery, they would choose to return to the hospital in their hometown for treatment.

After 2018, lots of urban migrants experience a "reflux" phenomenon. Their demand level has undergone a significant shift after accumulating a certain amount of wealth in first-tier cities, from survival to leisure. Settling down in second and third-tier cities reduces the pressure on buying homes.

With the country's demand for technical talents, those who have always been engaged in professional technology have gradually become in urgent need of skills; hence, the choice of survival value has made the "unable to retain people" in first-tier cities the biggest problem.

4. The different reasons for the phased problems encountered by different immigration times

According to the different analyses of the division results, urban migrants have been affected by various aspects of the market, system, attitude, and other elements at different stages. In the final analysis, it is still caused by the essential contradictions in the three aspects of the population resettlement system, the supply of educational resources and the difference in social security standards.

4.1. Conflicts between the urban resettlement system for rural-urban migrants and their own circumstances

The weaker sense of belonging of urban migrants before 2010 was mainly due to the marginalization of institutions and attitudes. After entering the city, they didn't have excellent welfare guarantee and social policy protection in the city. Because their family stayed in the countryside, they have a strong sense of homesickness. In addition, some scholars suggested that because of the influence of cultural exclusion, urban migrants may psychologically distance themselves from the city, resulting in social divisions [5].

After 2010, most urban migrants struggled to integrate into the city at this stage and found their sense of belonging because they understood that working in the big city might be a better choice to change their destiny. In addition, the government gradually accepted urban migrants, removing the time limit for staying in the city. By doing so, their sense of belonging to the city eventually rose.

Urban migrants' sense of belonging to the city has risen after 2018 because they can be in a middle-income position in second and third-tier cities. Moreover, they can feel that they brought value to the surroundings, and no longer have an outsider mentality[6]. They can serve and enjoy both the benefits of the city, and living in a relatively familiar environment with the culture is the best way for them to satisfy their sense of belonging.

4.2. Imbalance of educational resources for urban migrant children

Before 2010, urban migrants did not have permanent urban residence certificates. Hence, the government could not allow the children of urban migrants to enjoy local benefits, that is, to attend school like locals. Most urban migrants had poor living conditions and no additional time and energy to care for their children, so they generally chose to leave their children in the countryside.

After 2010, it was difficult for urban migrants children to attend school because schools would charge additional fees from them. In the attitude of the surrounding population, their children were easily discriminated against by local children in school, simply because they came from rural areas, so their children couldn't devote themselves to learning wholeheartedly. Still, urban migrants brought their children out since they could have greater access to better educational resources.

For example, in 2017, Chengdu issued the Guiding Opinions on Doing a Good Job in the Compulsory Education of the Children of Migrant Workers Moving to the City in 2018, which clarified that non-residents living in the city and cross-regional migrant workers living in the city could apply for compulsory education in local following it. Therefore, one of the purposes of many urban migrants migrating from large cities to cities in second and third-tier cities is to improve their children's education problems, on the one hand, to allow their children to enjoy better education policies and resources in the local area, and on the other hand, to make their children's growth mentality more peaceful.

4.3. Differences between social security for urban registered permanent residence and rural registered permanent residence

Before 2010, institutionally, urban migrants were primarily short-term (one to two years) work, so they rarely had the opportunity to obtain housing benefits and medical care. Furthermore, it was difficult for the government to strictly examine whether the contracts of enterprises and factories to workers were legal, leading to numerous labor exploitation incidents by heartless enterprises. Locals discriminated against urban migrants, leading them could only contact migrants with similar identities and couldn't form a concept of community in life[7].

After 2010, due to science and technology development, primary urban workers' skill levels needed to be correspondingly improved, such as using computers and professional equipment. However, urban migrants usually didn't practice well and mastered new skills. In addition, the development and popularization of high technology would slowly replace several primary labor jobs; hence, urban migrants lacked market competitiveness. Moreover, although urban migrants were much more compared to before 2010, they were still accustomed to the living pattern of the blood family structure and had difficulty integrating into the shared community culture.

Since 2018, urban migrants have become less marginalized in the market. They have migrated back to second and third-tier cities after learning new technologies in first-tier cities so that they can find a position with higher salaries and job levels there. In terms of housing policy, it has changed from not being able to buy a house with a nonlocal registered permanent residence to only restricting the city center of a large city without a local registered permanent residence, but the suburbs are not limited[8]. Most of the communities in second and third-tier cities are their fellow villagers who are very friendly to urban migrants with similar cultures and living habits. After the government implements the national universal medical insurance, helping them do medical examinations conveniently.

5. The three-dimensional solution path of differentiation problems

Urban migrants are currently a large group in China. It is given that most urban migrants are little likelihood of returning to the countryside after entering the city instead of permanently living in the cities, so their survival problems and quality of life will also be related to the regular operation and order of the city. Over the past decades, we have seen multiple improvements in response to this change by the Chinese government. Continuing to improve ways to help this group in the future should also be one of the goals of the national government and individuals. In order to solve the above problems, this paper proposes the following thinking from three different dimensions of the state, society, and the individual:

5.1. National dimension: policy proposals

The country should improve its social security system. Providing locals and urban migrants a fair opportunity to compete in their jobs, safeguarding the labor remuneration rights and interests of urban migrants, and increasing the crackdown on illegal employment incidents of wage arrears. The country should also continue maintaining the national general medical insurance policy and implementing the universal insurance plan. Strengthening the occupational safety rules and regulations for urban migrants, such as forcing their companies to buy special insurance for workers of dangerous chemical types to ensure the safety of urban migrants in their work and life.

5.2. Social dimension: optimization of practices

Given the marginalization of the market for urban migrants, the government can continue to organize regular training in different industries and give some opportunities specifically for urban migrants to enjoy the convenience of the city. Moreover, the government should encourage urban migrants to settle in second and third-tier cities or the capital cities of their hometowns, using cost regulation to guide population flow and promoting economic development in new urban areas. At the

same time, in order to maintain the results of urban-rural mobility, the government should also introduce appropriate policies, enabling urban migrants fully integrate into the city to stay. The government should also strengthen the exchange of information between the outflow and the inflow areas to facilitate the provision of an information basis for the work of various departments of the state. What's more,The government should establish schools in places where urban migrants usually gather and implement the policy of supporting professional teachers to ensure that urban migrant children can use educational resources as local children.

5.3. Personal dimension: the change of mentality

Except for the government increasing humanistic care, the public should also promote cultural integration and mutual assistance among residents. It is not only necessary to find ways to fully integrate urban migrants into the new social and cultural system but also to enable the local people in the city to form an inclusive concept of them and advocate a pluralistic and harmonious culture[9]. Governments and locals can also conduct some education and publicity on public networks to encourage urban migrants to participate. The local community committees can standardize community management, treat new urban migrant households with the same attitude as locals, and distribute welfare entirely and equally. The local community committees can take more care of urban migrants and communicate with them regularly to understand the latest situation to avoid the emergence of radical ideas and dangerous events.

6. Conclusions

So far, urban migrants are still plagued by market marginalization, institutional marginalization, and attitude marginalization. Especially due to registered permanent residence restrictions, which make it difficult for urban migrants to develop a strong sense of belonging to the cities in which they live.[10] In the future, the factor moving tendency of urban migrants includes not only economic income but also many emotional and life requirements. The government should apply appropriate policies to "retain" urban migrants suitable for urban life and allow them to choose areas where they can live more safely and freely. More importantly, at the individual level, urban migrants are no longer seen as a fragmented surplus labor force but as a member of the city, a living people. In contemporary days, with the step-by-step improvement of the government and the citizens, the quality of life and living conditions of urban migrants are steadily improving.

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