

# Problems of New Generation Migrant Workers from the Perspective of Social Discrimination

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**Abstract** The correlation of migrant workers and other social problems are studied from the aspects of the concept of "migrant workers" and social discrimination, "new generation" and mobility of social class, and the gender structure of new generation migrant workers. The results show that the "worker" in the "migrant worker" comes from the "work for other people"; although the "migrant worker" has the sense of discrimination, it really reflects the survival states of a certain social class; comparing with the first class migrant workers, the new generation migrant workers are the second generation of migrant workers, and their social position has not changed basically. The unfairness of social mobility is included among the "poor second generation", "rich second generation" and "officer second generation", which may lead to the hardening of social class and the appear of opposite classes; the new generation migrant workers are subverting their fathers' psychological recognition of "man dominates the outside and the woman dominates the inside" by the imbalanced sex structure, which is characterized by more women and less men. The social problems concerning new generation migrant workers caused by the sex discrepancy are directly related to the construction of the framework which comes up to the human moral and the stable improvement of the whole social ideological and cultural level.

**Key words** Migrant workers, New generation migrant workers, Social discrimination, Mobility of social class, Gender structure, China

Since the 21st century, the new generation migrant workers have become the hot social topic in the academic cycle. As a new academic term derived from the concept of "migrant workers", the "new generation migration migrant workers" has the same root with the "migrant workers", but in connotation terms, the "new generation migrant workers" is more complicate and hard to define than "migrant workers". Based on the connotation of "new generation migrant workers", I study the connection between the problems of migrant workers and other social problems from three aspects, covering the concept of "migrant workers" and social discrimination, "new generation migrant workers" and the mobility of social class, and the sex structure of "new generation migrant workers".

## 1 The concept of "migrant workers" and social discrimination

**1.1 The concept of "migrant workers" contain discrimination** In academic cycle, the tendency of beautifying the concept of "migrant workers" has existed for a long time when defining the concept. The main stream opinions think that migrant workers refer to people who undertake industrial activities in cities but remain the identity of being farmers<sup>[1]</sup>. The emergence of the concept of migrant workers indicates that the social position of migrant workers has improved and the concept is the mark of Chinese social progress<sup>[2]</sup>. The explanation of "migrant workers" contain an obvious tendency, that is migrant workers are peasants but they are workers in industries. Because the industry is advancer than agriculture and the working

class has long being the leading class of China, the concept of "migrant workers" shows peasants' enthusiasm for pursuing the advanced things and the continuously deepened degree of industrialization. However, such explanation of "migrant workers" is inharmonious with the actual feelings of many people. In the first place, the social class who is regarded as migrant workers do not agree to the concept. I have ever conducted a random interview on more than twenty migrant workers combining with a social survey, and I found that the peasants dislike being regarded as "migrant workers" more or less. In the second place, according to the life experiences of my familiars and I, many urban citizens have the accent of disdain and pity when talking about migrant workers. In the third place, some scholars think that the system background of the concept of "migrant workers" is the double residence registration system implemented by the central government, and the concept contains discrimination<sup>[3]</sup>. In the fourth place, when searching the concept of "migrant workers" in CNKI, there is even no any paper about it in the two time periods from 1994 to 1998 and in 2003. It indicates that the concept of "migrant workers" has been regarded as tattoo that can not be mentioned for it contains discrimination.

**1.2 The connection of "migrant workers" and "working for others" in literal meaning** Through profound research, I find that the "migrant workers" is derived from "working for others", so migrant worker mean "peasants who work for others", rather than "peasants who undertakes industrial work". In order to clarify the relations among the concepts of "working for others" and "migrant workers", I conclude the number of papers containing the terms of "working for others" and "migrant workers" on CNKI periodicals net. The results are present as follows.

**Table 1** Number of papers containing the terms of "working for others" and "Migrant workers" in CNKI periodicals net

Year	Working for others	Migrant workers	Year	Working for others	Migrant workers
1981 – 1993	45	17	2005	557	1 118
1994 – 1998	0	0	2006	514	1 990
1999 – 2002	1 203	152	2007	549	2 447
2003	0	0	2008	455	2 597
2004	525	725	2009	436	3 388

From Table 1, it can be seen that, before 2003, the number of papers contains the "working for others" was nearly parallel with that contains "migrant workers" as a whole. For example, from 1981 to 1993, the number of papers contains the two items was relatively small, and the two periods from 1994 to 1998 and 2003 the two items were forbidden to use. From 1999 to 2002, the term "work for others" appeared 1203 times in the topics of papers in various periodicals. While the term "migrant workers" only appeared 152 times in the topics of papers in periodicals. The differences show that when the society starts pay fully attention to the class of people who work for others, then workers who are the peasants have been paid attention to gradually. After 2005, the term "working for others" appears as an element of the topic of papers in about 500 papers all together in various periodicals, and the number showed the decline trend. However, "migrant workers", as an element appeared in the papers of periodicals was far more than "working for others", and the number showed the in upward trend. The reasons for the difference may be like follows: the migrant workers are the main body of people who work for others, for they account for 80% to 90% of them; migrant workers are the lowest class of people who work for others and they expose the social problems from many aspects intensively.

**1.3 The origin of the discrimination of "working for others"** In fact, the discrimination of the term "migrant workers" is caused not only by the negative influence of "peasants", but also by the term "working for others". The term "working for others" comes from Hong Kong, and the expression contains three elements; the first one is someone is hired by others and works for other people (including works for the government or private institutions); the second one is someone is not the boss; the third one is that someone gets salaries from working for other people as the main income. Since 1980s, the expression "working for others" has been brought to the inland China and become frequently used expression. With the march of time, the expression gradually integrates to the expressions such as "working for others for long term" and "working for others for short term" of ancient China, so the derogatory senses appear gradually. The derogatory senses cover the follow three aspects. The first one is someone is willing to be exploited; the second one is someone is exhausted for he works for a long time with low income; the third one is that someone has low social position, unstable job and always in the moving stage. The derogatory sense of the expression "working for others" can be established, for it reflected the hard situation of most people from the working class.

Although the expression "migrant workers" has derogatory meaning, it reflects the livelihood conditions of that group of people, so it has adaptability. But it is not of great significance in discussing the existence and abandon of the expression, and what really means is to change the bad livelihood conditions of migrant workers.

## 2 The "new generation migrant workers" and the mobility of social class

**2.1 The connotation of "new generation migrant workers"** Although the understandings on "new generation migrant workers" vary in a certain degree, most people are inclined to think that when using the concept of "new generation migrant workers" to describe the group of migrant workers, it refers to the young people born after 1980. The psychological basis of this explanation is that; firstly, the reform and opening up policy was carried out pro and past 1980, and the flow of migrant workers appeared in this time period. Secondly, as for Chinese people, twenty years is just the normal process for a person to finish the journey from nativity to adult. People used to think the time period about 20 years as a generation. Thirdly, 2000 is the beginning year of the 21st century, and the young people born in 1980 become the labor forces and go to cities to work. Fourthly, since the 21st century, the modernization degree of the whole China has deepened. The migrant workers who were born around 1980 show the different life attitude and life concept with their parent generation. Generally speaking, "new generation migrant workers" is a positive and energetic expression. When the expression is put in front of "migrant workers", we are expected to see a group of energetic people who try to flow to better place. However, seeing from the "Fox Conn jump" and some other events, we know that comparing with the first generation migrant workers, the living conditions of the new generation migrant workers have not changed fundamentally.

**2.2 The plight of the mobility of new generation migrant workers** The social living conditions of the new generation migrant workers have not been improved comparing with the first generation migrant workers; the reason is that the development of Chinese social class has the inertial of passing on from one generation to the next. It is just like HE San-wei said that "the poor in China are being inherited"<sup>[4]</sup>. If we calculate it from the 1980, it can be known that the new generation migrant workers are the second generation of the poor peasant in countryside. Their peasants are excluded from the main track of social economy and political life<sup>[4]</sup>, so that they are choked in terms of accepting education, skill cultivation and developing social relations. When the new generation migrant workers enter the society as labor force, they will find that they are alienated from the modern civilization out of the self-restriction, so they will accept the "marginal psychological state" of the first generation migrant workers<sup>[5]</sup>. Although under great pressure from various aspects, in recent years, the urban administrators give more understanding to the migrant workers and be more tolerable for them, driven by the interest distribution pattern, the urban administrators just accept the migrant workers in economic system

rather than in political system. It determines that the social environment has changed greatly but comparing with the first generation migrant workers, the relevant social position of the new generation migrant workers has not changed. The so called "new generation migrant workers" is the second generation of migrant workers. It is easy to predict that the new generation migrant workers and the "ant tribe" formed in recent years will form the main body of the "poor second generation" in China.

**2.3 The social influence of the plight of the mobility of new generation migrant workers** As a social class, the new generation migrant workers have already in the lowest position of the society, so there is no space for them to move to the down position; as for the huge space in the upper position, the new generation migrant workers are choked by the relevant social policies and system. The same to the first generation, the new generation migrant workers have realized the mobility in the geographic sense, rather than the mobility of social class. The factors that affect the social mobility of new generation migrant workers are multi-directional, which include the social structure, social economy, social development level, educational background, family background, social network resources and so on. As a reference background for the existence of the "poor second generation", the "rich second generation" and the "second generation of government officers' offspring" rely on their family background to realize the social mobility in a closed scope by the way of inheriting and exchanging. This kind of mobility has bad effect on the social justice and represents the decay of social elite. We can say that, the injustice of Chinese social mobility among the "poor second generation", "rich second generation" and the "second generation of government officials" may freeze the social class and lead to the opposite class. The "poor second generation" can not conduct the social mobility, for they have no choice but accept the poverty of their parent generation; the "rich second generation" and the "second generation of government officials" close the inner social mobility of social elite and rights and property are the results of their parent generation' delicate operation. According to Vilfredo Pareto's theory of elite circulation, this kind of class separation may impede the circulation of elite and the unsmooth of social mobility, and then it will threaten the social stability.

In conclusion, comparing with the first generation migrant workers, the problems of the new generation migrant workers are more complicated and the social problems are more profound. How to promote the mobility of social class, so as to prevent the social ills caused by the new generation migrant workers, has become the top emergency of adjusting the social policies.

### 3 The gender of the "new generation migrant workers"

**3.1 The gender structure of the first generation migrant workers** In Chinese society, the inertia recognition of the "male outside and female inside" is rigid in people's mind. The traditional moral emphasize the social capability of men, so it encourages men to work out; at the same time, women are

tied to the family responsibility, so women is limited in family. Among this kind of cultural atmosphere, the farmers often refer to the rural male laborers, though female laborers also take part in agricultural production, they are not farmers. After the founding of the new China, the female laborers in rural areas has obtained the identity as farmers equal to male laborers, but in the real life, people also follows the traditional customs and only regards male laborers as farmers. As for the gender adaptability of "migrant workers", the above traditional customs is still true. For example, we do not use "migrant workers" to call female workers and when being called "migrant workers", many women felt uncomfortable. The statistics of the Research and Study Group of Chinese Agriculture Ministry show that in 2002, female migrant workers accounted for 26.89% of the migrant workers, and in 2003, the proportion increased to 34.3%, and in 2004, the proportion increased to 34.6%<sup>[6]</sup>. In view of the fact that the migrant workers before 2004 are the first generation migrant workers, so the above mentioned figures can explain that the traditional recognition on gender has had significant influences on the first generation migrant workers.

**3.2 The gender structure of new generation migrant workers** The gender structure of new generation migrant workers is conversing the traditional psychological recognition of their parent generation. The survey conducted by CAI shows that: "the gender structure of migrant workers from different time period varies hugely. Among the migrant workers, who were born before 1980, the men workers are far more than the female workers with 62.8% of male and only 37.2% of women. But among the migrant workers who were born after 1980, the proportion of female workers is apparently higher than that of male workers with 44.4% of male workers and 55.6% of female workers, and the gender proportion of migrant workers who were born after 1980 has only 79.8%<sup>[7]</sup>". The time application scope of the date is from 2006 to 2009, which generally reflects the new gender structure of new generation migrant workers. The Pearl River Delta is the typical concentration area of migrant workers, so the survey data is of universal significance. The social connotation behind the survey date is complicated, but I pay special attention to the following point: the female workers from rural areas begin to work in cities as equally as male workers, which reflect the social vogue of young women to pursue independence and freedom. Comparing the female workers of the last generation, this is indefinitely an elevation of social culture. However, the social transformation of gender will cause the malposition of the gender role of male and female in a certain period. In view of the current situation, the new generation female migrant workers bear greater pressure than male workers.

**3.3 The difficulties of the development of new generation female migrant workers** The gender plight in the cause of career is the developmental problem faced by new generation female workers. Affected by the traditional social gender in China, the man-oriented culture still has huge effect on various fields including politics, economy and society. Thus, the first generation migrant workers have to accept their fate helplessly. However, the new generation female migrant workers have high educational degree and affected by the modern informa-

