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# Connotation and Characteristics of Employment Ability of New-generation Migrant Workers in China

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**Abstract** Based on China's special conditions and characteristics of specific group of new-generation migrant workers, this article researches connotation of employment ability of new-generation migrant workers in China, that is, the connotation of employment ability of new-generation migrant workers in China should include four aspects: professional knowledge and skills, learning capacity, adaptability and environmental force. On this basis, through the analysis of indicators concerning connotation of employment ability, we get the overall characteristics of employment ability of new-generation migrant workers in China and reason responsible for its serious weakness. Finally we put forward corresponding countermeasures as follows: impart professional knowledge and skills; promote learning capacity; foster adaptive capacity; improve employment environment.

**Key words** New-generation migrant workers, Employment ability, Connotation and characteristics, China

Forrier holds that the employment ability includes personal ability and career aspiration<sup>[1]</sup>. The career aspiration is the incentive features of one's own, including the willingness to enhance employment ability and change a job. Fugate opines that the connotation of employment ability consists of four dimensions: career identification, personal adaptability, social capital and human capital<sup>[2]</sup>. Thijssen asserts that the concept of employment ability should be comprehended from three different levels: core definition, broad definition and all-inclusive definition<sup>[3]</sup>. The core definition is only concerned about the employment ability of the individual workers; the broad definition is not only concerned about the employment ability of individual workers, but also concerned about the characteristics of individual workers' employment wish and attitude; the all-inclusive definition has a broader range of research, extending to the environmental factors that enhance or hinder the development of individual employment ability. Zhu Xin-cheng deems that the employment ability is the collection of individuals' knowledge, skills, personality and various conditions when they successfully get job, keep job and change job in labor market<sup>[4]</sup>.

Due to different research perspectives and scope, the above experts and scholars' expressions of connotation of employment ability are not exactly the same, and there are several to scores of specific indicators for measuring employment ability. Based on the results of the above experts and scholars, our understanding of connotation of employment ability includes the following two points: first, employment ability is a kind of comprehensive ability, and there are diverse factors determining or influencing the employment ability of individuals, including environmental factors; second, further, since the impact of environmental factors, especially the policy environment, on different types of social groups, is different, therefore, for different

types of social groups, the connotations of employment ability vary, sometimes even disparate.

## 1 Connotation of new-generation migrant workers' employment ability

The new-generation farmers are the population, with agricultural registered permanent residence, born after the 1980s and aged more than 16, mainly engaged in the secondary and tertiary industries elsewhere. There are about 100 million new-generation migrant workers, a group with a huge number, faced with many problems. The employment problem is the core, which has increasingly attracted wide attention from all orders of society, even the central decision-making level. What is on earth the connotation of employment ability of new-generation migrant workers in China? What are the constituting elements? What indicators we should adopt to study and analyze the employment ability of new-generation migrant workers in China? Clearly, figuring out these problems is the prerequisite for promoting the employment ability of new-generation migrant workers. On the basis of the above experts and scholars' research results, combined with China's unique conditions and characteristics of new-generation migrant workers, as far as we are concerned, the connotation of employment ability of new-generation migrant workers in China should include the following four aspects.

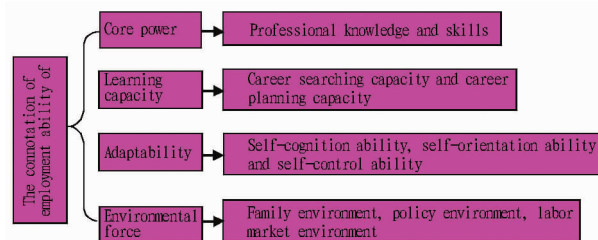
**1.1 Professional knowledge and skills** Professional knowledge and skills are the core of human capital, and the most important basis for the employers to select employees. Most of the people without professional knowledge and skills have no choice but to engage in simple unskilled labor, and new-generation migrant workers are no exception.

**1.2 Learning capacity** Learning capacity is the integrated manifestation of learning motivation, ability, and determination. The learning ability of labor forces is one of the core elements determining employment ability. For the new-generation mi-

grant workers, the main indicators reflecting learning capacity should be career searching ability and career planning ability. Division of labor in modern society is more and more detailed, there is voluminous information of supply and demand in the labor market, and a large number of vacant positions coexist with the labor forces to be employed. Objectively, it requires the job seekers to have a certain job searching capability; through career orientation, goal setting, and career path design, career planning is great power for guiding and inspiring people to improve the employment ability. Clearly, the two capabilities are also important factors determining employment ability of new-generation migrant workers.

**1.3 Adaptability** In psychology, adaptability generally refers to the individual's ability to adjust motivation and mental state, so that they adapt to the surrounding environment. The new-generation migrant workers go from rural areas to the developed large and medium-sized cities, and even metropolis, and identity, occupation, environment, experience rapid changes, therefore, if they are not be equipped with a certain adaptive capacity, they can not find jobs. Among many indicators measuring adaptability, interpersonal skills, self-positioning capability, and self-control ability are important. Interpersonal skills are actually the ability to get along with others, and the important capability in finding jobs; self-positioning capability is particularly important for new-generation migrant workers to find jobs, and the trend of too high or low expectation will severely hamper the employment option behavior; self-control ability is an important component of adaptability. In one's life, it is not always smooth, and finding a job will not be easy, especially for new-generation migrant workers.

**1.4 Environmental force** Environmental force refers to the various environmental factors that promote or hinder enhancement in individual's employment ability. At the present stage in China, the impact of environmental factors on employment ability of new-generation migrant workers is obvious. The environmental factors influencing employment ability of new-generation migrant workers include family environment, labor market supply and demand conditions, and policy environment. First, the family is the cradle for individual growth, and family education, family economic conditions will profoundly affect the employment ability and employment attitudes of new-generation migrant workers. Second, the situation of supply exceeding demand in China's labor market is grave in general, and the special group of new-generation migrant workers, is most vulnerable to the brunt of changes in supply and demand in labor market. Finally, after the release of Document No. 5 [2006] by the state, all regions across China strengthen efforts to clean up and eliminate all kinds of policies discriminating against migrant workers' employment in cities, but due to the deep impact of rural-urban split employment system, the maturity and perfection of the policy can not be completed in a short time, and the impact of policy factors on employment capacity of migrant workers, especially new-generation migrant workers is still very significant. The connotation of employment ability of new-generation migrant workers in China can be shown in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1 The connotation of employment ability of new-generation migrant workers in China**

It can be seen that on the one hand, the employment ability of new-generation migrant workers is a kind of complex and comprehensive ability, and the employment ability, a system in itself, has rich connotation; on the other hand, in many of its sub-capabilities, professional knowledge and skills, learning capacity are at the core of employment ability having direct or decisive contribution to employment ability, and adaptability, environmental force are at the periphery of employment ability system having indirect or indecisive contribution to employment ability. Of course, for different labor individuals or the same labor individuals in different periods, there may be great difference in role of various kinds of sub-capabilities.

## 2 Overall characteristics of employment ability of new-generation migrant workers in China

According to the above figure of connotation of employment ability of new-generation migrant workers in China, we make a comprehensive analysis of various indicators concerning employment ability of new-generation migrant workers in China, and thus we can see that the employment ability of new-generation migrant workers in China is worrying.

**2.1 It lacks professional knowledge and skills** The majority of new-generation farmers are secondary-school or high school graduates, and even some work elsewhere before graduation. Nearly all the knowledge they learn is from secondary school textbooks, and this knowledge structure is clearly not in preparation for employment; due to long-term working or farming, most of the older-generation migrant workers have some special job skills, but a large portion of new-generation migrant workers have no this experience, seriously for want of professional skills of engaging in work.

*Research Report on Issues concerning New-generation Migrant Workers* issued by National Federation of Trade Unions in 2010 said that the educational level and vocational skill level of new-generation migrant workers cannot answer for the needs of urban labor market, which is the key problem hindering long term stable employment of new-generation migrant workers in cities<sup>[5]</sup>. The statistics from National Bureau of Statistics in 2010 shows that although the length of education enjoyed by new-generation migrant workers is longer than that of older-generation migrant workers, from the content of education, 77.9% of new-generation migrant workers still remain in the stage of compulsory education (64.4%) and general second-

ry education (13.5%), while the proportion of new-generation migrant workers who receive vocational education is only 9%<sup>[6]</sup>.

## 2.2 The learning capacity is not enough

**2.2.1** Enthusiasm of career searching is not high. There are few channels of career searching for new-generation migrant workers. Moreover, most people have no time and willingness to actively search the employment positions. After coming back from the working place, they often feel tired, and even surfing mobile Internet is basically for entertainment. Although they change employment positions between different cities, different industries frequently, most of these change options are often random and passive.

**2.2.2** Career planning capacity is weak. Most of the new-generation migrant workers, working outside the home with the attitudes of "have a try" and "temper themselves in the world", are confused about the career choice, and their future career planning is not clear.

Research Report on Issues concerning New-generation Migrant Workers issued by National Federation of Trade Unions in 2010 said that as high as 71.4% of new-generation migrant workers choose to "temper themselves in the world after graduation", "find fun outside home", "learn a skill", and "reject ennui in hometown"<sup>[5]</sup>. From one side, it also shows that the career planning ability of new-generation migrant workers is not strong, and most people have no clear career planning.

## 2.3 Adaptability is not strong

**2.3.1** The ability of contact and communication has not yet trained fully. Compared with the older-generation migrant workers, new-generation migrant workers are basically the only child in their family, lacking brothers and sisters' company in the process of growth; some parents of them work outside all year round, having not many opportunities to communicate with parents; most people have poor school record, and reluctant to frequently rub elbows with teachers and classmates, therefore, their ability to communicate has not been fully trained.

**2.3.2** The self-cognition is not objective. Most of new-generation migrant workers are in the age of early 20s, and some people have not reached this age, with mental immaturity; in comparison with their parents, they have high educational level, like the pursuit of material and spiritual enjoyment, and have high expectation of wage from urban employment, therefore, the self-evaluation and self-cognition are often not objective.

**2.3.3** The self-control capacity is weak. Due to the special growth environment (one-child families and relatively good living conditions), the vast majority of new-generation migrant workers have weak bearing capacity, strong self-esteem, rich but delicate sentiment, weak self-control ability, lacking good psychological preparation for the future working environment.

**2.4 Environmental force is unfavorable** The environmental factors in China at present are not conducive to improvement and enhancement in employment ability of new-generation migrant workers.

**2.4.1** It is negatively affected by the family environment. The current urban-rural gap has been narrowed to a certain extent,

and rural production and living conditions have been greatly improved. Most of new-generation migrant workers are the only child in the family, with relatively favorable living conditions. They have no experience of farming and working elsewhere, which makes most of them lack the hard-working spirit. Clearly, this family environment has negative impact on their employment ability.

**2.4.2** The policy environment lacks equality. Under the framework of the current household registration system, the city's supporting employment policies still have strong exclusion to new-generation migrant workers. For example, the governments in some cities strengthen constraint in the name of management, and require the companies to give priority to recruiting local urban labor forces; the legitimate rights and interests of migrant workers are often infringed, the rate of signing contract is low, and the incidence of industrial injury accidents and occupational diseases is high; the degree of social security for new-generation migrant workers is low, and the statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics in March 2010 show that among the current new-generation migrant workers, the proportion of pension insurance, health care insurance, and unemployment insurance enjoyed by them is 21.3%, 34.8% and 8.5%, respectively<sup>[6]</sup>.

**2.4.3** The situation of supply exceeding demand in labor market is grave. First, the uncertainties in development and changes of the current world economy are increasing, and all countries are adjusting and restoring the domestic economy. In this case, the ability of China's export-oriented industries to absorb the migrant workers declines greatly. Second, with changes in the mode of economic development, the pace of technological transformation of traditional industries is accelerated, increasingly demanding high quality of labor. Finally, millions of graduated college students and labor forces newly added annually in the city, are put into the market supply of labor, worsening new-generation migrant workers' employment.

## 3 Countermeasures

Through the comprehensive systematic analysis of connotation and characteristics of employment ability of new-generation migrant workers, this paper holds that the development of vocational education and the improvement of employment environment, are two most direct and most effective ways to promote employment ability of new-generation migrant workers. The content of vocational education is not only the teaching of professional knowledge and skills, but also includes the improvement in new-generation migrant workers' adaptability and learning capacity. The most critical content of improving employment environment is to establish a fair and just policy environment.

**3.1 Impart professional knowledge and skills** Imparting of professional knowledge and skills is the road we must follow to achieve transformation from physical-strength-based new-generation migrant workers to skill-based new-generation migrant workers. In the process of developing vocational education for new-generation migrant workers, we should incorporate

vocational education for new-generation migrant workers into the compulsory education, and the education funding should be guaranteed by legislation; imparting of knowledge and skills should not only face the labor market demand, but also be based on characteristics and interests of new-generation migrant workers.

**3.2 Promote learning capacity** We should build the labor market information release platform in line with the characteristics of new-generation migrant workers, for example, choose some fixed media at the right time (migrant workers' break time) to run or publicize supply and demand information of migrant workers; encourage and support the intermediary organizations to carry out consulting services regarding migrant workers' employment. The key content of vocational education is to help new-generation migrant workers make correct career planning, because career planning is difficult, needing experience of life and perspicacious forward-looking vision. It is difficult to achieve by relying solely on new-generation migrant workers.

**3.3 Foster adaptive capacity** First, we should guide new-generation migrant workers to comprehensively and objectively understand themselves, and establish a realistic expectation of the future development goal based on this. Second, in vocational education entities, taking the goal of employment as orientation, we should organize various kinds of group activities on the basis of common interests and hobbies, and provide opportunities as many as possible to new-generation migrant workers for fostering their ability to communicate. Finally, the new-generation migrant workers have to strengthen self-regulation, psychological balance. Only by doing this can their self-control ability be gradually improved, their employment ability be developed by leaps and bounds.

**3.4 Improve employment environment** Among various environmental factors influencing the improvement in employment ability of new-generation migrant workers, the loss of fair and just policy environment is most serious, therefore, to create

and maintain a fair and just policy environment is particularly urgent to improvement in employment ability of new-generation migrant workers. First, in the system, we should gradually and steadfastly strip off the discrimination policies concerning public services and welfare attached to the census registration, to create a fair chance for improvement in employment ability of new-generation migrant workers. Second, we should strengthen labor protection, strengthen law enforcement, and mete out severe punishment to the enterprises and units with the behaviors of discrimination in employment, the deduction of wages, and arbitrary expulsion of migrant workers, according to the law, in order to provide legalized and institutionalized protection for improvement in employment ability of new-generation migrant workers. Finally, we should offer support for the development of labor-intensive industries, which is of great avail to improvement in employment ability of new-generation migrant workers in China.

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sustainable and coordinated development of industrialization, urbanization and urban-rural integration.

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