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Empirical Study on Online Political Participation of Young Migrant Workers

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Abstract Popularization of network technology and development of online political participation expand approaches of young migrant workers participating in political affairs and raise interest and ability of young migrant workers participating in political affairs. Through questionnaire of young migrant workers participating in political affairs in Xi'an, Xianyang and Yangling, the survey team found that political participation of young migrant workers takes on following characteristics: active and positive online political concern, passive and profit seeking online political expression, and claim of right. Besides, online political participation of young migrant workers is related to region, cultural level, and occupation, but not related with their political status. Based on this survey, it came up with recommendations: governments at all levels should strengthen network information construction, carry out theoretical and practical training for online political participation of young migrant workers, establish online political participation government feedback mechanism and enhance party organization construction, and bring into play the lead model role of party members of young migrant workers in online political participation.

Key words Young migrant workers, Online political participation, Empirical study

1 Introduction

Every technological revolution of human society will exert tremendous influence on political life. Currently, rapidly developing network technology has become a major channel for Chinese citizens transmitting messages, expressing opinions, commenting on political news and releasing emotions, so the influence of online political participation on government act is more and more prominent. As essential force of China's urbanization process, young migrant workers start participating in political affairs and the network becomes new channel for young migrant workers expressing rights and interests. Our team surveyed Shaanxi Province where the information level is moderate. In the form of questionnaire, we made an empirical study. We surveyed situation of online political participation of young migrant workers in Xi'an, Xianyang and Yangling. By random sampling method, we issued 500 copies of questionnaire, collected 445 acceptable ones and the valid response rate is 89%.

2 Analysis on current situation of online political participation of young migrant workers

Our survey indicates that online political participation of young migrant workers mainly takes on following characteristics:

2.1 Active and positive online political concern Online political concern is the first step for online political participation.

Our survey about online concern about social hot spots or political issues indicates that 71.5% have daily or frequent concern, while only 28.4% have little or no concern. Therefore, young migrant workers have high enthusiasm for online political concern. 39.8% pay close attention to social issues or political hot spots, such as people's livelihood security / urban construction (education, medical care, housing, and price) and 34.6% concern about social life, such as culture, recreation, and charities. 8.6% concern about diplomacy / military and 14.6% concern about government act / political figures. Since educational level of young migrant workers is mainly senior middle school and their work is mainly manual labor, they usually concern about issues related to their vital interests.

2.2 Passive and profit seeking online political expression

Online political discussion is the major form of current online political participation. Survey data show that only 39.8% young migrant workers actively participate in online discussion or comment about social issues, while about 59.5% never participate in online discussion. Active participation is mainly intended to arouse attention of more people and even government, while unwilling to participate in discussion or comment is mainly due to not understanding relevant knowledge and background and not knowing what to discuss or not familiar with functions of online discussion. When seeing news related to vital interests, 52.9% young migrant workers stated that they will express opinions, 41.8% just took a look, and 5.3% turned a blind eye to the matter. This indicates that young migrant workers show high profit seeking characteristic in online political participation, and most young migrant workers will actively discuss about issues related to their benefits.

2.3 Claim of rights in online political participation Political rights of citizens are realized mainly through political participation activities such as voting, inquiry, hearing, and suggestion.

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These activities reflect position, selection scope and function of citizens in social political life and manifest content of political relation^[1]. Therefore, online voting, hearing, inquiry, and suggestion have become major approaches for modern citizens participating in political activities. However, the survey indicates that only 34.2% young migrant workers have once participated in such activities, and as high as 65.1% said that they have never participated in such activities. Compared with participation of online concern and discussion, few young migrant workers participate in deep level online political participation. Among those who participate in online voting, hearing, inquiry, and suggestion, 30.2% thought that these are their legal rights and duties. Young migrant workers participate in online political affairs are mainly for implementing and safeguarding their legal rights through network arousing public opinions.

3 Analysis on factors influencing online political participation of young migrant workers

3.1 Gradual narrowing of digital gap weakens the online political participation of young migrant workers in the region of migrant work

The regions, where young migrant workers work, are significantly correlated with online political participation. Different regions have different popularization of network, thus the online political participation of young migrant workers is different. Generally, the online political participation of large cities is higher than small and medium-sized cities. However, our survey indicates that online political participation of Yangling is 82.6%, higher than Xi'an (66.5%) and Xianyang (45.2%). This is because Yangling is a national agricultural model area and a pilot city of National Smart City project and it has realized coverage of network. Even in some small towns, young migrant workers have little living pressure and abundant idle time, thus they have more time to search and obtain information through network. By contrast, young migrant workers in large and medium-sized cities do not have much time due to busy work and living pressure and do not have time to concern about political affairs.

3.2 Educational level exerts fundamental influence on online political participation of young migrant workers

Educational level is an essential indicator influencing network access. There is a positive correlation between act of young migrant workers searching political information and educational level of young migrant workers. Those young migrant workers with higher educational level can use network technology better, actively concern about network information, participate in online discussion, and express their opinions. Survey indicates that young migrant workers with age of 18–23 years old and educational level higher than senior middle school have strong network performance and part.

3.3 The influence of occupation factor on online political participation of young migrant workers is closely connected with their educational level

In this study, we divided occupation into manufacturing industry, retail, transportation, catering, building, management, and individual dealers. Statistical results

indicate that young migrant workers in manufacturing and transportation industries have higher enthusiasm for online political participation. This is mainly because young migrant workers in manufacturing and transportation industries have higher educational level, stable job, certain economic foundation, certain network knowledge, free time, and economic strength to concern about network information. Data indicate that young migrant workers in catering service industry and individual dealers have low concern about network. This is because these workers have low educational level and low income. Therefore, difference resulted from different occupation is closely connected with educational level.

3.4 Vacancy of party organization activities leads to no correlation between political status and online political participation of young migrant workers

Generally, the political status will exert certain influence on political participation of the young. For example, the empirical study in 10 universities of Zhejiang Province indicates that there is significant difference in political participation of students with different political status. Party members and league members are more active in participating in political activities^[2]. However, in the survey of young migrant workers, the situation is not like this, and there is no correlation between political status and online political participation of young migrant workers. This result is unexpected. In the interview with party member young migrant workers, they said that they seldom participated in party organization activities and even they participated in online political activities, they generally do not consider their political status. This is because the number of party members is relatively small in young migrant workers. Among 445 young migrant workers we surveyed, only 13.9% are party members and 36.6% are league members. Secondly, organizational level of party members of young migrant workers is relatively low. In their work, young migrant workers seldom participated in collective activities, and just expressed their personal opinions when participating in political activities, and basically neglected their political status.

4 Recommendations for raising online political participation of young migrant workers

4.1 Strengthening network information construction to provide equal opportunity for young migrant workers participating in political activities

The information is a basic condition for young migrant workers participating in political activities, while the network is an essential carrier for young migrant workers participating in political activities. Information-based online political participation needs having the aid of modern network technology and widely distributed network virtual channels^[3]. In China, due to difference in regional economic and cultural development level, the digital gap still exists between regions and between urban and rural areas, and the situation is worse in eastern coastal areas than central and western regions. Young migrant workers are influenced from backward information digital popularization, unbalanced information acquisition. As a result, people with rich in-

formation will take active position, which goes against fair and popular online political participation. However, with popularization of smart mobile phones, especially construction of smart cities, and coverage of free WIFI in the whole city, digital gap is constantly narrowing and the network information acquisition ability of different social classes is improving. As young generation of migrant workers, smart mobile phone has become their major living and recreational style. Most young migrant workers said that it is more swift, economical and frequent to obtain political news, express opinions, and participate in political activities through smart mobile phone. Therefore, government at all levels, especially government in central and western regions, should accelerate developing network information, narrow the digital gap, and guarantee equal opportunity of young migrant workers in online political participation. In 2013, Shaanxi Province energetically promoted the information construction. With great support of local government and formulation of Broadband China Strategy, 1000 villages connected broadband network, laying a solid foundation for network development of Shaanxi Province^[3], and also providing favorable technological condition for citizens' online political participation.

4.2 Enhancing theoretical and practical training of online political participation to improve online political participation ability of young migrant workers Compared with previous generation migrant workers, young generation migrant workers have higher educational and cultural level. However, these are not enough for them to get to know value of online political participation and do not know how to use network to realize their rights of political participation. They have to keep indifferent attitude towards online political participation^[4]. Our survey indicates that educational level is a key factor influencing their online political participation. 36.1% young migrant workers said that they do not know relevant network technology, political knowledge background, and do not know what and how to discuss, so they did not participate in online discussion. For this, it is required to improve their online political participation ability. Firstly, the state should propagate relevant laws, regulations and policies through various media, to make young migrant workers realize they can express their opinions in the framework of legal provisions. Secondly, government may cultivate online political participation ability of young migrant workers through microblog, WeChat platform, and other feasible means, to provide powerful technological support for young migrant workers^[5]. Thirdly, organizations should extensively organize young migrant workers to actively participate in learning of political theories and scientific and cultural knowledge, improve their political theoretical level and political skills, so as to lay a solid foundation for improving online political participation ability of young migrant workers^[6].

4.3 Enhancing construction of online political participation government feedback mechanism, to provide a channel for young migrant workers to express and realize their benefits

If a citizen thinks that he can exert certain influence on govern-

ment formulating policies and government can actively interact with netizens, they will actively participate in political affairs. Otherwise, they will be indifferent to political activities. In our survey, 50.4% young migrant workers thought that online expression, voting, inquiry and suggestion will exert certain influence on government policies, and 10.4% said that these will have strong influence. However, 75.3% young migrant workers said that they received no active response from government. Government should establish online political participation feedback mechanism, actively respond to problems conveyed by young migrant workers, and solve the problems offline, to further improve current situation of weak response. In addition, government should reflect and satisfy reasonable and legal benefit demands of netizens in urban policies, strengthen democratic concept in the realization of benefits, so as to raise reliance and efficiency feeling of young migrant workers in online political participation.

4.4 Enhancing the construction of party organization, to bring into play leading model role of young migrant worker party members in online political participation Problems conveyed by young migrant workers prominently reflect vacancy of the party organization construction in the team of young migrant workers. Firstly, there are few party members in young migrant workers. Among 445 young migrant workers we surveyed, only 13.9% are party members and 36.6% are league members. Secondly, organizational level of party members of young migrant workers is relatively low. In their work, young migrant workers seldom participated in collective activities, and just expressed their personal opinions when participating in political activities, and basically neglected their political status. Therefore, local government should take active measures to strengthen grass-roots construction of the party organization in young migrant workers and enhance party spirit cultivation of party members of young migrant workers. Furthermore, government at all levels, society and organizations and enterprises employing migrant workers should cultivate leading model role of young migrant workers, stimulate interest of young migrant workers in participating in political activities, actively guide network public opinion, propagate positive force, and make young migrant workers obtain feeling of political trust and approval.

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