Go Back to Hometown with Earning, or Integrate into Urban Life——Base on the Social Integration of Migrant Workers

Zhenxing Li¹,a and Haihua Zhu²,b*

¹,²School of Economics, Sichuan University, Chengdu, China

ª327682756@qq.com, bzhh10016@163.com

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Abstract: This paper analyses the social integration of migrant workers in China, and holds that urban housing price, contractual society and the traditional concept of life value based on hometown are reasons why a large number of migrant workers do not have a sense of belonging to the city, while the short sightedness of migrant workers' goal has a negative impact on individual social capital, human capital and business investment. For the migrant workers, it is better to arrange their individual behaviors from the perspective of urban integration than to make up their minds to get more income than the rural ones within a certain period of time and finally return to their hometowns.

1. Introduction

In 2017, the number of migrant workers¹ in China reached 172 million, accounting for 30 percent of the total rural household registration population (577 million), it's a record high, according to the 2017 Migrant Workers Monitoring Survey released by the National Bureau of Statistics. The average age of migrant workers reached 34.3 years old. The new generation of migrant workers born in 1980 and even later gradually became the main body of migrant workers, accounting for 50.5% of the total number of migrant workers in China. Based on the sense of belonging of migrant workers to the city, this paper deduces two subjective choices of social integration, which have profound sociological and cultural roots, and lead to different micro-individual behavior decisions in social capital, human capital and business investment, and thus bring about differentiated individual and social revenue.

2. Two Options for Social Integration

Migrant workers have a weak sense of belonging to the city, with only 38 per cent believing they are "locals" of the city in which they live, and the larger the city, the weaker the migrant workers' sense of belonging to the city (Table 1) and the more difficult it is to adapt to urban life[1].

Table 1 Sense of Belonging of Migrant Workers to Their Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Proportion of migrant workers Self think as a native (%)</th>
<th>Proportion of migrant workers Very adaptable to local life (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban population scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 million</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 million</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>25.3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

¹Migrant workers refer to the migrant workers who work outside the township where the household registration is located.

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The different attitudes towards the sense of urban belonging mean that migrant workers have two different choices of social integration subjectively: one is "disintegration", thinking that they are only working to earn a living, should strive to earn money in the city, save money, open source throttling, and finally leave the city, "fallen leaves return to their roots", and return to the place where they have registered permanent residence; Second, "active integration", from a long-term point of view, efforts should be made to change the place of work into a place of life, to enter the labor market with a long-term attitude of living in the local, to obtain local housing and household registration, and ultimately to achieve integration into the local. Such two social integration strategies will have an important impact on workers' social capital, human capital and investment returns, and even have different effects on regional development and industrial upgrading in China.

3. Reasons for Abandoning Integration

Data show that at least 60% of migrant workers have no sense of belonging to the city, implying a choice of "disintegration" or "unsuccessful integration". Considering that half of migrant workers are now "post-80s" and younger, they are generally considered “A generation difficult to return to the countryside”[2] because they do not possess the agricultural-based handicrafts as previous generations [3], and if they do not integrate well in cities, it may lead to a series of social problems such as waste of human capital and unemployment.

Intuitively, in China, the larger the population, the higher the housing price, the more difficult it is for migrant workers with low incomes to buy houses and settle down there, and the weaker the sense of integration will be. On the other hand, the larger the city scale, the more the production organization reflects the high degree of contract and marketization, the more indifferent the relationship of human and clan, the more difficult it is for migrant workers to integrate into the local society.

However, even for "cities with less than 500,000 people and towns ", 37 percent of migrant workers said they did not have a sense of belonging, which is difficult to explain for reasons above. This may be due to the fact that in our traditional concept, the value of individual life is based on hometown and the evaluation of native people. It is considered that "leaving one's hometown" is a sad and transitory life status. Even if one can not "return to one's hometown with golden clothes", “fallen leaves must "return to their own roots". "The wealthy and honorable do not return to their hometown, just like nocturnal walking in luxurious clothes" and other proverbs is a vivid manifestation of this concept.

4. Differentiated Individual Programming

Social capital has a strong localized feature, that is, the social network formed by individuals usually only works in specific areas. Different integration choices will have a great impact on individuals’ social capital investment behavior, such as whether to invest time and energy in associating with local neighbors, friends and colleagues, whether to increase personal image investment to obtain higher evaluation from superiors and colleagues, whether to increase "human relationship expenditure" to maintain better local relationships, and so on. If "non-integration" is chosen, the individual migrant worker thinks that he or she will leave the local area after a certain
period of time, and the social network in the local area will have a very limited effect on the short-term income increase, so he or she will tend to invest in a lower level of social capital\cite{4}. Conversely, if "active integration" is chosen, investment in local social capital will bring long-term benefits and individual motivation to invest will be enhanced.

Human capital investment decision-making has similar characteristics. Usually, the skills required by the enterprise in the place of work are difficult to apply in the place where the household registration is located (hometown). For migrant workers in particular, the skills appropriate for the urban economic sector simply cannot be found in rural settings\cite{5}. As a result, the incentive to "learn by doing" will be weakened for workers who choose to "disintegrate" because it is expected that they will find it difficult to work in local enterprises for a long time. And workers who choose "active integration" will have a stronger incentive to delve into the skills needed for the job. This is also the reason why some enterprises prefer to employ "locals", especially the highly technical posts\cite{6}: the training expenditure of enterprises on "locals" can serve the enterprises for a long time, and thus enhance the benefits of enterprises.

For individual industrial and commercial households, different integration options will affect their business behavior and profitability. Most of the migrant self-employed are engaged in catering and sales and other service industries, which requires the fusion of local needs and characteristics, to meet local regulations, such as mastering the local dialect, business licenses and so on. If you just hold "stay for a while" mentally in the local business, it is difficult to have the incentive to continue to improve services to meet the regulatory requirements of industry and commerce. But if you plan and strive to work in the local life, you will be more proactive to improve the operation, expand the scale, business licenses and other fixed-cost expenditures also bring about by the greater the benefits.

To sum up, this paper holds that the choice of "disintegration" will reduce the income of individual investment in social capital and human capital, and will also reduce the investment income of individual industrial and commercial households, and will have a negative impact on the long-term development of individuals.

5. Conclusion

This paper briefly analyzes the current social integration of migrant workers, and holds that in addition to the high urban housing prices and contractual working environment, the traditional concept of personal value based on the hometown is also an important reason for the low degree of social integration of migrant workers in China. Compared with those who choose "active integration", those who choose "non-integration" will be at a disadvantage in social capital, human capital and business investment.

The essence of population flow is to improve the allocation efficiency of human capital in a larger space. The scale effect of population agglomeration and the specialization of human labor division mean that cities are more productive than rural areas, or some cities are more productive than the others, and these cities are more attractive to high-human-capital labor force. Choosing to migrate to work, you can get in touch with more advanced production methods, more capable working partners, and effectively improve your own quality structure in interaction with the local environment. However, if we only regard the work in cities as a "transitory measure" and choose "disintegration" in the long run, we will not be able to deep into the local social division of labor, and also reduce the return on capital investment, which is not conducive to the long-term development of individuals and the society.

References


[2] Zhu Xiao and Duan Chengrong. (2016). Poverty of Rural Migrant Workers Leaving both Their


