An Analysis on the Migrant Workers’ Selection Tendency of Reference Group

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Abstract. Migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group will influence their social psychological perception and attitude. Based on large-scale questionnaire data, this paper studied the influencing factors of migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group from 4 respects: (1) personal characteristics, (2) motivation to settle down in the urban areas, (3) self-efficacy, (4) perception of pressure. It is found that the migrant workers of having higher income, stronger motivation to settle down in the urban areas, higher self-efficacy and less perception of pressure and the younger workers tend to choose urban residents as reference group. Compared with migrant workers with primary and secondary education, those with college or above education tend to choose urban residents as reference group.

Introduction

With the expedition of the industrialization and urbanization, a large number of migrant workers are becoming the main part of Chinese working class, while they are excluded from urban institutions and recessive social system since the Reform and Opening. Their social psychological perception and social attitudes have a strong influence in Chinese society.

People's social psychological perceptions and social attitudes can be affected by their selection of reference group based on the reference point theory in behavioral economics and Social comparison theory. For Chinese migrant workers, in many literatures, migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group has been used to explore the changes of their social psychological perception and social attitudes. However, compared to much theoretical research of migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group, few researches carefully analyze the variable and directly study migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group.

In view of this, in order to further research the changes of migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group after they moved into cities, based on many references, especially Kulik (1992)'s and O 'Neill (2005)'s theoretical models of reference group’s selection, this paper studies empirically the impacts of personal characteristics, motivation to settle down in the urban areas, self-efficacy and perception of pressure on migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group, according to the large-scale questionnaire data.

Variable Measurement and Analysis Methods

Sample Selection and Data Collection

The data come from field research, including 2,500 questionnaires by random sampling method. And 2,418 questionnaires were collected. After eliminating the absence of key variables and inconsistencies, 1554 valid questionnaires were obtained, with an effective rate of 64.3%.

Variable Measurement

In this paper, the variables are measured by Likert 5-level scale, where "1 ~ 5" means "completely disagree" to "completely agree".

(1) Referents. Merton and Kitt (1950) pointed out that people are more likely to choose the group they admire or want to join as reference group. Studies have also shown that groups with close
spatial distance and more social contact are more likely to be the reference group (Kingdon and Knight, 2007). Hu rong et al. (2012) believe that trust will reduce social distance. The higher the trust of migrant workers on urban residents, the closer they feel to urban residents. This paper measures migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group from 3 respects: 1) degree of connection, 2) degree of closeness, 3) sense of belonging and identification.

(2) Motivation. This paper measures migrant workers' motivation to settle down in the urban areas from 3 respects: 1) survival motive in the urban, 2) living motive in the urban, 3) intergenerational motive.

(3) Self-efficacy. This paper measures migrant workers' self-efficacy from 3 respects: 1) ability, 2) income, 3) social status.

(4) Perception of pressure. This paper measures migrant workers' perception of pressure from 2 respects: 1) the living pressure, 2) working pressure.

Empirical Method

As mentioned above, the dependent variable in the econometric model is 0 or 1, which means that migrant workers’ reference group is urban residents or rural villagers. These independent variables are processed by using the PCA method. To ensure accuracy of the empirical results, this paper uses binary logistic regression model to analyze the influencing factors of Migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group. The linear expression of the model is:

\[
y = \ln\left(\frac{p_i}{1-p_i}\right) = \alpha + \sum_{j=1}^{m} \beta_j x_j + \mu
\]

\(p_i\) is the probability that the ith sample of migrant workers chooses urban residents as reference group; \(\alpha\) is the constant term; \(\beta_j\) is the regression coefficient of the jth independent variable \(x_j\); \(\mu\) is the random error.

Empirical Analysis

Empirical Regression

|                      | Model1          |            | Model2          |            |
|----------------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
|                      | B               | Exp (B)    | B               | Exp (B)    |
| Gender (1)           | -0.237**        | 0.789      | -0.207*         | 0.813      |
| Age                  | -0.020***       | 0.980      | -0.020***       | 0.981      |
| Education (2)        | 0.111           | 1.118      | 0.097           | 1.102      |
| Education (3)        | 0.632***        | 1.882      | 0.582***        | 1.790      |
| Log (income)         | 0.544***        | 1.722      | 0.515***        | 1.674      |
| Motivation           | -               | -          | 0.175***        | 1.191      |
| Self-efficacy        | -               | -          | -               | -          |
| Pressure             | -               | -          | -               | -          |
| Constant term        | -4.723***       | 0.009      | -4.453***       | 0.012      |
| Hosmer & Lemeshow    | 0.234           |            | 0.106           |            |
| P value              |                 |            |                 |            |
| Minus 2 log likelihood | 2070.206     |            | 2059.357        |            |
Cox & Snell R² | 0.051 | 0.058  
Nagelkerke R² | 0.069 | 0.077  

Note: *, **, *** respectively represent passing the statistical test with significance levels of 10%, 5% and 1%.

Table 2. Estimation results of influencing factors of migrant workers’ selection tendency of reference group.

|                      | Model3 | Model4 |
|----------------------|--------|--------|
|                      | B      | Exp (B)| B      | Exp (B) |
| Gender (1)           | -0.224*** | 0.799  | -0.217* | 0.805   |
| Age                  | -0.018*** | 0.982  | -0.018*** | 0.982 |
| Education (2)        | 0.033   | 1.033  | 0.020   | 1.020   |
| Education (3)        | 0.428*  | 1.535  | 0.422*  | 1.525   |
| Log (income)         | 0.454*** | 1.575  | 0.447*** | 1.564 |
| Motivation           | 0.161*** | 1.175  | 0.175*** | 1.191   |
| Self-efficacy        | 0.218*** | 1.244  | 0.201*** | 1.222   |
| Pressure             | -       | -      | -0.164*** | 0.848   |
| Constant term        | -3.834*** | 0.022  | -3.762*** | 0.023   |
| Hosmer & Lemeshow P value | 0.118 | 0.468  |
| Minus 2 log likelihood | 2044.320 | 2034.964 |
| Cox & Snell R²      | 0.067   | 0.073  |
| Nagelkerke R²       | 0.090   | 0.097  |

Note: *, **, *** respectively represent passing the statistical test with significance levels of 10%, 5% and 1%.

Regression Analysis

1. The influence of personal characteristics on migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group.
   The empirical regression results show that gender, age, education and income all significantly affect migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group under the significance level of 10%. This means that the migrant workers of having higher income, higher education level, younger migrant workers and female migrant workers tend to choose urban residents as reference group.

2. The influence of motivation to settle down in the urban areas on migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group.
   The empirical regression results show that the migrant workers with strong motivation to settle down in the urban areas are more likely to choose urban residents as the reference group. This is probably because the migrant workers with strong motivation to settle down in the urban areas will increase their contact with urban residents and pay attention to urban residents’ situation. The acquisition of information will affect the selection of reference group (Goodman, 1974; Kulik and Ambrose, 1992). When migrant workers increase their access to information about urban residents, they tend to choose urban residents as the reference group.

3. The influence of self-efficacy on migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group.
   The empirical regression results show that migrant workers with higher self-efficacy tend to choose urban residents as the reference group. Migrant workers with higher self-efficacy generally set higher goals for themselves in the city and constantly improve their strength to adapt themselves to city life. Therefore, migrant workers with higher self-efficacy can prompt them to choose urban residents in better conditions as reference group.

4. The influence of perception of pressure on migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group.
The empirical regression results show that migrant workers who face greater pressure in cities tend to choose rural groups as the reference group. In a positive and relaxed urban environment, migrant workers naturally gradually increase their contact with urban residents and integrate into urban groups. Therefore, migrant workers who face minor pressure in cities tend to choose urban residents as the reference group.

**Further Discussion**

It is found that the migrant workers of having higher income, stronger motivation to settle down in the urban areas, higher self-efficacy and less perception of pressure and the younger workers tend to choose urban residents as reference group. And compared with migrant workers with primary and secondary education, those with college or above education tend to choose urban residents as reference group. To some extent, these evidence means that in the sub-class structure of migrant workers group, compared with other migrant workers, the migrant workers in the dominant class may tend to choose urban residents as the reference group.

Many scholars have also found that the objective economic status of Chinese migrant workers is inconsistent with their subjective social attitudes. Such as some scholars find that there is an "Esaterlin" paradox about subjective well-being of migrant workers (Zhou ShiJun et al, 2017). In this paper, the empirical evidence shows that migrant workers with the higher income, the higher self-efficacy, stronger motivation to settle down in the urban areas tend to choose urban residents as the reference group, which means when they face unfair treatment in the urban areas, these migrant workers might be more negative because of the change of their reference group. It is consistent with the above research.

**Conclusion**

Based on many references, especially Kulik (1992)’s and O’Neill (2005)’s theoretical models of reference group’s selection, this paper studies empirically the impacts of personal characteristics, motivation to settle down in the urban areas, self-efficacy and perception of pressure on migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group, according to the large-scale questionnaire data. The research finds that: (1) These personal characteristics variables besides gender have significant influence on the migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group. (2) The migrant workers with strong motivation to settle down in the urban areas are more likely to choose urban residents as the reference group. (3) The migrant workers with higher self-efficacy tend to choose urban residents as the reference group. (4) Migrant workers’ perception of pressure has negative correlations in the migrant workers' selection tendency of reference group. Migrant workers who face greater pressure in cities tend to choose rural groups as the reference group.

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