Analysis of the Poverty Problem of Migrant Workers from the Perspective of Social Capital

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Abstract. Migrant workers are a special group in the transition period of Chinese society today. A series of problems caused by the poverty problem of migrant workers have always been a huge challenge to social development as well. From the perspective of social capital, this paper interprets the poverty problem of the vulnerable group of migrant workers, which is conducive to supplementing relevant research and specifically analyzing the reasons for their poverty, and then it puts forward some suggestions such as strengthening integration, government-leading, offering multiple support, perfecting the system and standardizing the environment, from the angle of raising social capital of migrant workers.

1. Introduction
Since the reform and opening up, the number of people living in absolute poverty in China has decreased from 250 million to 40 million now. In absolute terms, this is in itself a major contribution to the world cause of poverty reduction, but it is still quite an arduous task to eliminate poverty. With the deepening of economic system reform, there appears a new type of poverty, that is, the poverty of migrant workers. The so-called poverty of migrant workers refers to the mobile poverty-stricken population who temporarily leave the rural place of domicile and blindly flow into the city without permanent migration. Many scholars have made different explanations for the poverty of migrant workers, such as views on poverty of resource elements, naive views on poverty and systematic views on poverty, etc. However, these explanations seem to be not convincing enough for the Chinese society that lays emphasis on relationship orientation and ethic as standard. Therefore, the author tries to study the poverty of migrant workers from the perspective of social capital, in order to further explain the root causes of poverty of the vulnerable group of migrant workers.

2. About social capital
Social capital is embedded in social structures or social relations, existing in the form of obligations, expectations, trust, norms, authority, etc., its flow direction can be obtained or changed through people's purposeful actions, which can enable individuals to achieve the resources they desire[1]. It contains three aspects of connotation: first of all, social capital is a collection of real or potential resources, that is to say, resources are not merely the core of social capital, but the prerequisite for the formation of social capital. In the next place, social capital is intangible, manifested as the relationship between people, such as trust, norms, authority, etc., these different social relations are not only the existence forms of social capital, but the places and ways in which it takes shape. Thirdly, social capital is also an ability to mobilize social resources. Only through the mobilization of individual actors can the resources embedded in social relationship networks become realistic and effective social capital.
As far as individuals or groups are concerned, once they own social capital, they can gain social support as well as the conditions and opportunities to change their own situations because social capital is essentially a supportive relationship, which reduces the cost for achieving goals. In Chinese society, relationship determines the social behaviors of people. The amount of intake of social resources and the social status of individuals depend on a great extent on the quality of the social capital they possess. Individuals increase their chances of making profits by taking possession of capital to obtain more social capital, so the individuals, families and groups that are lack of support and protection of effective social capital will be plunged into poverty and plight. It is in this sense that social capital in itself has an extremely strong anti-poverty significance. In terms of the poor who seek security, social capital can be converted into what he needs help and reduce the cost he needs to access to resources, and in this way, it is equivalent that he gets some degree of guarantee[2]. In other words, social capital has a certain social security function for the poor who are lack of resources.

3. Poverty status of migrant workers

3.1. The influence on the mobility forms of migrant workers

Due to the long-term unsynchronized development of urban and rural areas, the quality of the rural labor force is generally low, and the self-protection psychology of urban people repels farmers from entering the city, so it is difficult for farmers to find a chance of survival in the city by themselves. In this case, the mobile labor force in rural areas can only gain work information or get work by fully relying on such social capital of the relatively elementary social relationship network, or the kinship and geographical relationship. During this period, they are not so much seeking material survival as seeking a sense of security and dependency.

It is precisely the trust and dependence on the kinship and geographical relationship, and the fact that the government organizations of outflowing places rarely or seldom organize the mobility of labor force, that makes the rural labor force often adopt a self-organized mobility mode when going out, especially when going out for the first time (the outgoers mobilize all sorts of social relations on the basis of their kinship and geographical relationship, and get employment information, implement the employment position and solve a series of life problems through these informal relations). This way can reduce the risk cost and opportunity cost of rural labor mobility, and offer certain life guarantee for the persons who go out for the first time.

3.2. The influence on the living forms of migrant workers

A typical example is "Zhejiang Village" in Beijing. "Zhejiang Village" takes shape on the premise of Zhejiang's industrial and commercial households inhabiting together and based on the kinship and geopolitical relations. For the villagers here, living in compact communities not only has the meaning of life, but the meaning of production and management[3]. But for many other mobile labor force in rural areas, living with people with kinship and geographical relationships is to mutually look after and help each other, as well as serve themselves. The places of residence of migrant workers are generally provided by the working units, or they rent private houses in cities. Their way of living in individual concentrated communities in small areas is not unrelated to urban people’s repulsion against them. It is precisely this kind of repulsion that leads to the strengthening of cohesion within the migrant population, and thus forms their own way of living with the network of kinship and geopolitical social relations as the link. Only in this way can they reduce their living costs and alleviate their psychological pressure caused by their inability to integrate into urban society.

3.3. Migrant workers have a weak sense of social belonging and identity

Migrant workers, a vulnerable group working in cities, cannot immediately integrate into urban life. Various concepts of them such as consumption view are also inconsistent with those of urban people, they will be rejected by urban people from time to time, making them unable to obtain social recognition, and as a result, it is very difficult for migrant workers to participate extensively in the work and life of
cities and actively exert their subjective initiative, which is not conducive to further developing and improving the living conditions of migrant workers in cities.

4. An analysis of the causes of poverty of migrant workers from the perspective of social capital

4.1. The basic conditions for migrant workers to accumulate social capital are weak

Social capital is built on social relations, while social relations are on a reciprocal basis. Personal resources determine the ability of an individual to provide rewards to others in social exchanges due to social interaction, which means that the more resources a person has, the more capable he is to provide rewards to others, and thus the stronger his ability to take in other people's resources through social networks. However, in real life, migrant workers come from villages and towns, and they are much weaker than urban residents in terms of education degree, wealth, status, power and social relations, etc. Therefore, migrant workers who are lack of resources are incapable of achieving reciprocity in social relationship networks, thus it is difficult to ensure that their social relationship networks can continue to interact and provide a tremendous outpouring of support. If the principle of reciprocity cannot be insisted, the relationship strength and support strength in social networks will inevitably weaken and social networks will even break down. In this case, it is more difficult for migrant workers to establish a network of relationships with other groups. Therefore, in the absence of the prerequisites for the formation of social capital, the social support obtained by migrant workers will inevitably be weaker than that of general urban residents, and so it is more likely for them to fall into poverty. For the migrant workers who are trapped in poverty, their own personal resources are scarce, they have no resources to be exchanged and no ability to provide rewards to others, the quality of their social capital can only maintain at a low level and can hardly be improved, so poor migrant workers are also more likely to fall into a vicious circle where the poorer they are, the less likely they will get help from others, and the less unlikely they get help from others, the poorer they will be.

4.2. The space for migrant workers to expand social capital is narrow

Possession of resources does not mean having social capital. Individuals with resources can form social capital only by carrying out interaction, making association and conducting exchanges in a social relationship networks. It can be said that the interactions in the network of relationships between people are the places and ways to form social capital. In real life, on the one hand, since migrant workers have different lifestyles and values from those of urban residents and they are lack of equal and pleasant exchange with urban residents, they are often excluded and discriminated against by citizens because of institutional factors and cultural differences. Thus, it is still the previous network of relationships that results in their capital stock in cities. On the other hand, they have to face such problems as being in a financial strain, being transferred to new work units and out of employment. Under the pressure of survival, they have no leisure time to expand their resources, so the space for migrant workers to expand social capital is very narrow.

4.3. Migrant workers have limited capacity to use social capital

Resources can become effective social capital only after being mobilized and used. Only through their own mobilization capability, employment of the existing relationship capital in their social network, or constructing new relationship chains to borrow top-level advantageous capital, can people finally make social capital play its role effectively[4]. Personal mobilization of resources is as important to the formation of social capital as personal possession of resources. In many cases, migrant workers often give up the opportunities to mobilize and utilize resources themselves. The reasons lie in the following two aspects. On the one hand, their own attitudes and ideologies hinder the possibility for them to mobilize resources in person. Migrant workers often consider that once the resources are mobilized, especially the employment of relationships other than daily relationships entails huge transaction costs, while the income may not necessarily be greater than the cost and the result may not worth the candle, so migrant workers do not dare to mobilize resources easily. On the other hand, the system does not recognize the
mobilization of resources by migrant workers. Although migrant workers have recognized favorable social resources and also have the desire to mobilize social resources, there appears the problem of institutional disapproval in the mobilization of social resources, that is, migrant workers are lack of status and power. Power is not only a kind of social resources owned by individuals, but also a force for mobilizing resources, and without power, resources can hardly be mobilized. For instance, migrant workers are far away from the original organizations and group resources in their hometowns and are on the edge of society and they can no longer use and mobilize the resources in the original organizations, so their opportunities and abilities to mobilize resources are all lost.

4.4. The resources of the weak network of relationships are seriously insufficient

According to Granovetter and Linnan, for job seekers, a weak network of relationships may seem more powerful than a strong network of relationships. That is to say, when a person is looking for a job, the information that is truly valuable to him in finding a new job is often obtained not by his close relative or friend (strong relationship), but by his general relative and friend (weak relationship)[5] because a strong network of relationships is often limited to more homogeneous information and is of little help to individuals while a weak network of relationships is different, and it can bring relatively abundant information and knowledge to individuals, thereby enhancing individuals’ competitiveness. The resources of the weak network of relationships are seriously insufficient for vulnerable groups in China, which are mainly from two aspects:

On the one hand, it originates from the traditional Chinese interpersonal view of "differential pattern". Fei Xiaotong (2000) has long proposed that, the changing process of an individual’s social relations from strong to weak is just like the circles of ripples pushed out when a stone is thrown on the surface of the water. Everyone is the center of circles launched by his social influence, from the center to the edge, the relationship between members is getting increasingly distant, and the relationship has also changed from strong to weak[6]. The conservative and backward ideas inherited from the Chinese traditional agricultural society makes farmers more inclined to associate with people who have blood relationship with and relatively close to them. Once one side believes that there is no need for the two sides to contact each other, the side will voluntarily interrupt the so-called kinship relations. As a result, the interpersonal network of farmers is getting narrower and narrower, and there are fewer and fewer people they can trust.

On the other hand, due to the high degree of homogeneity of network members, the availability of social capital is reduced to a large extent. According to Lin Nan's theory of "social resources", the greater the heterogeneity of a person's social network, the higher the status of network members, the weaker the relationship between the individual and members, and the richer the social resources he possesses (1982). Then, by comparing the situations of migrant workers, we can see that in their very limited network of relationships, the statuses of network members are basically the same, that is, the identity of migrant workers. While Lin Nan's theory points out that the higher the status of the network member, the more effective support and help the individual receives from him[7]. Therefore, migrant workers, especially poor farmers, are almost impossible to have any contact with the high-level social strata, and thus they cannot get any resources from them.

4.5. Institutional factors cause the vulnerable group of migrant workers trapped in the plight of social capital

The compromise and concession of social policy to the strong correlation within the powerful groups do not benefit the social vulnerable groups, but strengthen the social exclusion and prejudice against them. Vincent once made an incisive argument that the interaction of poverty and policy determines the position of the poor in the hierarchical structure of society, and the poor are created and recreated by those economic policies that reflect poverty. It is precisely because "the leading group has already hold social power and is not willing to be share it with others" (Popenoe, 1999)[8]. Therefore, they will inevitably exclude marginalized poor and weak groups by virtue of government and social policies. Inequality and poverty are the results of fighting for limited resources in the process of interest distribution among
different groups of society. An obvious fact is that vulnerable groups with poor individual resources can influence the social policies of governments and protect their own interests more effectively only by uniting together and forming a coalition of concerted actions. But those poor migrant workers who are in a weak position cannot establish a broad and powerful alliance organization at all, thus losing their abilities and conditions to bargain with those with vested interests.

5. Countermeasures and suggestions for migrant workers to fight against poverty from the perspective of social capital

5.1. Promoting the citizenization and urban integration of migrant workers

The core issue of urbanization lies in the citizenization of migrant workers, and more importantly, the transformation of migrant workers' life concepts, ways of thinking, behavioral habits and forms of social organization, and that they change from migrant workers to urban residents in the true sense. In the process of urbanization in our country, it is an inevitable choice to increase the social capital stock of migrant workers so that farmers can smoothly change into urban residents and adapt to urban life[9]. The process of citizenization of migrant workers can be promoted from the following aspects: advancing the progressive reform of the household registration system, realizing the complete unhooking of household registration and welfare as soon as possible, and boosting the development of urban and rural integration; giving citizenship treatment to migrant workers and enhancing migrant workers' sense of identity to urban society; providing the social system and cultural environment conducive to the interaction and communication between migrant workers and cities; realizing the transformation of migrant workers' social relationship network from cohesive group network to open group network[10], obtaining new information, discovering new resources and finding new opportunities by establishing contact networks with urban residents, and building a bridge between migrant workers and urban residents originally separated and divided.

5.2. Giving full play to the guiding role of the government

Increasing the social capital of migrant workers needs to be realized through external force, and the government undertakes unshirkable responsibility in this process of construction. First of all, strengthen the propaganda of public opinions, eliminate social exclusion against migrant workers, improve mainstream society's attention and recognition of poor migrant workers, and promote all sectors of society to lend them a helping hand to them; moreover, strengthen the employment support of poor migrant workers through legislative means. At present, migrant workers are mostly in unfavorable employment situations (for example, the signing rate of labor contracts is very low, there is a general lack of social security, wages are relatively low and workers often suffer from wage arrears, and the working environment and labor protection are generally poor, etc.), the government must develop corresponding laws and policies to support the employment of migrant workers (for instance, to further improve the existing "Labor Law" and "Labor Contract Law" or formulate "Employment Nondiscrimination Act" with reference to foreign experience to restrict regional discrimination in the labor market[11]), and protect the legal and equal rights of employment of migrant workers; in the third place, establish and perfect the social security system for migrant workers, including social insurance transfer and succession system, labor protection system and so on.

5.3. Developing nongovernmental organizations and forming mutually supporting networks

China is a society that obviously lacks civil organizations, one end is the strong government, and the other end is atomized individuals and families, and there is a lack of civil organizations that play a stable and coordinating role. To enhance the social capital of migrant workers, it is necessary to develop trade unions, associations, chambers of commerce and various mutual-aid and cooperation organizations, especially migrant workers' rights protection organizations and other non-governmental organizations, organize scattered individual migrant workers, cultivate their awareness of participation, get out of their families and integrate into society, and form a broad network of social mutual aid and support; provide
migrant workers with opportunities to exchange, encourage and trust each other through this network so that they can develop self-confidence, continuously explore their own potential, participate extensively in social activities, actively exert their subjective initiative, gradually improve their collective decision-making ability and ability to resist risks; encourage them to invest in social capital with organizational resources, and finally realize the combination of self-help and other assistance to enhance their anti-poverty capacity.

5.4. Perfecting social security system and constructing institutional social capital in rural areas

It is suggested to establish and improve the social security system in rural areas and integrate rural residents into the social security system; the major issues are to expand the coverage of the social security system and provide migrant workers with necessary unemployment insurance, endowment insurance and work-related injury medical insurance for their work and life in cities. Therefore, it is essential to enforce the basic social insurance. Every naturalized farmer who goes to town, runs his own entity or engages in individual business must be forced to pay for himself the two most basic social security funds, namely social endowment insurance and medical insurance of comprehensive arrangement for serious disease. Farmers working in other units of cities must demand employers to pay social endowment insurance funds for them, medical funds of comprehensive arrangement for serious disease and work-related injury insurance funds according to the social security requirements of local cities, and other insurance items may be expanded further depending on the circumstances. Social security networks of cities should cover farmers who enter the cities for naturalization must enjoy the same social security and welfare treatment as urban citizens under the same conditions. Meanwhile, considering the relatively large mobility of migrant workers, attention should also be paid to the policy arrangements for the transfer of social security to other places so as to do a good job in regional coordination.

5.5. Standardizing the social and cultural environment

First of all, it is primary to change the values of urban residents and make them realize the contribution made by migrant workers to urban development, abandon their prejudice against migrant workers, and help them integrate into urban life better. Secondly, enhance migrant workers' sense of identity with urban social culture. For migrant workers, although they also live in certain communities in cities, this kind of residence is usually temporary, and the communities are temporary for them as well. They do not own property or even a fixed life here, but on the contrary, the great contrast between the daily life of migrant workers here and the local residents always reminds them that they are not a member of this place. Under such circumstances, it is difficult for them to form a sense of identity and belonging to urban society and living communities. It is a long and complicated process to enhance migrant workers’ sense of identity with urban society and community culture, raise their social status, enable them to find the feeling of "home" in unfamiliar cities, and integrate into urban life with the mentality of being masters, which requires the urban society to create a concept and atmosphere of equality, mutual aid, mutual understanding and tolerance.

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