

Group Differences Among Nongmingong: A Follow-up Ethnographic Case Study

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This study probes the differences between two generations of nongmingong by presenting and analyzing the ethnographic fieldwork data collected in a labor-intensive enterprise. In the article the authors tend to stress two points. The first is about the attitude to the choice of “reflux” and “job-hopping”. It is suggested that “reflux” and “job-hopping” are two different practices and attempts for both new and old nongmingong when confronted with future development, which may be viewed an opportunity for them. It also suggests that “reflux” and “job-hopping” may represent the needs for self-actualization, strategies and means of mobility or even the different ways of worldview between rural and urban residents of the new and old nongmingong. The second point is about the process of self-categorization of the nongmingong, which illustrates how they are divided by the ideas and options. The authors will explain the process of internal alteration by analysis of their mutual evaluation and definition, interaction, and even conflict.

BACKGROUND ABOUT TWO GENERATIONS OF NONGMINGONG (农民工)

Nongmingong has become major urbanization and industrial labor forces in China in recent years (*nongmingong* refers to peasant workers, a particular social class and phenomenon in China since China’s economic reform launched in the end of 1970s. Before the economic reform the peasants were not allowed to search for employment in cities but after economic reform the peasants are free to find the employment opportunities in cities and once hired will be categorized as *nongmingong*, means peasant workers), and the *nongmingong* phenomenon has drawn great attentions from both policy makers and scholars, there is a large body of literatures on *nongmingong* studies (cf. Arianne and Tamara, 2004; Cheng and Yao, 2005; Dou, 2010, Gaetano and Jacka, 2004, Gu et al., 2008, Guang, 2001; Liu and Xu, 2007, Loraine and Zhao, 2000; Mallee, 1996; Murphy, 2002; Scharping, 1997; Solinger, 1999; West and Zhao, 2000, Wu, 2005, Yu et al., 2010, Zhang, 2001).

As the development of *nongmingong* the internal differences between generations has emerged as a topic of debate in the academic world of China (Wang, 2002; 2001; Wang and Qin, 2002; 2005). Scholars conducted the studies on “New Generation” group identity of *nongmingong* mainly based on the survey in Hangzhou, Wenzhou, Shenzhen represented by Wang Chunguang who is the first to find out that the so-called concept of “new generation of floating rural population” has two meanings. One meaning is the groups of people who are under 25 years old and migrated from rural areas to work in urban areas in the 1990s. There is a clear difference on the experience between them and the first generation of *nongmingong* who migrated to urban areas from rural areas prior to the 1990s. The other meaning is that they are not the second-generation rural migrants but rather the transitional ones between the first and the second generation because they have different identities, life expectations, and behaviors from the first and second generations. Wang Chunguang also finds out that those *nongmingong* of new generation of floating rural population have diversified motivations of moving out from the rural areas, and the most typical one is to make a better living in the urban.

However, the social reality pushes them have to face a dilemma: on one hand, it is difficult for them to return to the villages; on the other hand they cannot get fully settled in cities. According to Wang Chunguang, the interaction between China's unique social environment and the impression on the society of the new generation of floating rural population has helped to format the community identity of the new generation, especially the identity of the urban culture. In addition, the identification of new generation of *nongmingong* appeared to be more non-deterministic, and their hometown identity has also weakened. Moreover, in his study Wang sharply realizes that the awareness of the basic civil rights among the new generation has been increased dramatically in later years (Wang, 2002; 2001). More recently, scholars study the intergenerational differences among *nongmingong* by comparative and statistical analysis. Zhuang (2008) based on the two surveys of the floating *nongmingong* in the city of Xiamen, Fujian Province, studies the procreation desire of *nongmingong*. The findings suggest that although nearly all *nongmingong* share similar opinions on certain issues, such as the best ages to give a birth of a baby, there are some significant differences on the other issues of life among various generations of *nongmingong*. Wang Dong and Qin Wei (2002) analyze the survey data and point out that there are discrepancies in time periods of the initial migration, age, marital status and educational levels in aspects of the motivation and purpose of flowing, income, consumption, the adaptability to the urban, as well as the frequency of returning hometown. They believe that inter-generational differentiation has indeed occurred among *nongmingong*. The main features of inter-generational differentiation lie in time periods of the initial movement, age, marital status and educational levels. Cheng Aihua and Yao Shanghai also analyze the inter-generational differences of *nongmingong* and conclude that the new generation of *nongmingong* take on more characteristics of contemporary industrial workers in urban areas and thus become the main component of China's industrial workers. Therefore, China should gradually build entirely equal and market-oriented labor relations with the related regulatory mechanisms to support the systems (Cheng and Yao, 2005).

There are a number of other relevant studies on the *nongmingong* that involve the analysis of intergenerational differences. Some scholars generalize the group identity of the new generation of *nongmingong* through analyzing the self-identity, motivation and difficulties of development, the process of adaptation to the urban society as well as the characteristics of income and consumption (Gu et al., 2008; Liu and Xu, 2007). Theories and frameworks of such research are still under development and more systematic researches about two generations of *nongmingong*

are expected to be conducted. Thus, how to subdivide the *nongmingong* in terms of generation is a prominent and important issue and remains as a question of priority in the ongoing study of inter-generational itself (Cheng and Yao, 2005; Wang and Qin, 2002; Wang, 2002).

Although scholars tend to agree that the first generation mainly refers to the *nongmingong* in 1980s while the new generation of *nongmingong* refers to those who are among the first group to emigrate from their rural homes, the general division of the *nongmingong* theory is still under discussion and there is no unified agreement on it (Liu and Xu 2007, Zhuang 2008). Therefore, the “new generation” of *nongmingong* is hard to define. For instance, how to make a distinction in terms of generation between the *nongmingong* in the 21st century and the ones in 1990s? Apparently, it is an issue of period division but not the generally mentioned “generation”.

There are two inseparable questions on the comparison of the intergenerational characteristics to be answered: 1) What we have seen as the inter-generational differences is caused by generational differences or the cycle of life? 2) When we compare the two generations of *nongmingong*, must we demonstrate the difference between two generations or the difference between two generations of *nongmingong*. On the term generational gap, we suggest that the generation refers to the alternation of human life, from generation to generation, while inter-generational gap refers to the existence of estrangement and disparity. Therefore, the actual meaning is generational disparity: the gap between generations on concepts, way of thinking, and habits, etc. (Sun, 1997). Obviously, this is a distinction based on age differences. Such differences are more a reflection of the cultural difference in a non-physiological sense.

The current study mainly concerns the inter-generational differences and the heterogeneity among *nongmingong*. The data used in this study were collected through a longitude ethnographic fieldwork at a stationery factory, during the fieldwork periods the authors interviewed many *nongmingong* informants, which makes the inter-generational study possible. The authors believe that it is necessary to have a deep consideration and exploration to the difference between two periods of age and two generations. No doubt that the differences exist, if we refer the issue to generation, it is unavoidable that the generation heredity is involved.

As will be demonstrated, the authors found that the differences lie more in the mutual identification and evaluation, rather than heredity. Therefore the use of “two generations” may need to be avoided. The main focuses of this study are the differences and mutual understanding between groups. Therefore, in this article the authors will not use the division of “first generation” and “second generation”. In this paper the discussion on *nongmingong* is mainly based on our understanding of the group changes and internal differentiation of *nongmingong*, rather than age changing of life body.

OLD V.S. YOUNG: FLOATING PATTERNS OF *NONGMINGONG*

In the Pearl River Delta area (PRDA), one common characteristic of labor-intensive enterprises is the high mobility of workers. For instance, the size of workers in *Dacheng* Company was about 1000 employees, but the floating rate of workers was the quadruple of regular size in 2006. Our findings indicate that there are two main patterns of workers’ mobility: backflow (回流, *hui liu*) and job-hopping. The attitudes on floating pattern are varied by different generation *nongmingong* groups. More than 90% of the old *nongmingong* tend to return home, but only 50% of them have tried to do so. On the contrary, most of young *nongmingong* do not want to back home. Superficially, young *nongmingong* prefer to find their new life in a larger society to return to their hometowns. They may change their minds when they are getting

old. The authors suggest that we can explore the reason of different attitudes between the old and young generation through their various lived experience. The understanding of the rural and urban life is different between young and the old *nongmingong* groups due to their respective growing experience, which cause the difference of their motivation of returning home and goal in life as well. On the attitude of job-hopping, the old and experienced *nongmingong* indicate that they have to consider carefully before they make the decision to switch their jobs. In contrast, the young *nongmingong* tend to switch their jobs more frequently, which implies stability is not the primary matter they will consider. The old *nongmingong* workers believe that frequent job-switching would obstruct the young from getting advanced. However, the young *nongmingong* workers believe that they can improve themselves and get the better job through job-hopping; therefore, job-hopping is commonly encouraged among the young generation. Below, the authors will further discuss the disparities between the Old generation of *nongmingong* workers and the Young generation *nongmingong* workers, as well as the rationales of these differences.

MOTIVATION TO WORK AWAY FROM HOME

Many old *nongmingong* said that they had to decide to work away from home because making a living through farming proves difficult. Sun Liping, one of the *nongmingong* informants told the authors: “in the minds of *nongmingong*, there is no concrete image about the relation between land and labor ... what dominates them to move away from home for job comes from their ideas of farming profits.” “In China, the flowing of rural labor to the industrial areas and cities is a sort of reflection to the ‘widespread poverty caused by a large number of surplus labor.’” Most of *nongmingong* informants claimed that they went out to work because they could not support their families just by farming. About 45% of them have arable land at home, and 86% of them admit that the primary impetus of working outside is supporting their families.

The situation is different in the young *nongmingong* group. Though about 30% of them have land at home, few of them did farming work before going out and they seldom take responsibility to support their families. Actually, few of them have experience in farming at home. Then what is their motivation to decide to work away from home? They believe that there is no future if they remain in their rural hometown. They know that, as manual workers, the wealth dream seems far away but at least the life in the city is more enjoyable and with more opportunities than rural life. They feel tiresome and desperate to make a living by farming life at their young ages. They also said that they want to go out to *see the world*; otherwise, they could not adjust themselves to the change and development of the world. Furthermore, they worry that they will miss invaluable experiences and opportunities if they do not follow the steps of people who go out to work.

For the young *nongmingong*, they perceive that there are only two choices are suitable for them: continuing to study at school or go out to work. The choice of doing farm work seldom comes to their mind. For them going out to work is a feasible way since it has been practiced by their predecessors. Moreover, they consider it life experience that they deserve, because “others do like that, so do I!” In addition, they have numerous dreams and hopes, though of which some of them might be illusions, toward urban life. In their mind, urban cities are magical and amazing spaces much better than the place in which they were born, where they cannot fulfill their values and dreams. These differences between generations directly affect their attitude towards urban

life and returning home. Since the old *nongmingong* worked out for the pressure of survival and supporting the families, once the pressure is lessened, they may quit their work to return home.

By comparing urban and rural life, the old *nongmingong* workers think that life of farming is better for the casual and free. The most important thing is the money they earn and save in the city is good enough to enable them a better life, which arouses respect from the villagers. Thus, the old ones embrace the belief “coming back when money is enough”. On the contrary, the young ones decide to work in the city out of enriching their experience and future, even some take it for granted. What they want to change is not only the economic status, but also their life style. They want a different life, and want to break the shackles of poverty, so they will not return home even if they have earned enough money. They compare the life of their peers living in the city with that of themselves, and hope that they can live as the same as the city residents. Returning home means they cannot fulfill their self-value and adapt to urban life as well. Therefore, the two groups are divided.

THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS MAKING MONEY AND WORKING

Many old *nongmingong* workers claimed that young people always change their jobs but do not work seriously. They believe to work sincerely and hard are the most important virtues of work. Workers were paid by their bosses and therefore must do things honestly. They consider losing job shameful, which shows incompetence and inability of those who lost their jobs. They have a strong sense of risk on being unemployed. They report that they are more eager to learn at the beginning and do not care about the external factors such as holidays, environment, etc.

On the other hand, the young *nongmingong* workers are different. Although they share the same purpose of making money, they have no the diligent attitude. They tend to “make the most money by doing the least thing.” In their opinion to quit a job and get a better one is prideful rather than dreadful. They do not think it is a disgraceful of losing job, because it is their own decision to quit and therefore they would be proud of that. They think that only by changing jobs can they improve themselves, thus, they shift jobs frequently for more suitable position, and though this type of job switching they are able to mobilize up in their social and economic life.

They pay much attention to some potential factors such as personal development, equity, and environment into job-hunting, is their primary consideration. They also care about whether their professional knowledge can be applied and valued, and whether they can do what they like to do and what suits them the most. In addition, they do not feel a strong crisis of losing job. In short, in terms of dealing with job-hopping, the two groups differ from attitudes and opinions. The old group criticizes the younger ones for not being surefooted and having no passion to learn, while the young think they do not need to feel shameful for job-hopping, which, on the contrary, can ameliorate their life effectively.

ATTACHMENT TO THE FAMILY IDEOLOGY AND OBLIGATION

The reason that most old *nongmingong* choose to return home is closely related to the family obligations. On the one hand, they come back home is for their parents, and to spend the rest of their life with parents in their hometown to demonstrate their filial piety to their parents, a key Chinese value. On the other hand, initially, they went out to work because of supporting families. When their children are able to make money, their financial burden is relived accordingly. They believe that it is time for them to hand over the responsibility to their offspring. They also went

home to create another choice for their children, no matter by building a house or opening a grocery store or something else, hoping that one day their children can inherit it.

On the contrary, young *nongmingong* workers think that they do not need buy a house in their hometown. They dream that when they become wealthy they could afford one in the city and settle their parents there. Moreover, they lack the sense that “family should live together”, because most of them were once the stay-at-home children or floating children. They can give up living together with their family members for their future development. They believe that being filial is to earn more money for themselves and their parents, rather than living together in poverty. On the attitude towards either returning home or job-hopping, young *nongmingong* tend to take less family obligation into account than the old *nongmingong*, who were constrained by too many factors when making a decision.

VALUES AND BELIEFS

When talking about working away from home, many old *nongmingong* mentioned some fellow villagers who have worked somewhere for a period and then introduce them to work there, which has become an important pattern for farmers get employed in cities. Therefore, the old *nongmingong* they rely on the fellow villagers had worked outside, and they always seek the fellow villagers’ advice when they are deciding whether to work in the cities or to change their jobs. Without the approval or encouragement from their village fellows, the old *nongmingong* workers would not take risks easily. Besides, they see the frequent changes of jobs as the most serious risk to take, which may lead to negative consequences.

As for the young *nongmingong* workers, it is a common for them to see their fathers or uncles struggling to work in the cities, so they take it for granted that working in cities is an experience they should have, so that when they decide to quit from school they will go out to work together with classmates with less prudence and caution. The point here is that they are not so discreet or afraid of taking risks. When it comes to job-hopping, they always make their decision easily and do not think that it will have a negative influence on them, even if they have made the wrong decision, because they could change the job again, which is a very popular common sense among the young *nongmingong* workers.

As to the attitude towards way of life, the old *nongmingong* workers are unwilling to settle in the city, even though there is no survival pressure, because they believe that they have already been rooted in their hometowns, attached to their parents and accustomed to the living environment. In contrast, the young *nongmingong* workers have experienced the wandering life in their early ages; they do not exclude this life style at all. Besides, although it remains unclear whether the young *nongmingong* workers have the ability to settle down in cities, many of them have expressed such inclination.

EMOTIONAL AFFECTIVE ELEMENTS ON THE ATTITUDE AMONG NONGMINGONG TOWARDS JOB-HOPPING

After three decades of reform and opening-door policy, China is firmly striding forward in modernization. However, one side effect is that the influence of traditional culture has declined in this process. It is impacted by ideology of rationalization; do young people tend to make rational choice? We found that in the survey that young *nongmingong* are still affected by many

emotional factors when they make decisions, which is reflected in some articles that their job-hopping is described as “irrational job-hopping”.

But the authors of this article argue that the targets of their choices are vague but meaningful. We analyzed their demands associated with their objectives, and found that they have a complicated goal. The income and social life are one of factors affect their choice, when switching the jobs they take a lot of aspects into consideration, such as: the remuneration or pay including fringe benefits, working environment, superior-subordinate relationship, and whether their strengths can be brought into full play, etc. However, before changing jobs they are vague about it. They usually do not make the decision by comparing the aspects they care about, instead they adopt the attitude of “give it a try”. The economic and living factors cannot be accounted separately for their decision of job-hopping. They do take care of the both. It is due to their vague but integrated targets that the decision of the young *nongmingong* is described as “irrational job-hopping”, and “frequent job-hopping”. They are commonly termed as “fleas” in the labor market.

As indicated above, the old *nongmingong* depend on the information provided by their fellow villagers when changing jobs. Will the young ones deal with the job information more rationally? Data collected for this research demonstrate that they are not. Because of the pervasive false advertisements and information, young *nongmingong* refuse to believe the information on employment information printed in newspapers, generated in televisions and posted on the internet, they still trust the information that from their fellow villagers and friends. Objectively speaking, they lack the ability and conditions to effectively analyze the information on employment, so they turn to their relatives and friends, making passive and irrational decisions. In the process of job-hopping, the kinship and acquaintance play a central role.

We found that the young *nongmingong* often make their decisions by imitation and customs. On the motivation to work in the cities, they choose to do that because they consider it an indispensable life experience, a feasible choice which has already been practiced and confirmed by so many predecessors. This kind of experience is also related to their dreams—making a breakthrough in life and being a successful person. However, rational judgment is rarely seen in their decision-making. Many of them left school because of weariness, which is also transferred to their work. As a result they are prone to feel bored in their working environment, which leads to job-hopping. In their eyes, job-hopping is a common and normal practice which all other people do, and it is job-hopping that can help them find a more suitable position.

The authors also discovered that job-hopping of the young farmer-turned workers is opposed by the old ones because it comes from “instinctive impulse” to a large extent. The old *nongmingong* judge the young, claiming that they do not care about the job at all, that their toleration of grievance is low. Their quitting from jobs seems always associated with the quarrel with their bosses, colleagues or even girlfriends or boyfriends. Our data indicate that those unforeseeable accidents account for 20% of all the resignations. The old *nongmingong* express their concern that there is no stability in the young people. They scold them at their absence of single-mindedness in work, lack of tolerance and disrespect to superiors and the elders. In addition, many young *nongmingong* admit that they do quit their jobs out of “impulse”, but at the same time they think that it is a practice of rebellion on one hand and a way to solve all the problem on the other.

In fact, the critiques towards the young group become a kind of stereotype that affect great on the old one. Many old *nongmingong* think that the young people are not as hard-working and tolerant as they, so they are impatient and impetuous, which is the reason why they are

frequently change their jobs. Therefore, in the factory, the old *nongmingong* are unwilling to teach the young. The gap is increasingly widened because of the misunderstanding and prejudice between the two groups.

We compared many aspects between the old *nongmingong* and the young ones in the investigation, however, it is not easy to claim whether the gap is between two generations or between two generations of *nongmingong*. The primary reason for the blurry distinction is that at present the young *nongmingong* are more and more like the general urban youth. They are trying hard to adjust the way of urban life, consequently, the characteristics of farmer of them are becoming less and less, thus causing the distinction between them and the last generation of *nongmingong* in terms of group identity. Nowadays, going out to work has already become a custom of the young farmers, and they have so many features different to the *nongmingong* in the 1980s, which is likely to help them become an urban youth, however, it may also cause new problems.

INTERACTION AND CONFLICT BETWEEN THE OLD AND YOUNG NONGMINGONG

It is clear that the gap between the young and old *nongmingong* tends to get deeper and deeper, mainly because of the lack of effective communication and mutual understanding. In this section, we will discuss and analyze the opinions of the two groups for each other, and find the explanations about the conflict between two groups.

Different Opinions between the Old and the Young *Nongmingong*

The theory of ethnicity on self and others suggests that one group can separate two sub-groups according to ideas of “us” and “them”; and age could be one of factors of distinction. When the old *nongmingong* realize the difference between them and the young generation, they can amplify this difference and separate them from the young by strengthening their own characteristics. Similarly, the young *nongmingong* also reinforce their own group identity beyond the age, involved within the same status or experience. The two groups are distinguished gradually by construction of self-identity and opinion for each other. Actually, the process of distinguishing the old group from the young is a process of self-categorization within *nongmingong* group.

For the old *nongmingong*, the young generation has the following features: On the view of professional skills, obviously, the young *nongmingong* have wider knowledge and stronger ability. So they have better learning ability to get used to the new environment and master the new skills, this is the common opinion from the older *nongmingong* who used to teach the young workers. However, the young group thinks the knowledge from books is more significant than that from practice. Moreover, they are overconfident. They would like to emphasize the professional skills they learned but not the experience from older generations, therefore, few young *nongmingong* want to learn from the old ones.

On the working attitude, the young *nongmingong* are in the state of absent-minded. They are ready to quit and find a better job, rather than staying in one place steadfastly to improve their job skills. So they do not have a sense of identity and belonging for any enterprise. In contrast, the old *nongmingong* do the work with full-heart. They feel pride in making high-quality and low-cost products. The young *nongmingong* hope to do the least work and take the most money so that they would be calculated and weighed by using a lot of cunning skills.

On the attitude of life, the young *nongmingong* are more confident, have better ability to adapt the city life, and become similar with the people live in city. They try to change their inferiority through the “luxury” consumption which they cannot afford sometimes. They seek the fashion without thinking too much of their status. They look down upon rural people and make an utmost effort to shake off the shackles of identity. They are in a quest for enjoyment, rather than money, indicating that working overtime is unacceptable. What they are concerned about is only themselves, neither a certain enterprise, nor their hometown. In this sense, they lack collective identity.

From the view of interpersonal relationship, the young *nongmingong* do not like to be tied. They emphasize self-determination and the feeling of being respected. They do not like to be suppressed. Therefore, many old *nongmingong* said that it is difficult to manage a group, because the young people are too individual, squeamish and hard to handle a little aggrieve. From the contacting with the peer, they communicate more with the partners in the factory, not only with the villagers. They form small groups because they have the same dream and interests.

For the young *nongmingong*, the old ones have the following characteristics: They are more skilled but are stubborn about the original technology. They believe in experience, but do not believe in knowledge. (The situation is more apparent in labor-intensive industries, which need more repetitive labor, and do not ask for the high technology.) They do not want to learn new knowledge and do not value the knowledge of young people. They are literal-minded and biased for young people. They are afraid of being surpassed by the young. From attitude of the work, the old are actually more serious and patient. They are able to do their best in current situation because they have no higher goal. They obey their boss or superiors, do whatever they are required. They see company's benefit as their own responsibilities. They are more concerned about the situation in the factory, rather than the information outside world.

From the attitude of life, the young think the old are willing to live in an obsolete lifestyle. They are too indolent to change their lifestyle; they prefer live in a boring manner to enjoy the colorful city life. They would like stay in dorms when there is no work. On the view of interpersonal relationship, they trust the relationship between fellow villagers rather than “outsiders” (The outsiders mean non-fellow colleagues), especially people from Guangdong Province). For the superior-subordinate relationship, they show more obedience to the superiors, but they command to their subordinates arbitrarily. They do not like young people, and often scold them.

The opinions above do not only refer to the two groups of *nongmingong* but also are found in two generations. However, it shows that *nongmingong* group is changing, young *nongmingong* attempt to become the urban youth, indeed, more and more young *nongmingong* are gradually similar with the urban youth through their efforts, the boundary between urban and rural youth thus become blurred. Meanwhile, many thoughts of them are very different from that of their parents. The belonging of rural world and the authority of parents have faded out.

Interaction and Conflict between Young *Nongmingong* and the Old *Nongmingong*

As mentioned above, the relationship between old *nongmingong* and the young are largely described as sorts of interaction between teaching and learning, managing and being managed. This interaction is mainly between the parents and children, or senior and junior. Our data suggest that the interaction relationship between the old and the young exist firstly between the parents and children. The formation of value of youth is from their parents. Many young *nongmingong* live a wandering life with their parents in the city. While living at the bottom, they

grow up in the process of migration between urban and rural areas. Working out seems to be their preferred choice except study. The old *nongmingong* are forced to work out, but the young take working out for granted.

As for career development, the old *nongmingong* have experienced hardship and oppression, so they often encourage their children to make change of their lives. Influenced by parents' opinion, young *nongmingong* often see business or freelance work as their preference. They do not want to work extremely hard as their parents. They want to get rid of the identity of *nongmingong*, but they do not have capital.

The interaction between the old and the young also exists in superior-subordinate relationship. Although the relationship between the superior-subordinate relationship cannot fully correspond to the relationship between the old and the young, majority of workshops still see experience and qualifications as the measurement criteria in the labor-intensive industries, except for some Research and Development Department, or Human Resource Management Department which take status on the academic qualifications. So, the old are often foreman or manager, but the young can only be an operator on the assembly line. Therefore, the interaction of the new and the old occurred mainly in the relationships between managing and being managed.

In the research, we found that the management of the old generally relies on the experience and social relationship, which is the part of the reason of the contradiction. The young *nongmingong* are very sensitive to the sense of freedom and fair. They often dissatisfied with the management of the old. This usually causes job-hopping or resigning. The reasons include that supervisor reprimand too much; the supervisors are not fair to deal with conflicts; the superiors put pressure on others; the supervisors have less ability or capacity than their subordinates. The value difference leads to frequent conflicts between them. We observed two conflicts in the factory during our fieldwork. We can see the different values between them through these two cases.

Cases One: the Incident of Cleaning the Toilet

In April of the year when we were doing the fieldwork, the total worker number of New Century Stationery Factory fell down to the lowest point, decreasing by nearly 300 workers in a month. In the worst case, 200 workers resigned in a day. The conflict was caused by new regulations that dismissed part of cleaner staff issued by Mr. Zhang. It is said that the toilets of offices and workshop would be cleaned by workers and managers themselves. This provision was firstly proposed by Mr. Zhang Yongquan, but it was carried out by departmental managers and foremen. The notification infuriates most of operator immediately.

The managers cannot tell the real intention of this provision, which triggered this resign event. In this case, the contradiction between the old and the new are come up. Why do they have such new regulations? Mr. Zhang Yongquan told us that the purpose is to urge the workers to form beneficial health habits. Besides, he thought workers should see the factory as their own home and take the responsibility to clean it up. He believed such an action would cultivate a sense of common identity and belonging. For this reason, the factory dismissed all the toilet cleaners and replaced them with sector members.

In fact, Mr. Zhang's argument is disputed by some of the old employees and opposed by all of the young employees. But why in this case the issue turned into the conflict between the old and the new *nongmingong* workers? We assume it is attributed to the different ways of dealing with issues. We have collected and compiled the different views from the two groups. The young *nongmingong* think that: 1), dismissing cleaners is the capital trick for saving cost. The company

asks other employees to do such basic work, indicating disrespect to them. The company is selfish and barefaced. 2), they stay in the factory only for work, not for life, so they have no obligation to raise the collective identity. They do the work they have to and deserve the money they get. Employment relationship is not believed can foster a sense of belonging. 3), cleaning work is a basic work which should be done by the Auntie-cleaners. Doing the work is considered to waste talent of young. It also remarked the company looks down upon the young. 4), the foremen and managers, who are promoted from the common workers as the young, should protect the workers' rights, rather than accept all as the older employees.

However, the old *nongmingong* workers think that: 1), the superior's decision is correct with good intention. The only thing they should improve is that it ought to be gradually carried out instead of taking such aggressive action. 2), the superiors did not show the workers a good example. They said if Mr. Zhang Yongquan had cleaned the toilet at first, they would not have such strong condemn on this issue. The conflict has minimal negative impact on the YQP's workshop because YQP cleaned the toilet for a few days before ask for others to do the work. Many young *nongmingong* resigned at the same time. It is not only because they do not want to clean the toilet, but also for the reason that they have other choices. They do not have to stay in this company. This event is just a trigger.

We can see the differences in problem resolving as follows: firstly, it is the difference of the definition about the individual and the collective. The young workers have more serious antagonism feeling toward the factory. They do not want to work in a fixed place. It is just a temporary place to make money. The contrary is the case in the old *nongmingong*. Secondly, in this case, the young make very clear distinction among the hierarchies of work. They believe that cleaning the toilet is "inferior", which should be done by the old women, rather than the young. But for the old the most important thing is to make money. What kind of job is secondary considered. The professional self-esteem of the young *nongmingong* has been established. Thirdly, it is the difference between radical and conservative. Some old workers also presented dissatisfied with the matter, however, the expression is relatively mild, which will not lead to resign. Instead, they make great effort such as cleaned the toilet at the beginning to give the young a good example. However, the young easily make the decision to change jobs without considering many factors.

This event has far-reaching influence. It not only resulted in the resignation of a large number of employees, but also tensing the relationship between the old and the young. However, because of the insistence of Mr. Zhang Yongquan and the promotion by part of the upper manager, now these provisions are still in practice. Below (see Table 1) are some information we collected through the questionnaire survey, from which we can examine the responses and feelings of the workers in this event.

TABLE 1.
COMMENTS BY NONGMINGONG ABOUT TOILET CLEANING

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrears of pay; no cleaners, not think about for employees • Arrears of pay; toilet clean scheduled but no one take in charge • Arrears of pay; no one take toilet matter in charge; no weekend • A toilet cleaner needed • Arrears of pay; wages and benefits should be improved; how could a big company assign employees to clean toilet • Just hundreds Yuan can the company afford a toilet cleaner, why they ask |
|---|

for us to do so, it makes no sense.

- Why they ask us to clean the toilet? Are we cleaners?
- The assignment of cleaning toilet should be canceled.
- A big company should not ask employees to clean the toilet, or that would affect the reputation.
- Can the company hire a cleaner? It benefit for the employees' reputation
- Why ask for the employees to clean toilet? Cannot they afford it?
- Why ask for the employees to clean toilet? Why the company doesn't hire a cleaner?
- Are we operator or toilet cleaner?
- Why ask for us to clean toilet during our work? Can the company hire one cleaner?
- Why should we clean the toilet?
- The image of the company is important, so factory cleaners are necessary; the staff should focus on their jobs
- Not afford the cleaners has negative impact on company
- Do not let the employees to clean the toilet, it should be done by the manager of the company;
- Clean the toilet everyday without paying, are you a miser?

Case Two: Willing to Have a Rest or Willing to Work Overtime?

We found some responses in the answers to questionnaire: "We hope the company adjusts working hours. The overtime is too short." Why is the overtime not too long, but "too short?" As common sense, no one likes the pressure of working overtime. People would like to have more rest time. The request seems contrary to our understanding of the fact. One of our informants said: "If I get a normal salary alone, I could not save money, given that the most spare money is made by working overtime. The basic pay is just enough to living." Another informant who held the same views said: "Even if there has a rest, we do not know where to go. Going to every place would cost money. But work overtime can we make and save money. Therefore, I hope the company will allow us to work overtime accordingly."

In the study, we found that people who hold this view are mostly over the age of 35, while the workers who are about twenty hold the opposite view. A young *nongmingong* worker said: "I do not want more overtime work. I am not coolie. The leisure time would make our work better because boring work reduces the efficiency." The executives of HR also told us that the overtime work is required before, but it has debate on the length of the time: the young eager to have a rest, because they can go outside and shopping. While the old require overtime work voluntarily for earning more money. But the labor laws control the overtime work strictly. Now the company practices the "application system". The length of overtime depends on their applications.

The length of overtime in this factory is usually 60 to 70 hours per month, and sometimes more than 100 hours. In accordance with the wages of 1.5 times, the workers can earn 400 ~ 500 Yuan more. For the old *nongmingong*, it could be saved each month, while the young are not concerned about that, they are more concerned about their regular rest. This reflects the different necessities between the old and young. The old group still remains in the basic survival necessity, in pursuit of making money; they do not care whether there is a break. The young demand the higher quality of life and do not want to live in a boring way. On the other hand, this

reflects the difference on recreational life between two groups. For the old group, there is no place to go when they have a rest because of the cost. They watch television in their dormitory if they have a break. The young group would go shopping or meet friends. Leisure time arouse their desire to consumption in the city.

SUBJECTIVITY DIFFERENTIATION OF THE *NONGMINGONG*

Overall, respective experience, interaction and conflict between old and young group caused the differentiation of the *nongmingong* workers' subjectivity. This differentiation also reflects the process of self-categorization which influenced by labor market and capital. Firstly, there is no doubt that *nongmingong* are changing with ages. So the directly interaction and conflict happened between the old and the young. We suggest that 1980 as a watershed: the one born after 1980 belongs to the new generation.

Secondly, the differences age and life experience of the *nongmingong* workers are certainly an important reason for differentiation, but it is not the only factor to interpret their complicated distinctiveness. It is also a process of self-categorization to differentiate *nongmingong* into the new and the old. In this process, the understanding of urban and rural life, and the attitude toward tradition are adjusted. In other words, the old *nongmingong* treat themselves as "migrant workers". But the young refuse this status. They think they are industrial workers, which means their identity of peasant fades out and parental authority also weakens because of the emphasis on human capital.

As rural ideology declines, the young may grow up in the city, wandering with parents. Although few of them have the experience of farming, they see it as temporary and part-time work. They are trying best to work and stay in city. This process makes them more confident, and enable them develop the way of thinking which is similar with the urban youth. It also encourages them to get rid of the rural characteristics and adapt urban culture.

The decline of the parental authority means the young do not receive the knowledge and skills form their parents. They are confident to surpass their parents and get updated skills. This is a different way of learning. In the past, farmers could not choose their own career because parental authority is supreme. The young will naturally help their parents do some farm work when they grow up, so their skills of production are all obtained from the parents. The parents acquired the skills from the grandparents, as well as long-term work experience. For a long time, the authority of parents is established and unshakable. So a lot of old *nongmingong* have adapted this way to learning. Even in the factory, they often acquire knowledge from the older generation in the factory.

However, there is an impact on this transmission system caused by the change in the pattern of economy. Information and modern factors of production have changed social relationships at agricultural age. The way in which we get the revenue no longer depends on labor skills and production experience. The next generation who enters the industrial and commercial field no longer needs to get living skills from their parents. The process of their socialization has shifted from family and the field to the school and larger social groups. Because young people accept new knowledge so quickly, they gradually exceed their parents on knowledge, skills, and openness. These changes undermine the authority system of the older generation.

The conflict between the young and the old are largely caused by changes on the system of knowledge transmission. The decline of the parents' authority leads to the conflicts between subordinate and superior. Once the young begin to break the shackles of their parents, they often

underestimate the practical experience. This also indirectly accelerates the emergence of non-rational changing job.

Thirdly, subjectivity differentiation of the *nongmingong* is also involved with the role of the labor market and human capital. Nowadays, the Pearl River Delta region is firstly facing to a large-scale industrial transformation since reform and opening-up; the labor-intensive industries will face a big challenge. Under this change, the old *nongmingong* no longer have their advantage in the cheap labor.

The difference of social resources and career position occupied by the *nongmingong* is the origin of the subjectivity differentiation. Social resources include capital, technology, knowledge, labor, social relations and other factors. Because the social resources owned by individual are great different, which causes the different flows of career, then the *nongmingong* form a group which is highly heterogeneous. When there are less *nongmingong* than the market demands, the young *nongmingong* already have sufficient sources for competition. While the professional skill of the old *nongmingong* is backward and the knowledge is rigid, that makes them fixed in career or return home. The young *nongmingong* have more competitive capital. This kind of capital includes age, knowledge and ideology. Therefore, the possibility of job hunting and job-hopping not only relates to the subjective choice of the *Nongmingong*, but also depends on the demand of the labor market.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE STUDY

In this article we focus on the group differences among *nongmingong* according to the case study on the practices of *Nongmingong* rather than differentiating them based on age simply. We suggest that the emergence of differences between the old and new *nongmingong* is a process of self-categorization of the *nongmingong* who are divided by the ideas and options through this process. We explain the process of internal alteration by our analysis of old and young *nongmingong* mutual evaluation and definition, interaction, and even conflict.

Nongmingong workers have become a major force for urbanization and a major resource for industrial labor market in modern China. It is important that the business leaders understand the difference of *nongmingong* workers from non-*nongmingong* workers, as well as the difference among *nongmingong* themselves to be effective in daily operations. One such an important difference among *nongmingong* workers is the age groups. The border between the old *nongmingong* and the young, accompanied by the returning and changing job, is increasingly clear. The discrepancies constituted by age, values, labor market and social resources take effect in *nongmingong*. That makes the special interest demands of the *nongmingong* change. Understanding these differences can make us clearly see the changes within the future trend in farmer-turned workers. Furthermore, it will also make us pay more attention to the young *nongmingong* group, who will play an important role in the transformation era of China.

In short, we focus on the differences among the *nongmingong* as a new direction of Chinese rural-urban migrants emerged in recent years. There are a few issues that we should address but due to the limitation of our capacity and resources we did not do well, for instances, firstly, on the aspect of methodology we realize that we need to provide more details on how this case study was conducted. Secondly, as a follow-up research, it will be better that if we describe some changes occurred during these 10 years; in other words, we need to compare the changes of the factory we studied and analyze what are the relations and differences of the *nongmingong* between the present and 10 years ago. Thirdly, for higher grade, it will be better if we can trace

the relations between micro case study and macro social system changes by using statistics techniques. These issues open the door for us to continue on our current study.

ENDNOTES

1. This study represents part of the Ministry of Education sponsored focus project, the city of new immigrants, outcomes. Dr. Zhou Daming and his student Sun Jiuxia conducted a ten-year fieldwork in Shenzhen DaCheng and JieSheng stationery factory from 1996 through 2006. A large number of data were collected and processed with a number research reports and papers published through that longitude study. This is a follow up study by the authors since 2006. The stationery factory under the study was established in 1988 in Xinxiang town and was regrouped by the Hong Kong Stationery in 2000, almost all the equipment and workers were relocated to Foshan City. Special thanks to Zhang Youquan, the director of the factory.
2. The authors sincerely thank the editors and reviewers of the International Journal of Business Anthropology, for their insightful critics, comments, and constructive suggestions.

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