

Shanghai's New Generation Rural Migrant Workers: An Intercultural Communication Perspective

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This is a quantitative study of the social networks and intercultural adjustment issue of post-80s rural migrant workers in Shanghai. The present study used SPSS to process the data collected in Shanghai, the biggest metropolis which has also undergone the most foreign influences in China. One hundred fifty four (n=154) valid self-designed questionnaires were collected which included personal information, scales on the intercultural adjustment as well as scales measuring social network. Rural migrants' social communication networks, intercultural adjustment, and relations of social network and adjustment were explored respectively.

The results indicate that these social networks are not random, but exhibit features of both small-world and homogenous networks. The study also implies that the individual's network's size, density and homogeneity have correlations with the group's intercultural adjustment factors. As a study of migrating and weak group, this study provides an intercultural communication perspective and related data in terms of social integration of the second generation migrant workers.

Border-crossing individuals and groups have long been one of the foci of intercultural communication scholarship since the beginnings of the discipline. Amongst the different types of migrating groups, migrants from rural to urban contexts can experience many of the difficulties that are faced by those who migrate from one nation to another (Berry et al., 2002). Although migrating within the nation, China's rural migrant workers, especially the post-80s generation, are faced with no less difficulty than international migrants. The first section of this introduction addresses the historical background of the group. The next section discusses theories of network and adjustment. The third section addresses the related researches on the network and adjustment of the group. The fourth section concerns the research questions.

The Historical Background of Rural Migrant Workers

In China, a country on its move to the modern society, dual structure is an apparent symbol of the discrepancy between cities and rural areas. The dual structure refers to the structural break in the aspects of politics, economy and culture. Rural culture stands for the agricultural culture with a feudal element while the city culture is industrial culture with bigger modern element. There is great difference in term of cultures between rural and urban areas (Gan, 2001).

The latest three decades has witnessed great changes in China. Due to the rapid growth of urban economy and increasing demand for labor, more and more farmers left their rural areas and flooded into the cities in search of employment (Lu, 2004). This led to an ever increasing scale of inter-regional labor migration. In 2007, there are more than 200 million migrant workers in China's cities.

Currently, the total number of migrant workers in Shanghai is 4 million, of which one million are post-80s rural migrant workers. Shanghai, as one of the main receiving cities of rural migrant workers, is experiencing its new stage in the process of reform and opening. During this stage, the large fast-increasing body of young migrant workers plays an important role. The successful adaptation of the huge special young group is the basic strategy to dissimilate the China dual structure, to develop the wholesome people and to construct a harmonious society.

Network Theory and Adjustment

Network theories are based on the assumption that individuals' behavior is influenced by relationships between individuals rather than the characteristics of the individuals. Network infrastructures are characterized by certain properties. Some of the most common properties used to describe social support networks are size, density, homogeneity/heterogeneity, reciprocity, and multi-plexity (Schensul et al., 1999). Over the past decades, ego-centered networks have received increasing attention as a common tool in survey research and are widely used today to measure the structure of social relationships (Luo, 2005). Furthermore, the analysis of ego-centered networks in survey research may be helpful for understanding social structure.

The core of adjustment is change; particularly change in personal and social behavior (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984). Adjustment was defined as the psychological outcomes that are associated with adaptation (Berry, 2002). Adjustment involves both objective and subjective outcomes. Subjective aspects would include emotions such as anger, frustration, anxiety or sadness. Objective aspects of adjustment include outcomes that are independent of the mind of the individual; these would include salary, job performance ratings, or grades. Successful intercultural adjustment would entail having positive psychological consequences during and after the adaptation process (Smith, 1996).

The research of Young Kim (1986) and Yum (1988), together with the work of Smith (1999), have shaped the direction of the present study. Although very few studies have investigated intercultural adjustment from a network perspective, Kim and Yum have begun to demonstrate that certain network configurations either constrain or facilitate communication and the flow of information, specified a network theory, suggesting that intercultural networks will be more radial, less dense, less multiplex, less transitive, and have generally weaker ties than intracultural networks (Shim, 2004). A related conclusion of interest is Kim's suggestion that interpersonal ties, and their resultant communication, are a more powerful acculturative force than consumption of mass media (Gudykunst, 2005).

Researches on the Group's Network and Adjustment

In order to better understand the attitudes and behavior of these migrant workers, their social network and adjustment issues are examined respectively in China. Rural culture life style shaped the new generation, including the social network constructing. Rural community value family and neighbors and achieve integration by moral control. Innovative as their mind is, big difference between the two cultures will shock them and cause all kind of maladjustment (Chen & Pan, 2007). Parts of them avoid communicating with locals (Li,

1996). The continuity of migrants' culture and behaviors rooted from their native rural area is clear. Research shows that quite a lot of the group feel they are rootless in city (Zhou, 2004).

New generation migrant workers (also labeled as second generation migrant workers, young peasant workers, post-80s migrant workers), in sociology, mainly refer to those rural migrant workers born after 1980. Their educational level, occupational expectations, material and spirit need are far beyond the old generation of migrant workers. Long for the urban life and identity with urban culture make them set the social integration as their ultimate goal in cities (Fu, 2006). However, institutional barrier together with the culture difference make the adaptation process a tough journey (Chen & Pan, 2007). In this bitter process, the social network of the new migrant workers plays an important role.

Investigation finds the physical closeness does not generate much social interactions between the two groups of people. Somehow, they would not initiate communication with local residents (Fu, 2006). They interact with their fellow immigrants, especially those from the same village and or neighboring villages, at a daily basis. They also keep a very close tie with their relatives and other members of family at their native villages (Wei, 2006). There is a clear line of their continuity in their behaviors from their rural background, as Chinese rural society emphasizes family and geographical relations.

Partly resulted from the lack of interaction the urban residents, migrants' knowledge and experience of urban life style is limited and artificial. Urban residents are rarely considered as rural migrants' reference groups in their daily life. "Urban culture and lifestyle" of others have very limited impacts on their original behaviors. They interact with their fellow immigrants, especially those from the same village or neighboring villages, at a daily basis (Fu, 2006).

Generally speaking, rural migrant workers are marginalized, they are caught between urban and rural culture (Chen & Pan, 2007). National statistic bureau reveals the majority of migrant workers are not willing to go back to their hometown and work as peasants. In other words, their identification with peasant is weaker while the identification with worker in city is strong. Despite of the marginalized situation, they are satisfied with urban life (Li, 2007).

The status quo of these rural migrant workers poses a question: how do the young migrant workers adjust to the urban life? Migrant population's cultural adaptation is a complex process, influenced by many factors like individual's competence, environment, and mass communication. The paper mainly explores the social networks of the group and discusses the social network factor and its correlation with the adjustment of the group in the perspective of intercultural communication.

The significance of social network factor playing in the re-socialization will be clearly seen if the correlation between social network and intercultural adjustment is studied in the perspective of intercultural communication (Smith, 1996). Domestic social network researches on migrant populations mainly focus on the descriptive analysis of social network, some on the job-seeking network study. Most of the researches just see the social network as an object not as a research tool. Most researches regarding supportive network analysis are based on the data of interviewing. Quantitative study of the social network and intercultural adjustment has not been seen in China.

What does their social network look like? Is there any correlation between their social network and intercultural adjustment? To solve my research questions, I put forwards my hypothesis as follows:

- H1. Social networks will be more intracultural than intercultural.
- H2. Network size correlates with migrant workers' adjustment level.
- H3. Density and homogeneity of the networks correlate with migrant workers' psychological distress.
- H4. Locals' size in the networks correlates with overall adjustment level.

Methods

Participants

The present study was designed to examine adjustment issue, social network and their relations among post-80s rural migrant workers in Shanghai. All of the participants were under 30 years old and from other parts of China with rural registered residency. Most of them were single and three fourth of them were males. Their living time, educational background and occupational type varied. The data were mainly collected in Hongkou district, which is located in the northeastern part of central city. All of the participants were randomly chosen in the shops or in the street. To guarantee the good quality, I was on site for their reference. This sample seems representative to the young rural workers in Shanghai.

Of all the participants (n=154), 74% are males and 83% are single. As to their educational background, 49% of them received junior middle school education; 25% have got an industrial school or a secondary technical school diploma; 22% finished their high school education. Of the studied subjects, 23% are from the most developed areas like Beijing, Tianjin, Jiangsu, Fujian etc., while 77% are from less developed areas in China like Heilongjiang, Hebei and Yunnan. In Shanghai, 44% of them are all sorts of professionals and technicians and 31% in service trade.

To select the respondents I need, the first three questions of the questionnaire concerning their age, registered residency type and hometown are used to pick out the proper informants. After years of working in Shanghai, many of the group are economically settled down with a comparatively settled occupation. In this research, I chose different job takers particularly to make the data reliable. The informants are from diverse occupations including chef, waitresses, hardware engineers, auto mechanic, shop owner and etc. These occupations cover not only traditional labor jobs but some professional jobs.

Measures

The present study uses SPSS to process the data which were conducted in Shanghai, the biggest metropolis which has also undergone the most foreign influences in China. Among 176 post-80s rural migrant workers questionnaires collected, 154 were effective and valid. The participants in the study were from all walks of the young rural migrant group. Each participant completed a questionnaire included scales on the intercultural adjustment as well as scales measuring social network.

The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part is on the personal information, which is used to select the right informants. There are five questions relating to adjustment. Another four questions are designed to measure the group's social network.

Personal information part includes questions like age, registered residence type, hometown, occupation type, educational background, etc. The first three questions were designed to pick out the right informants and the rest of the questions could give us more personal information about the informants.

The second part is a self-made assessment of adjustment questionnaire. Five questions were given in this part. “Do you want to establish good relationships with the locals or not?”, “Do you want to keep your original living customs?”, “To what extent do you think you adjust to Shanghai life?”, “To what extent do you feel at home in Shanghai?”, and “How long do you want to stay in Shanghai.”

The third part concerns a concise ego centered social network questionnaire adapted from General Social Survey of Ronald Burt (1984). Each of the question characteristics and the reasons for their selection will now be addressed in more detail. Network Infrastructures are characterized by certain properties. Some of the most common properties used to describe social networks are size, density, homogeneity/heterogeneity, and multiplexity (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). These most common properties can be clearly embodied in my questionnaire. The questions included, “Please think carefully and write down all the surnames of your closely-linked people in the last six months.”; “Do your top five closely-linked friends have Shanghai registered residency?”; “Do your top five closely-linked friends know each other?” and “How do you know your five closest friends?”

Results

Firstly, to get the map of the social network and adjustment, I use the descriptive study by SPSS. Next, I use the correlational analysis to process the data to study the relationship of aspects of the social network and intercultural adjustment.

Intercultural Adjustment

Concerning the adaptation strategies, that 80% of them wanted to keep the original culture and 86% of the group were willing to develop good relationships with Shanghai locals is an obvious signal of their adaptation strategy.

Overall adjustment evaluation (see Table 1) shows that 26% of the subjects felt well adjusted to Shanghai and 55.8% moderately well adjusted. That means 82% felt adjusted to Shanghai life.

To adjust to a new culture, one has to experience psychological distress. The research (see Table 2) shows that 82% didn't feel the psychological distress in Shanghai. The result shows 45% of the participants indicated that they intended to work in Shanghai in the next five years.

Social Network

As can be seen from Table 3, the average number of the network size is 6.6. Of their mostly-linked five friends, the average number of the locals with registered Shanghai residency is 0.6. The average number of those friends who didn't belong to their blood ties and living place-ties nor their current coworker circles is 1.3.

Table 1. Graph of Adjusted Level

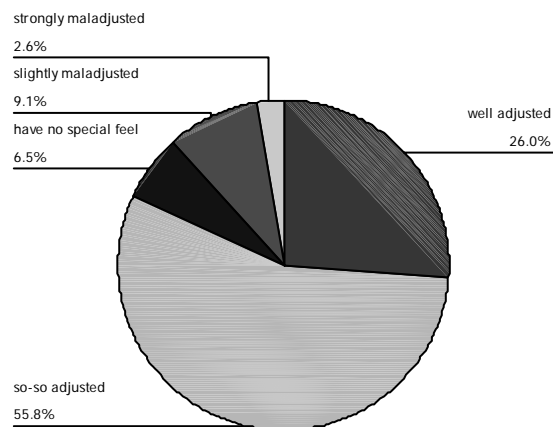


Table 2. Psychological Distress

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
Strongly repelled	1	1.3	1.3	1.3
Slightly repelled	21	27.3	27.3	28.6
No view	27	35.1	35.1	63.6
Occasionally feel at home	18	23.4	23.4	87.0
Feel at home	10	13.0	13.0	100.0
Total	77	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Network

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
network size	77	1.00	10.00	6.6753	2.70692
friends outside of	77	.00	5.00	1.3247	1.64989
locals in network	77	.00	5.00	.6623	1.14260
Valid N (listwise)	77				

The research shows that 11% of them had social networks no more than three, 45% have four to seven to communicate and 44% have more than eight social ties. In 58 % of their five-people networks, all network numbers are friends. About two thirds of them have no closely-linked local friends. Of their networks, kinship members, coworkers and town fellows account for four fifth. In general, the group's network is more dependent on family members, relatives and current coworkers than on friend of the same interest or experience.

Correlational Study

Correlational research frequently provides the basis for the hypothesis. A correlation exists when two different measures of the same people, events, or thing vary together—that is, when scores on one variable covary with scores on another variable (Shaughnessy, 2004). In this study, the causal relationship was not touched. That means the study just explores the relationship between the pairs of correlated variables, not their cause-effect relations. It is not within my considerations that which variables are the predictors of other variables.

The correlation between adjustment factors and social networks factors can be shown in the Table 4. Adjustment level positively correlates with network size at the 0.05 level ($r=.173$). Psychological distress positively correlates with density ($r=.205$) and with homogeneity ($r=.180$) respectively at the 0.05 level. Adjustment level positively correlates with number of locals in network ($r=.016$), but is insignificant. Another unexpected positive correlation shows up between the desired stay duration and the network size ($r=.217$) at 0.01 level.

Discussion

Adjustment Description

Speaking of the adaptation strategies, that majority were ready to set good relationships with others while they still had strong psychological identity with their original culture shows that the group mainly adopted an integration strategy in Shanghai, which would help them adapt to Shanghai life. Integration was their option. That is, some degree of cultural integrity is maintained, while at the same time the individual seeks to participate as an integral part of the larger social network of a multicultural society.

Although the group was weak and marginalized in Shanghai, adjustment descriptive analysis shows that most felt fit for life in Shanghai practically and psychologically. We can clearly see that majority felt adjusted to their life in Shanghai and didn't feel distressed, half of them were considering working in Shanghai for another five years or permanently. There are three reasons to interpret the results.

The first reason may be concerning their individual quality. In Shanghai, they could make their livings, accept the urban culture easier than their parents and have their own social network to interact with. Different from the first generation rural migrant labors, they were professionals and better educated, which helped them to settle down in Shanghai. Culturally speaking, although they were from the rural agricultural culture, they were presumably exposed to urban culture by the mass media and other channels. Lacking farming experience and entering city directly after they left school, most of them didn't acculturate the agricultural culture as much as their parents did. Plus, most of them could speak, read and write Mandarin, with accents sometimes, which help them to adjust.

The second reason can be due to their upward mobility. According to the theory, the stressors associated with downward mobility may lead to an increase in psychological problems (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwen, 1978), while upward mobility may reduce them. Suarez-Orozco (1991) has argued that immigrants have a "dual frame of reference" which

Table 4. Correlation on Social Network Factors and Adjustment Factors

		Adjustment Level	Psychological Stress	Desired Stay Duration	Network Size	Locals in Network	Density	Homogen- eity
Adjustment Level	Pearson Correlation	1	.252(**)	.218(**)	.173(*)	.016	.078	.137
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.002	.007	.032	.847	.338	.089
	N	154	154	154	154	154	154	154
Psychological Stress	Pearson Correlation	.252(**)	1	.146	.042	.012	.205(*)	.180(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.	.071	.605	.883	.011	.026
	N	154	154	154	154	154	154	154
Desired Stay Duration	Pearson Correlation	.218(**)	.146	1	.217(**)	.026	-.006	.116
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.071	.	.007	.747	.938	.151
	N	154	154	154	154	154	154	154
Network Size	Pearson Correlation	.173(*)	.042	.217(**)	1	-.044	-.065	.112
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.032	.605	.007	.	.584	.426	.166
	N	154	154	154	154	154	154	154
Locals in Network	Pearson Correlation	.016	.012	.026	-.044	1	.317(**)	.457(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.847	.883	.747	.584	.	.000	.000
	N	154	154	154	154	154	154	154
Density	Pearson Correlation	.078	.205(*)	-.006	-.065	.317(**)	1	.439(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.338	.011	.938	.426	.000	.	.000
	N	154	154	154	154	154	154	154
Homogeneity	Pearson Correlation	.137	.180(*)	.116	.112	.457(**)	.439(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.089	.026	.151	.166	.000	.000	.
	N	154	154	154	154	154	154	154

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

attenuates the potentially negative effects that their poorer socioeconomic situation might cause. The group made comparisons between “here” (settlement society) and “there” (hometown of origin), and come to the realization that their living conditions “here” are better than they were “there.” That’s why majority were adjusted “here.”

The third reason can be explained by the voluntary nature of the immigrants’ cultural contact with new societies. The voluntary one should expect a relatively easy acculturation experience and positive adaptation outcomes, at least in comparison to refugees (Krupinski, Stoller, & Wallace, 1973). As immigrants normally do not intend to return to their countries of origin, they may burn their bridges on emigration, and this may make it more difficult for them to return when it turns out that their acculturation experiences fall short of expectations. The desire for better social conditions and quality of life are probably the main factors motivating migration. Though they could be marginalized economically, politically and

culturally, they were still trying their best to fit for the lives here and forming their own subculture circle to coexist with the mainstream culture.

Social Network Characteristics

The first hypothesis is supported by the results. It can be seen that the social networks of the group was more intra-cultural than intercultural in terms of density and homogeneity. The density of their network is very high, for in 58% of the group's network members, all network members are friends. The group's networks, based on blood tie, marriage tie, current working place tie and living place tie, can be said to be homogenous.

As hypothesized, although immersing in the urban culture, the group's closely-linked networks seem not so intercultural network but intra-cultural network. Intercultural networks tend to be radial (e.g., individuals are linked to others who are not linked to each other) and intra-cultural networks tend to be interlocking (e.g., individuals are linked to others who are linked to each other) (Yum, 1988). Their network construction is within groups. Communications with people out of their circles and local citizens are rare.

Why does their social network appear homogeneous and enclosed? Rural culture affects the social network construction. Chinese rural society takes special stock in consanguine and geographical relations based on family ties (Fei, 1948). Chinese rural community value the blood ties and the living place ties based on families. This affects people's living mode and social communication mode. Such modes won't easily change with the changes of living place from countryside to cities.

The core of rural culture is "in-group" (people have blood ties or living place ties or friends of friends) society while urban culture is "strangers" society (people act on the contracts and choose friends of same interests). To the group, saying farewell to the familiar rural community and entering the strange city community means staying further away from the long-established rural social networks. But on more occasions, they would rather trust familiar people like country fellows, family and relatives, coworkers than to trust "strangers."

Social Network Factors & Adjustment Factors

Hypothesis two and three are supported by the results. As expected, adjustment level is correlated with network size. This means that the more friends they could closely communicate with in Shanghai, the better they would feel fit in Shanghai. Psychological distress is correlated with density and homogeneity. The results indicate that their high density and homogeneous network really affected their sense of belongings. An unexpected correlation showed up, that is, career plan is correlated with network size. The correlation means that the more friends they have in Shanghai, the longer they will stay in Shanghai.

Regarding the hypothesis four, there is insignificant correlation between the number of locals and their adjustment level. The reason may be due to the group's characteristics. The group, not like other migrant groups, entered Shanghai in groups usually. They mostly depended on their strong ties (blood ties, marriage ties, etc) to get job or support. Their living pattern determined that they had their own small in-group members to seek instrumental and affective support. It is not necessary for them to have local friends to acculturate new things.

Often, during the process of acculturation, societies become culturally plural. That is, people of many cultural backgrounds come to live together in a diverse society, forming a multicultural society. In many cases they form cultural groups that are not equal in power (numerical, economic or political) (Berry, et al.). The group studied, according to their social status and educational background, belongs to the non-dominant group in Shanghai. But they still enjoyed or at least adjusted to their lives in their own networks. The group formed their own small circles just like overseas Chinese form “China Town”—“leopard spots” in cities. From the above analysis, we can see they had to resort to their own group in Shanghai and develop interlocking network for a touch of comfort and support. Boldly speaking, the young special group in Shanghai was forming a co-cultural/sub-cultural group.

New Findings of the Research

The social network results are consistent with some others’ studies, which conclude that migrant workers’ social network is small, tight and homogeneous. This study from intercultural perspective shows that their social network is more like intracultural network than intercultural network; the latter is supposed to show up when in a new culture. The results lie in their original culture influence, their weak intercultural communication competence and their social status. Therefore, although they are in a new culture, they failed to renew their network for some reasons.

One major finding of this study was that social network factors including network size, density and homogeneity correlate adjustment level and psychological distress among the young rural migrant workers. This supports the position held by a number of IC researchers that network are related to out-group communication competence (Kim, 1986) and acculturation (Smith, 1989).

Relating to hypothesis four, the number of locals doesn’t correlate with their adjustment level in a significant way. This group can be said to develop their own cultural group in culturally plural Shanghai to some extent. The group, not like other migrant groups, enter Shanghai in group usually. They mostly depend on their strong ties (blood ties, marriage ties, etc.) to get job or support. Their living pattern determines that they have their circle to seek instrumental and affective support. It is not necessary for them to have other local friends to acculturate new things. This result is not alone. Several studies on migration have noted that the construction of intimate ties is crucial to adjustment, though it matters not with whom (Lebon, 1983).

Conclusions

In summary, the results of this study support the position that rural cultural values are very different from urban ones and social network, as social capital, matters a lot for the group to adjust. In short, the present findings highlight the importance of exploring adjustments, social networks and their correlations.

The results of this study have important implications for administrating and guiding the group as well as in the social integration research of the rural-urban migrants. To eliminate

discrimination to the group and to enhance their social identity to the city, the public opinion and mass media may as well cultivate a harmonious environment, by placing more emphasis on the big roles of the group, guiding citizens to change their stereotyped impression of the group. Thus, the gap between the citizens and the group will be gradually narrowed and cultural integration will speed up.

The homogeneous cultural environment is and helps to reinforce the original rural culture and inhibit the expansion of their social networks and the possibility to establish relationship with urban residents, which would be very helpful to their incorporation into society because social interaction among network members has an impact on individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Migrant workers are expected to resist the psychological distress, act on and respond to environment. The incorporation of cultural elements to their internal structure will increase their overall fitness to the culture.

Rural migrant workers have already, in the transitional period, been on the stage as a social group different from farmers and citizens. To our relief, government has taken some measures in the institutional aspect. Just in late May, 2007, 12 provinces canceled the previous Household Registration system, thus realizing the citizen equality in the institution. In this rural-migrant research, a new intercultural perspective is given to see the problem, which will provide a non-institutional approach to achieve the social integration and speed up modernization.

This study had a few limitations. First, the sample may be not that perfect. It was not a large-scaled survey but a small one collected within Hongkou district of Shanghai. The informants' occupations didn't cover all the main types, for instance, the hairdressers, the drivers, the tailors and the factory workers. Their understanding of the question may bring inaccuracy in the final results. Secondly, the self-made questionnaire needs to be tested in more researches because it has not been used in the past. This study expanded on prior research on rural-urban migrant from intercultural communication perspective, several recommendations are made for future research. More methodology can be applied to research the correlations between intercultural adjustment and social network. Furthermore, process of the social network change and adjustment should be given more attention.

Note

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