



Governance of New-Generation Migrant Worker Crime: An Analysis Based on Social Deviance Theory

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Abstract

Due to different life style and values, crime characteristics of the new-generation migrant workers are different from that of the first-generation migrant workers. Reasons for new-generation migrant worker crime can be explained by the theory of social deviance. Governance of new-generation migrant worker crime requires establishment of fair social security system, improvement in their cultural life, strength in their legal education and vocational training, as well as progress in services for new-generation migrant workers.

Key words: New-generation migrant worker; Theory of social deviance; Social security

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The new-generation migrant workers are also known as the second-generation migrant workers. They are born in the 1980s in rural areas or in cities whose parents work in cities. Their registered permanent residence is in rural area but later they leave the countryside and land to work and live on non-agricultural production in urban areas on a long-term basis. Surveys show that the crime rate of new-generation migrant workers is much higher than that of the first-generation migrant workers and has become a major hidden danger threatening social stability. *2010 Opinions of CPC Central Committee and State Council on Strengthening Urban and Rural Development and Further Improvement in Agricultural and Rural Development*

Foundation defined “new-generation floating population” as “new-generation migrant worker” in CCP and state policy documents for the first time, and pointed out to “take targeted measures and focus on problems of new-generation migrant workers”. New-generation migrant worker crimes have also been a concern of the theoretical circle and practical departments. It has become a problem that the society must deal with as how to govern new-generation migrant worker crimes.

Due to different growing environment and higher education level than the first-generation migrant workers, the new generation is completely different from the first-generation migrant workers in way of behavior and values, which leads to unique characteristics of new-generation migrant worker crimes.

A. Criminal Gang

In urban area, the new-generation migrant workers are mostly disadvantaged groups. In a relatively unfamiliar environment, individual criminal ability is limited, thus the low success rate for individual crime. Collective strength is a must to increase criminal efficiency and achieve criminal purposes, so the most effective way is gang crime. According to “research on migrant adolescent rights protection and crime prevention”, 72.9% migrant adolescents claimed they worked in gang in criminal activities. 73.9% gangs are composed of 1-4 associates and 26.1% composed of 5 and more associates. Among all criminal gangs, 53.9% participants said they were accessory criminals and 11.8% said they were forced or tempted to get involved in crime. Only 31.9% claimed they were prime culprits in gang crimes (Ying, 2011). The new-generation migrant workers find it difficult to fit in urban life. With weak social support system, they are not in a position to seek positive and effective support when running into trouble or pressure, so special ways such as getting involved in criminal gangs become an option to solve difficulties and relieve pressure.

B. Frequent Property-Related Crime

Property-related crime is a major element of all crimes in China. The new-generation migrant workers have higher expectation on material life, which is a prominent feature in new-generation migrant worker crime. In 2000, property-related crimes accounted for 78% of all crimes in China. In the same period, property-related crimes accounted for over 80% of floating population crimes in Guangzhou, Shenyang and Chengdu. This figure was as high as 92% in Shanghai (Shi & Wu, 2010). In 2008, property-related crimes dominated floating population crimes in Tianjin. Floating population crimes are dominated by theft, robbery and lot. There were 18,300 suspects (60.6% floating population) involved in theft, robbery and fraud. The new-generation migrant workers work in cities for high income to improve their living condition. Due to limited education and skills, new-generation migrant workers do not have the means to achieve their goal. When they can not achieve expected goals in legal ways and means, they would resort to illegal conducts.

C. Significant Violence

“The floating population is cut off from the society emotionally and ethically and puts themselves in an order he bears grudge. Emotionally and morally rootless, and of great mobility, they must achieve their goal during crime” (Li, 2001). Currently, the criminal means of new-generation migrant workers are becoming increasingly brutal. Murders for minor benefits are no longer rare. According to survey data in a region, there were 32 cases of violent crime in 2005 committed by floating population including robbery, intentional injury and rape, 41 cases of violent crime in 2006 committed by floating population and 68 cases in 2007. Compared with 2005, 12 cases of intentional murder, kidnapping, extortion, indecency, illegal detention, troublemaking and gang fighting were added (Zhang & Zhang). More violence is seen in new-generation migrant worker crimes. They tend to get property by violent means and hurting people.

D. Diversified Criminal Means

With improved education level, the new-generation migrant workers are more likely to accept novelties. Unlike traditional migrant workers, the new generation knows high technologies, which enables them to commit crimes by means of modern communication technology, especially the Internet, mobile phone and vehicles. Their criminal means are becoming diverse and complicated. The use of modern high-tech tools makes new-generation migrant worker's criminal means more complex and professional.

1. CAUSES FOR NEW-GENERATION MIGRANT WORK CRIME

There are many viewpoints concerning the causes for new-generation migrant worker crime. The author holds

that theory of social deviance can best explain the causes for new-generation migrant worker crime. Ordinary people not only accept common social norms but also share common cultural values. Cultural values set the goal for realizing ambitions. In the meanwhile, social structure also provides an institutional means to achieve culturally defined goals. If people do not accept culturally defined goals or the society doesn't provide legal opportunities to achieve cultural values, social deviance will come into being where there is no social norm. This theory was later developed by American scholars with sociologist Merton as the representative. According to Merton, all societies set goals for their members, but in fact, social structure limits the ability of certain groups to meet their demands and achieve their goals. It means the society raises two incompatible requirements for people at the bottom society. On one hand, they see material wealth and social status as behavioral objective. On the other hand, they are deprived of the opportunities to achieve these objectives. As a result, those who can not succeed in conventional ways have to turn to illegal or deviant means. New-generation migrant workers grow and are even born in cities. “Oppidans” have become their reference. They work in cities not to feed the family but seek personal development. Their expectations of life are far higher than their fathers. When the established high expectations are limited by objective conditions such as household registration and economy, they would feel deprived. With stimulus or influence of external factors, they are likely to commit crimes. To be specific, causes for new-generation migrant worker crime include economic, social and personal factors.

1.1 System Factor - Household Registration Based Institutional Discrimination

With existing population management system, external population into urban areas is discriminated in policy. A series of institutional discrimination with household registration system as the representative have hindered new-generation migrant workers from getting into cities. Under current urban social system, new-generation migrant workers are challenged with a parade of systems that are different from urban residents. With such differential organization, new-generation migrant workers are excluded from public products or welfares provided in these systems, such as children education, social relief and social insurance. Surveys have shown that new-generation migrant workers feel discriminated in many aspects compared with local residents, especially in education opportunity, education expense, job opportunity and promotion opportunity. Institutional differences deprive migrant workers of “institutional justice and protection which is the bottom line for justice in starting point, procedure and result. If major groups are excluded from institutional justice, it means the bottom line of social justice cracks” (Wen & Shi, 2005). Disadvantageous in

education level and labor skills, new-generation migrant workers find it difficult to compete with local residents in employment. It should have paid more attention to the protection of rights and interests of new-generation migrant workers so as to improve their competitiveness. Household registration centered institutional discrimination makes it more difficult for new-generation migrant workers to fit in urban society.

1.2 Economic Factor - Unsecured Income

Surveys show that most new-generation migrant workers work in informal sectors characterized with low income, instable employment, poor working conditions, shortage of labor security as well as physical labor. Despite the increase in income, it is still at a lower level than the living standard of local residents and the city where they work. The quality of life determines their way of life. Changes in way of life are the first step for new-generation migrant workers to fit in urban society while income, in turn, determines the quality of life. According to *China Migrant Worker Research Report*, in 2004, the average monthly pay of migrant workers was RMB 780 yuan and only 13.70% of them worked for less than 8 hours a day, combined with increasingly serious wage arrears. According to incomplete statistics of All China Federation of Trade Unions, by the middle of November 2004, wage arrears for migrant workers nationwide reached RMB 100 billion (Wei, 2008). As living conditions and social intercourses are all closely related with income, the low income has also prevented new-generation migrant workers from fitting in urban life. New-generation migrant workers fail to achieve to goal of higher income nor has their living standard improved. On the contrary, compared with urban residents, they feel wider gap between the rich and the poor, thus the unbalanced psychology. They finally turn to crime for economic reasons.

1.3 Personal Factor – Limited Competitiveness

After living in cities for a long time, way of life and values of new-generation migrant workers have been greatly changed. They value opportunity, ability and personal achievement, pursue self-actualization and already get used to the lifestyle in cities. Their way of life and values, however, are limited by their own conditions. According to National Bureau of Statistics, in 2009, over 26% new-generation migrant workers under 30 had received education in high school and above, and this figure was 31.1% among new-generation migrant workers aged between 21 and 25, which was 7.6% higher than the average level. Survey data showed that new-generation migrant workers are primarily engaged in service sector, 36.8% of which were salesmen and grassroots operators, 73.3% had no professional certificate, 46.7% engaged in repetitive labor work, and 21.5% engaged in what they thought low or cheap job. With the great gap between reality and dream, new-generation migrant workers are

more likely to become imbalanced. With stimulation of external factors, it is easy for them to turn to crime.

2. GOVERNANCE OF NEW-GENERATION MIGRANT WORK CRIME

For effective governance of new-generation migrant worker crime, there should be more opportunities for fair competition and make people socialized so that they can make better use of legal means available to achieve their goals, mitigate inner desire and adjust psychological state.

2.1 Establish Fair Social Security System

New-generation migrant workers must have a stable job, income and shelter so as to survive in cities. Only when economic income of new-generation migrant workers improves and survival crisis threatening migrant workers especially new-generation migrant workers is removed with economic security provided can make them feel secured and supported. As a result, discontent can be mitigated to avoid criminal behavior resulting from economic difficulties. The government must provide new-generation migrant workers with institutional guarantee. Therefore, it is necessary to improve related legal policies, establish an open and fair social security system so that new-generation migrant workers can enjoy equal treatment with urban employees. Only in this way can new-generation migrant workers fit in urban lifestyle. Only when economic income of new-generation migrant workers improves and survival crisis threatening migrant workers especially new-generation migrant workers is removed with economic security provided can make them feel secured and supported. As a result, discontent can be mitigated to avoid criminal behavior resulting from economic difficulties.

2.2 Improve New-Generation Migrant Workers' Cultural Life

Unfamiliar with urban lifestyle, social and living space is completely closed to new-generation migrant workers. In a new environment, self-control and ethic binding are declining, so they are likely to go astray. The government shall strengthen construction of public cultural and entertainment facilities in migrant worker residential communities, carry out a variety of social activities among floating population, improve their cultural life, and lead them out of isolation and into the society. As the base for migrant workers, various cultural activities can be carried out in communities so that new-generation migrant workers can participate in cultural activities either actively or passively to strengthen the tie between locals and migrant workers.

2.3 Strengthen Legal Vocational and Technical Education

Strengthened legal, vocational and technical education for new-generation migrant workers is one important

way to improve their adaptability. The government where migrant works leave should strengthen vocational and technical training in a planned and targeted manner. The government where migrant works flow in can carry out legal education in form of adult college and night school or hold lectures to make migrant workers familiar with local basic conditions. Also, legal publicity activities can be carried out regularly or irregularly in areas where new-generation migrant workers gather to improve their legal and comprehensive quality. Employers can improve their literacy and technical capability through training program.

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