

Social Mobility and Urbanization: Case Study of Well-Educated Urban Migrant's Life Experience in the Era of China's New Urbanization Project

Authors : Xu Heng

Abstract : Since the financial crisis of 2008 and the resulting Great Recession, the number of China's unemployed college graduate reached over 500 thousand in 2011. Following the severe situation of college graduate employment, there has been growing public concern about college graduates, especially those with the less-privileged background, and their working and living condition in metropolises. Previous studies indicate that well-educated urban migrants with less-privileged background tend to obtain temporary occupation with less financial income and lower social status. Those vulnerable young migrants are described as 'Ant Tribe' by some scholars. However, since the implementation of a new urbanization project, together with the relaxed Hukou system and the acceleration of socio-economic development in middle/small cities, some researchers described well-educated urban migrant's situation and the prospect of upward social mobility in urban areas in an overly optimistic light. In order to shed more lights on the underlying tensions encountered by China's well-educated urban migrants in their upward social mobility pursuit, this research mainly focuses on 10 well-educated urban migrants' life trajectories between their university-to-work transition and their current situation. All selected well-educated urban migrants are young adults with rural background who have already received higher education qualification from first-tier universities of Wuhan City (capital of Hubei Province). Drawing on the in-depth interviews with 10 participants and Inspired by Lahire's Theory of Plural Actor, this study yields the following preliminary findings; 1) For those migrants who move to super-mega cities (i.e., Beijing, Shenzhen, Guangzhou) or stay in Wuhan after college graduation, their inadequacies of economic and social capital are the structural factors which negatively influence their living condition and further shape their plan for career development. The incompatibility between the sub-fields of urban life and the disposition, which generated from their early socialization, is the main cause for marginalized position in the metropolises. 2) For those migrants who move back to middle/small cities located in their hometown regions, the inconsistency between the disposition, which generated from college life, and the organizational habitus of the workplace is the main cause for their sense of 'fish out of water', even though they have obtained the stable occupation of local government or state-owned enterprise. On the whole, this research illuminates how the underlying the structural forces shape well-educated urban migrants' life trajectories and hinder their upward social mobility under the context of new urbanization project.

Keywords : life trajectory, social mobility, urbanization, well-educated urban migrant

Conference Title : ICCS 2018 : International Conference on Chinese Studies

Conference Location : Singapore, Singapore

Conference Dates : July 05-06, 2018